



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00531
Title	(281917) Kerr-Grant, Colin (Flight Lieutenant)
Interviewer	Rapley, Stephen
Place made	Sydney NSW
Date made	10 January 1989
Description	Colin Kerr-Grant, Royal Australian Air Force Radar Unit, interviewed by Stephen Ripley for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939–45

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START TAPE 1, SIDE A.

> Identification: This is an interview with Colin Kerr-Grant. We are recording the interview in Sydney but normally your address in Melbourne is?

At Brighton, we have a unit now on The Esplanade, overlooking the sea.

> And we're talking about Mr Kerr-Grant's experiences during the Second World War leading up to his involvement with the radar – RAAF radar. End of identification.
>
> Is it okay if I call you Colin?

Yes please call me Colin.

> Can you tell me then, to start us off, when and where you were born?

I was born in Adelaide in St Peters. Our family lived in St Peters, in 1912, 28th August. My parents had a house in St Peters, they had been married about a year and a half I think before I was born. My father had recently been appointed as a professor of physics to the University of Adelaide. I grew up in fairly adequate circumstances. I went to St Peters College in South Australia and from there to Adelaide University where I did a science degree.

> So, do you think your science degree was clearly important in determining what you did later on during the war?

Yes, it was. I was influenced I think, by my parents, especially my father who was a scientist. I had originally – after getting my leaving honours, which is the equivalent of the HSC in those days – I had originally intended to do an engineering course, because I had some interests in engineering and looked on it as more of a career subject than science. Science is sometimes a little difficult to base a career on. However, I did a science dgree and an honours maths degree and after that my parents thought it would be a good thing if I continued my education and went to Cambridge, where I did another degree leading to a Bachelor of Arts in Cambridge. Now, Cambridge University always awards a BA for its first degree and as a consequence of that I've now got a Master of Arts degree as well as a Master of Science.
At the end of my education, I worked on a research project with a leading geophysicist Dr Bullard in Cambridge and came out to Australia again and did a gravity survey of part of South Australia, being attached to the Adelaide Observatory which was in existence in those years. I was still working at the observatory in the late 1930s and just before the Second World War and a few years prior to that – I'm not exactly sure of the exact year – I joined the Citizen Military Forces and as a part-time engineer in the Royal Australian Engineers.

> Do you remember why you joined the CMF? Was it around the time of Munich?

I think it was before Munich. A number of my friends were interested in military training because they felt Australia was not sufficiently well equipped in defence and at that time, the attitude of people towards military service was much more favourable than it was for instance in later years, especially the Vietnam years. Also, I had been at

school in the junior cadets, but in the early 1930s the junior cadets were disbanded and my first military training at school was an interesting experience, I felt I learnt quite a lot in the engineers and a number of my friends were in it.

(5.00) Was there a lot of discussion about defence policy, amonst your peers as – a teenager I suppose, in your twenties?

I think there was a feeling amongst the people that I associated with, who were mainly doing some sort of professional training, that there was a danger to Australia and that Australia was drifting towards, or the world was drifting towards another world war. This was fairly apparent, it became very apparent in the later part of the 1930s about 1937–1938 and I should say that I – no, I wouldn't have joined the engineers until 1936 probably, because I had been overseas in Cambridge until about then.

You would have been twenty-four?

Yes.

What type of activity did they have? Did they have bivouacs and things like that – that you regularly did?

We had bivouacs, we had – every week we had military training, which involved about two hours in which we were taught the fundamentals of militrary engineering including the use of explosives and bridge building. The bridge building in those days was very different from the bridge building now, it was what people used to all, `sticks and string building' in other words, you use wooden spars, which are quite large of course, and rope and it was possible to put up a bridge fairly quickly with this sort of primitive equipment. I don't think there's any training of that sort carried out now, what one uses are prefabricated metal pieces and makes a Bailey bridge or something similar.
However, I also did officer cadet studies in the army and I had done some – I was attached in England when I was at Cambridge to an officer cadet unit and I did some bivouacs there. So, my military training started even before I joined the CMF in Australia.

So where did you get married?

Oh, I didn't get married until 1951, after the war.

Right! That explains – because I was just going to ask you whether you had a family or not to worry about because at twenty-four it was conceivable that you may have?

In those days, I think a lot of people in professional jobs didn't get married so early. At that time, women often didn't – were not employed in permanent occupations, most of the girls I knew had jobs but in many cases they gave them up after they got married. Now this doesn't occur today, so the circumstances are quite different.

What were your – say your leisure activities then, besides the bivouacs, if you call that leisure?

I played a little bit of tennis, I enjoyed swimming. I used to also go on hiking trips with some friends of mind, I did that in my university days quite a bit. And I place lacrosse at the university, not with any great distinction, but I enjoyed it.

Tell me about – there's a group of questions about how you saw yourself – what class did you see yourself as being?

Well, I – this misused term – I suppose you call it middle-class. My father was a university professor and most of my school friends and our personal friends were in some sort of profession. One of the things about being a scientist is that you tend to form friends I think, if you're a gregarious sort of person, outside your own profession because there aren't very many scientists. So I knew a lot of medical people because that is a strong tradition in our family, I have a lot of medical relatives. I knew a lot of legal people because I seemed to be in class with them at university. I joined in Adelaide a bachelors club which was called The Modern Pickwick Club and this had a number of interesting people in it and it lasted for many years. One had to go to this club and read a paper and prepare a short talk on any subject, or a subject which is often assigned to you and then the other people got up and unmercifully tore it to pieces. This was very good training for one of the things that scientists are traditionally bad at, that is how to talk and how to put together a report, I think I am a little better than some people in doing that – some of my scientific colleagues.

(10.00) You talk about `The Pickwick Club' – the question I was going to ask you was, did you see yourself as British or Australian?

Well, I had been to England and I considered myself British in the sense that we then spoke about the British Commonwealth much more than we do these days, but always very definitely an Australian. My parents on both sides were born in Australia and actually one of my grandmother's parents came from Germany, so as did a lot of South Australian people.

Was that a source of conflicting loyalties?

Not at all, no. Because the rest of my family all came from Scotland and I didn't consider myself ... I had no sympathies, nor did my father have any sympathies, he wasn't on the German side. But we had no sympathies with the German militarism at all.

Did you have relatives and friends then, in South Australia who were I suppose, victimised by their German heritage?

Yes, we had a few friends who were victimised, this is in the Second World War. There were a lot of stories in South Australia about the victimisation of people in the First World War or the anti-German feeling which took effect in re-naming a number of South Australian towns, most of which have been changed back now, to their original German names.
I knew a lot of people at school and privately of German descent. Most of these were unflinchingly loyal to Austrlia, as far as I knew. There were one or two about which allegations were made. I never personally saw any evidence of this. However I know, that there were things going on in South Australia, which were subversive.

What? On the part of – within the German community?

Within the German community and this was fairly well known, but the majority of the German descendants were Australian and I fought along ... I didn't fight along side of them – but I knew a lot who were in the services. And they didn't hide their loyalties at all, they were obviously loyal to Australia.

So, you would have been in the CMF then when Menzies made that announcement over the radio – `His melancholy duty' – declaring that Australia was at war?

Yes, I was. You want to know my reaction to that, do you? It seemed to me, one of those inevitable things which however unfortuante it was, was a fact of life and you couldn't – you just accepted it and so did most of the people I was with. I knew one man who was a professional army officer, an adjutant, who was overjoyed at the prospect of going to war, because he felt his training and interest in military tactics was being put to some use. He was the only person I ever knew who expressed that sentiment.

What about your own feelings about it, the battlement and enlistment?

Well, I was in the – as I said, in the CMF engineers, the 3rd Field Brigade in South Australia, this was kept in South Australia and there were no indications that it was going to be sent overseas. I felt that I would like to get some service overseas and I was sent to a training camp at Puckapunyal for two or three weeks and on the way back I stopped in Melbourne and went to RAAF headquarters there, and through some contacts I had, and said, `If I wanted to transfer to the RAAF what was the procedure?' The Air Force was very glad to have me and said that they would arrange this if I filled in an application to join the RAAF, which I did.

Why were the Air Force glad to have you?

I think the Air Force at that time was the least – in a way – the least popular of the services. It didn't have the same appeal of people joining a unit, the people they wanted were often skilled people such as engine fitters and so on and at that time we also had – this was after the war started – we also had reserved occupations in Australia in many trades and the people who were in it, even if they wanted to get away had difficulty in doing so. I was not in that position so, I had freedom. And as a matter of fact, this only happened after the war had started. I was in the engineers until the war started, and then I was called up for full-time service and this happened I think, about six months after the outbreak of war in August in 1939.

What was you work? That you were doing ... because the CMF was obviously ...

Yes, yes.

... evenings and weekends, what was you actual employment?

Oh, I was employed by the Observatory of Adelaide. I was finishing off the research work I started there and also taking star observations, at that time each of the states kept their own time service, soemthing that is now controlled by the – I think the National Observatory in Canberra.

So, it was – was it pretty routine work or ...

It was routine, but it was new to me and I enjoyed it. It involved a lot of complication, which in those days was not as automatic as it is now. The computers were not in and although I was trained in mathematics, I'm not particularly skilled in dealing with large groups of figures – in other words I make mistakes – so I had to check all my work and this was rather tedious and so, there were some problems. The government astronomer at the time discovered a new comet. Now there are lots of comets in the skies and this was a very small comet and he asked me to do some of the calculations on this which involved looking up these big tables – ten figure tables of logarithms and trigonometric functions of the calculations. I'd certainly made some mistakes in doing that – some arithmetical mistakes – but eventually we worked out the orbit of the comet and he sent it off to the International Astronomical Union as his discovery.

What was the comet called?

I don't remember, his name was Dodwell and it may have been called `Dodwell One' or something of the year which I believe was 1938.

I suppose if it happened in `88 they'd call it `A Bicentennial Comet' or something .... So, that's a skill that obviously readily transfers to – calculations to work that you could foresee being done in the RAAF. Did you have it clear in your head like that?

Well, when I put my qualifications down they said, `Well, we'd like you as a navigation officer'. Now, I had never done any navigation either nautical or otherwise and so, I had to learn the rudiments of navigation and the RAAF courses, as all RAAF courses I went to, were very comprehensive and detailed. So, I learnt a lot about navigation, including aerial navigation which is somewhat different from nautical navigation. And after graduation from that course, I was posted to Laverton and I was asked if I would be interested in joining something called `RDF' and they didn't want to tell me much about it because it was rather confidential at that time and then, I went to RAAF headquarters – my navigation course was at Point Cook in Victoria – and I went to RAAF headquarters in Melbourne, was interviewed by Wing Commander Pither, who had been trained on radar in England. At that time it wasn't called radar it was called RDF, which meant Radio Direction Finding and Pither asked me a few questions.

(20.00) Now, previously I had done some undergraduate and postgraduate work in England and there was a lecturer at Cambridge University, by the name of Appleton, after whom the Appleton Layer is called, and he was bouncing short bursts of radio signals off the ionosphere and I knew the sort of work he was doing because there was nothing secret about it, he published it. I didn't know it in detail because it was a part of physics that I hadn't studied personally, but I knew the general principles, so when Pither asked me, what Radio Direction Finding was, I said, `Well, possibly if you sent out a beam of radio signals, you could detect an object in its path', but at the time I was very puzzled, I didn't understand how a small object such as an aeroplane at a distance of several hundred – or fifty or more nautical miles could return a sufficiently strong reflection to be detectable, and that puzzled me and of course Pither didn't tell me any of the details, but he looked at me in a quizzical way and said, `How would you know that?' and I told him about my Cambridge experience and I said, `The rest of it is just a guess' and then he ... I think I had to fill in a form that want to go and

I went back and about three weeks later I got a posting to Richmond, to No. 1 Radar School – or No. 1 RDF School – at Richmond.

So let's just go back, before we follow up that experience, just to polish off the enlistment procedure. When you chose to enlist what – first of all reactions from say, the observatory where you were working, how did they feel about you joining up?

Well this happened very gruadually. I was in the CMF when war of imminent, our training was stepped up and then after the war started, about a month after the war started the CMF called up its – the army called up its CMF personnel for full-time service. My job at the observatory was not considered essential. I think at that time there were three other staff there, it was quite a small place and so, they said, `Oh, yes we probably can carry on if the existing staff increase their duties a little bit' and so they let me go. So I was already, before I joined the Air Force on full-time service with the CMF.

(25.00) What about your family then? How did they respond to it? Were they anxious?

Not really. My mother I think, had of course lived through the First World War and felt it was inevitable that we should have a confrontation with the Germans. And she felt that, being a British country we probably ought to do our bit – they were more British in their outlook than I was.

So, you first formal training then, was at Richmond in that No. 1 Radio School as it was called?

My first formal training in radar, but of course I`d had training in the elements of military and air force discipline and procedure before that.

This is just to save any confusion, after the CMF, the military forces and militia time, you had some training before you went into the radar unit?

Well, I had ... first of all I served for six months in the CMF in Adelaide. Then, after the bivouac or the two weeks camp at Pukapunyal I came down to Melbourne and applied to join the RAAF, I went back to Adelaide, I got a notice from the RAAF saying they wish to transfer me, which I took to the RAAF – which I took to the military authorities there, which they accepted, they said, `Alright, if you want to go, then you can go, you're only in the CMF unit', and this was an active – or more active part of the forces and then I went through some preliminary training at Point Cook before I was on this navigations course and that was formal training too of course – formal training in that sense of air force procedure and formal on the elements of navigation, with technical instructors there.

You say they were rather well organised – the courses – were they ...?

Well the navigation courses were organised, the radar course was different. Our other duties were cut to a minimum, it was a full-time, intensive course on radio theory and practice and we had some very good instructors where, two of them were English and we ... It was almost like being back at university.

What type of things? Were there practical sessions, where you had to actually build things up and test them and align them?

Yes, there was some practical sessions and there was a lot of theory on the principles of radar and the equipment that was used.

Tell me about the security, because this was all top secret, wasn't it?

Well, it was all top secret. We were required to sign I think, something saying that we wouldn't disclose anything that we heard and we were a little group. I think we all agreed that ... I mean, nobody ever wanted to speak of it outside working hours, we certainly talked amonst ourselves about it and at that time, there wasn't any – we were not dealing with documents at all we only had our own notes on the lectures, which were fairly – for the most part, they weren't secret material, they were the theory which was probably pretty well known at the time.

I've heard reports that there were twenty-four hour security guards, guarding the actual training area.

I think there were, yes but these were part of the Richmond guard force.

So, you are saying that a lot of the principles you were then taught, were – you could read them in the Admiralty Handbook or something?

I don't know that you could them in the Admiralty Handbook but the general principles of radar were fairly well known at the time I think. But the details of the equipment used and the type of pulses that we used were secret.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

Identification: This is side 2 tape 1 of the interview with Mr Colin Kerr-Grant. End of identification.

Carrying on then about that first radar course, it was the first course that had been run, wasn't it? So you were a bit of a guinea pig?

Yes, we were the guinea pigs and there were six of us on it. The two people I knew best on it was a man called Andrew Lewis who became a very good friend of mind in the short time that I knew him and then Bert Israel who was a very loquacious person, and who had had a lot of experience in radio. I don't know if you'd like me to talk about the only people on it?
Well, there was John Weir and I don't know .... He was from the PMG in Melbourne, a radio person. I haven't seen him since about the middle of the war and I don't know what's happened to him. There was Rex Wadley – Wadsley who had been with the Hydro-Electric Commission in Trasmania and also a lecutrer at the Univesity of Tasmania, he was very short and we called im `10BA'. Now, the reason we called him `10BA' was that in those days, instrument's screws in British equipment on what was called `The British Association Standard' which was BA and 10BA was one of the smallest of these so, he had the name of `10BA'. He is now I think, back in Tasmania, I've only seen him ... I haven't seen him since shortly after the war. There was also Jim Waddell who stayed in the Air Force and became a group captain and he's now retired

and so, his later history in the Air Force is probably very much more available to you than ... I don't know the details of it all.

You told me 10BA's nickname, what was yours?

Oh! I don't think I had one in the Air Force, I had one in the university. Given to me by one of my old school friends – it was `Gherkin' ...

What was that?

`Gherkin' – which is a sort of corruption of my name Kerr-Grant you see, turned around the other way. And also at that time I had a rather pimply face and – that's the reason for that. And I did get – because I have this double-barrel name – I did get called by some of my friends here, in Sydney `Cave-Brown-Cave' because there was a group captain I think, in the RAF who came to Australia and he had this rather strange triple-barrelled name and so, one of my friends at one time called me `Cave-Brown-Cave' and that stuck with a small group of mainly non-air force friends that I knew in Sydney.

Well look, going back to the course then, who were the instructors? Where did they come from? You mentioned a couple of British instructors?

Yes. Well one was Llewellyn and .... Look, I really have to go back and look at my notes here because – and another was Lewis and both of these were ... I think Llewellyn – he certainly became a warrant officer, I'm not sure whether he was a warrant officer or a staff sergeant at the time and Lewis was a sergeant, both of these were English and then there was a ... I think Maurie Brown was an instructor on that course, I'm not sure about that, I'll have ot look up my records.

But their background was it to do with ...

Their background was all to do with signals and radio and they were permanent RAF people who had been trained in England on special RDF courses.

How well prepared was the course? Did it impress you or not?

It did impress me, yes. Because it taught me a lot of things I didn't know and I'd had a science dgree with some electronics training and this went into aspects of electronics that I didn't know anything about.

And the whole presentation of the course and the pacing of the training of the lecturing and the practical work seemed to respond to the number of students there? ... Did it seem to be that way, that it was well planned?

I think it was very well planned. Like all initial courses I ... No doubt it was considerably improved later. The planning of the course to me, seemed more on the general lines and not specifically directed to the particular needs that radar would encounter in Australia and in my later experience of course, radar branched out in a number of ways in Australia. It was to some extent involved with this and at that time, nobody quite knew what the system was. We were told a little bit about the radar system that was defending England at the time, this was about the the of the Battle of

Britain and the Spitfires and Hurricanes defending England and apparently there was a chain of radio stations, they were called CH – to stand for chain – around the shores of England, which were long stations inter-dispersed between these were some stations with a shorter range which would pick up aircraft trying to doge the main chain stations by coming in at low levels.

That wasn't a system that was introduced in Australia – or was it?

The systems introduced in Australia, were what were called `Early Warning Staions' and then there were LWAW Stations, which were the light weight ones, which were developed by the radio physics laboratory of CSIRO in the university grounds in Sydney to be portable or shall we say, transportable to fit in inaccessible places especially in New Guinea and North Queensland.

Just on the training then, there were six of you on the course, weren't there?

Yes.

They'd clearly all had tertiary qualifications?

Yes, they did.

Were they looking at you as a course to kind of plan the subsequent courses, do you think? To see how well you'd grasp certain principles – or not?

I think to some extent, yes. But I don't know that we were all particularly suited for that. What eventually happened was that two of them, Israel and Lewis, got sent overseas to Singapore and then the Japanese invaded Singapore and Lewis unfortunately didn't come back, he was lost and Israel after some adventures .... Bert Israel managed to get back and as you know, I believed you'll be interviewing him at some future date.
Then I was sent to New Guinea, to Port Moresby, to have a look for a site for a radar station up there and I think that time, after a couple of weeks there I went down to Milne Bay, also reporting on the possibility of a site there. The Americans had a naval depot in Milne Bay and the Australians had been badly bombed by the Japanese on the runway, just prior to my arrival there. And then I came back to headquarters and I was not part of the installation team in putting up these stations.

(10.00) Just finishing on the training course, six people plus the two instructors, more instructors than ...?

There were three instructors.

Did you socialise with them?

Oh yes, we used to go out and have a beer with them and that sort of thing, especially the two sergeants. They were quite interesting and ... But, there was a line of demarcation because we were trainees and they were ... and also, I think we were all in the officer's mess and they were NCOs, or the two sergeants were NCOs so, we didn't use the same mess but we occasionally had a drink with them outside the local pubs and things like that.

People talked about the army as a kind of democratic institution, how did the terms of relationships generally ... What about where you were? Did it feel like a democratic arrangement or was there a – still a kind of strong importance put on rank and authority ... discipline?

I think in all armies there's a lot of importance placed on rank and in all armies there's quite a clear distinction between the officer class and the non-commissioned officers. There's also, in the army, more than the air force, a big distinction between the NCOs and non-commissioned officers and the other ranks. Now, in the Air Force, these distinctions do become a bit blurred because the RAAF had pilots in the NCO class and these pilots fraternised with the flying officers and other flying ranks in the officer class so, probably there's less distinction in the Air Force than in the other two branches of the service but – and off-duty I don't think it mattered much.

Was there much leave during that training period?

Oh, I think we had a couple of weekends off. I think the course was six weeks and it may have been eight weeks but it was six weeks I think. And we had certainly a couple of weekends off and we had night leave which we went out to Richmond or some of the surrounding towns.

So the result of that course, did everyong pass with flying colours?

Everybody passed. I do remember there was some – I don't think I was the top person but I passed quite easily. I think the ... One person who was a bit doubtful – I can't remember who it was at the moment – but they all passed.

So subsequent then to that, you were saying before that you were sent up to New Guinea to Milne Bay ...

Well, Port Moresby first.

Port Moresby, and what type of work were you involved in there?

Well, mainly advising on a site, I was a sort of reconnaissance person, looking at the possibilities for radar defence up there because there was no radar at that time.

So you were just checking out sites just to see if they were suitable ...

... yes ...

... topography?

And also, discussing with the – some of the technical staff up there, in the Air Force the use of radar and whether the local topography would effect it. I think my information on that was that it probably would be satisfactory looking out to sea but I didn't think we could – we might have trouble with the Owen Stanley Range behind. I think subsequently there was no trouble with the radar installations in picking up aircraft coming across the Owen Stanley Range.
(15.00) In those days we had a dilemma in the morning, a regular raid by the Japanese and there were slit-trenches outside the barracks and we used to get down in these, the Japnaese were usually on time and the bombs didn't drop very close to us, they usually dropped in the coconut plantations or in the sea or something but there were two occasions when the bombs were reasonably close. However, nobody took

this terribly seriously I think. It was later when I was up there that there was an American bomber squadron with a lot of ancillary personnel on the strip which is – is it Dobodura that's near Moresby? I'm not quite sure.

I don't know.

... I'm not clear on that at the moment, but I was for some reason going out to the air strip and there was an air-raid alert and it was very dangerous because the American blacks in their four wheel drive vehicles came rushing away from the air field, driving furiously and I was driving a jeep and I took a lot of evasive action to get out of the way of these Americans. The `black-grown stuff' did tend to panic a bit in these cases. I hope that's not interepreted as a racist remark but – even the white Americans of course were trying to get out of the strip too.

You were saying before about the regular eleven a.m. raids that no one took them very seriously. I can't imagine how you couldn't help but take something like that seriously?

Well, everybody got down in the trenches and then ... I think the attitude of most of the RAAF personnel was a matter of fate, if you got hit, you got hit if it didn't drop on you, you were pretty safe. And this was a sort of fatalistic attitude. But, the number of casualties from Japanese air raids on the area where we were, because we had few planes and they were bombing from a great height and they were using small bombs, was very minimal. Even amongst the New Guinea natives the casualties weren't particularly bad at that time. I think the main casualties came from the hand to hand fighting that took place later.

When is this time we're talking about? What period?

I don't know and because I think it was in early 1942, but I'm not sure – no, it must be later than that, it must have been perhaps in early 1943, I think it was in the early part of the year.

When was the first course in Richmond, roughly?

I would say that was probably about May 1942. You got me at a slight disadvantage because I've got no records in Sydney, I'm up here on holidays and if you'd like to get some more information later, I can give it to you.

We will, yes. Look, just coming back on some more general things, CMF Militia did you come across any antagonism, any kind of – conflict with other people that you met up with? I don't suppose you probably would've in the RAAF? Soldiers and things like that?

Yes, we had a bit of that from people and also it's the only place in the army where I felt I was stepped across by somebody who got promotion over me. I did an officer training course and I eventually got promoted and then another person got some seniority over me and I was a little bit rankled over that. I'm not sure whether he deserved it or not so ... It's ... long passed now.

But generally I mean, there weren't any conflicts within the sections you found yourself assigned to?

You mean internally or externally?

Internally.

Internally, no I think we were a very harmonious bunch of people on the whole.

Do you think it's to do with the special nature of the work?

Well, I think it was to do with that a lot of the people in the engineers had been my colleagues at the university and I new them and they knew me and we sort of made allowances for each other.

With – talking to other people when you were saying you were in Moresby reconnoitrying, searching out a suitable location, was it difficult to explain to people what you were looking for, given the secret nature of it?

Well I – I certainly was able to talk to the senior officers there and that wasn't ... I didn't consider that a difficulty, because they were supposed to know I think, I didn't talk to other people. The difficulty I came across was to ... I went and looked at various areas and then there seemed to be some difficulty in getting the use of the land by the Air Force because it wasn't possible for the Air Force to explain completely the nature of the operations that the land was used for, so this then got out of my immediate control, into the hands of the senior people at the station.

(20.00) So they had to ... the negotiations happened at a higher level then?

The negotiations happened at a higher level so I wasn't directly concerned and I presume they included some legal problems, as well as others.

Now this is negotiating within the Australian military or also with the local landowners?

With the local landowners or government authorities there. And not wanting to explain to the local government authorities what they were wanting to do.

Complicated ... What about the local Papuans – New Guinean people, did they – were there any – just a general question, how did you respond to arriving there, because that must have been a bit of a change to Adelaide, St Peters?

Yes, it was a change. I found the local New Guinea people extremely pleasant, extremely friendly. They had of course, all had contact with white people before, because Moresby was at that time – and might still be the biggest city in the country – and we didn't see a great deal of the locals. They did some of the menial jobs around the camps, some of them were sort of cleaning up the camp sites, doing jobs like constructing paths and setting up sheds and that type of thing so I didn't have a great deal to do with them. Shortly after I arrived the local New Guineans gave a concert and sang Polynesian songs and that was extremely pleasant and I enjoyed that very much. I remember that's one of the memories I have of living up there, we had two or three of these impromptu concerts some of which i think, more talented members of the RAAF who could perform also took part ... So life up there was very, very pleasant, after one got used to the humidity and the heat. My first impression on

getting out of an aircraft, I went up there by air, at Moresby was that I got into a sort of sauna bath, but after a couple of days when I got used to that and when the evenings came it was very pleasant.

> Was the travel ... because you were in the RAAF it was pretty easy getting around, wasn't it? There weren't the long trips, you had quick connections by air?

Well, if you had a posting your travel arrangements were in the hands of the transport officers and so I first of all went to Cairns, by train I think, and then I had a flying boat trip in one of the 10 Squadron's flying boats up to Moresby. I think it was 10 Squadron that ran a sort of ferry service up there for the RAAF, to transport materials or materials that need to be got there quickly and personnel and they were based in Cairns and I had about two or three days in a transit hostel in Cairns.

> How long did you stay in Port Moresby for ... that first time?

I think it was about six or eight weeks that's all, not very long.

> Just that first experience I mean, did it make you think about Australia's ... just some political ideas about Australian administration there at about the imperial tone of Australia's presence there. Was that apparent to you or did it seem more benign?

It seemed more benign, there didn't seem to be much confrontation at that time. Now at that time we had a number of district officers, I think they were called district officers in New Guinea and Papua, and I had met a couple of these people who seemed to me very tolerant and interesting people and then there was – there was also the New Guinea Rifles, I think at that time I didn't see ... I saw them on parade but I didn't have any contact with them and in addition to that, there was a New Guinea constabulary, they were well trained.

(25.00) One didn't ever see any confrontation with the authorities in those days, maybe this was because there was too strong a disciplinary hand on them but the other thing that I felt at that time was that, there were many New Guinea natives who were living in quite primitive conditions in parts of the country that you'd occasionally get a visit by the district officer and these were left very much alone. The plantations that existed, were mainly in the vicinity of Moresby and Lae and on the islands but the main hinterland of New Guinea was fairly untouched except for the gold mining areas. I didn't know very much about the gold mining exploitation of New Guinea at that time.

> So there would have been at that stage that you were there, already well organised facilities, accommodation, entertainment facilities?

Well there wasn't very much entertainment. As far as accommodation, the Air Force put up some sheds and we slept in them. They had a mess hall, they had a small headquarters at Moresby, it was not very large at that time and down the town there were a few shops and a few hotels. I think accommodation was extremely scarce for anyone coming up there. Of course a lot of the civilian businesses had lapsed because of the war, so this meant there were less Australian businessmen up there, there were some and there was some activity.

Like what? ... Like banks and trading companies ...

Oh, banks, trading companies, I think there were some exporters of products in New Guinea and of course imports there were quite a lot of activity.

On this visit, that was six or seven weeks you say?

Yes.

That was primarily solely to do with finding locations for suitable sites, was there also something to do with tropicalising ... `tropic proofing' or was that later?

That was much later in my life.

Good, let's get to it a bit later.

Much later towards the end of the war.

So people didn't know about `tropic proofing'?

No they didn't and at the time, though I didn't really know it then, there was a lot of trouble with deterioration of equipment, mainly optical equipment such as telescopes and sites of guns and so on and in the aircraft condensation, in the aricraft which fogged up bomb sites and other navigation equipment. But I think that once the aircraft got up in the air this tended to evaporate,so, for a few weeks or perhaps months you were okay. After that the dust which inevitably occurs with the condensation formed marks on the lenses, in the case of aircraft it's not so bad. You can fly them back to the mainland and get them serviced but the servicing was certainly more intensive. But the worst effects probably were on radio equipment, and we had quite a bit of trouble in air force radar equipment. The signals had much more trouble especially the army signals because they were trying to operate in the jungle and their equipment was always wet. In a radar station you were usually on top of a hill so you get a breeze and there was a certain amount of drying out but when you've got a humidity that's near 100% most of the time, drying out is very slow and if you're in a humid jungle with no wind ... conditions were very bad and a lot of the components of the equipment ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

STATE TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Identification: This is an interview with Mr Colin Kerr-Grant on the 10th of January, 1989 for the Australian War Memorial Project. The interviewer is Stephen Rapley from the ABC's Social History Unit. End of identification.

The firs tape just ran out as you were talking about some of the problems within the radios and some of the equipment, some of the components, how they were affected by the high humidity.

Well at the time, my first visit to New Guinea, that was not an evident problem, it certainly became more evident as the war moved on and more equipment was moved

to New Guinea and the army I think, had much worse problems than either the navy or the air force but all services had problems.

> We'll probably come back to that I think, because it obviously is an important theme in terms of the technology of radio and the way the institution, the organisations responded to it. Just to recap, after that course then, at Richmond who were you assigned to?

After the Richmond course I was attached to RAAF headquarters in Moresby, then I was posted back to RAAF headquarters in Melbourne and attached to the staff of the Radar Directorate, which I think at that time was still part of signals before it split off and became a separate branch of its own and directly under Wing Commander Pither and he assigned me the task of sighting and locating radar beacons in Australia. Now, in addition to the radar stations that were put around the coast of Austraia, there was another type of installation that was put on Catalinas and I – at some time in this period – and I'm sorry my memory is not as good as it used to be – but I was assigned to the flying boat station at Rathmines in New South Wales and there people were installing a device called ASV – Aircraft to Surface Vessel radar – which was used on – mainly on Catalinas but on some other long distance and reconnaissance aircraft – and the purpose of this was that the Catalinas which were out on patrols from the Australian coastline could search for shipping, either allied shipping that had become lost or was in trouble or enemy shipping, and they would pick this up on their radar and were able to track it in conditions of low visibility or even further than the norm of visibility. Then, in order for these aircraft to relocate themselves if they had problems, the system of beacons was set up in Australia which, if they received a signal from an aircraft with ASV on it, these sent back a coded reply and from the nature of the coding, the operator on the aircraft could identify which beacon was responding and also use it as a means of navigating to get home or to get to some other place. So, a system I think, of sixty beacons was going to be set up in Australia and on the islands of New Guinea.

(5.00) At what frequencies – at HF or at radar type frequencies?

These were radar frequencies. They were radar responding beacons. And then there was another sort of radar that was put in the cockpits of aircraft called IFF. I didn't have very much to do with this except that, I was attached for a period of a couple of months to the Radio Physics Laboratories to liaise with the radio physics people on the development and installation of radar on aircraft and in this light weight early warning system, the requirements of transport ability and so on, because the Radio Physics Laboratory, although they had some engineers also were not altogether familiar with Air Force requirements. Let me say that, I don't know that I was altogether familiar with Air Force requirements because I hadn't been in the Air Force too long but I was supposed to be able to find out what the Air Force required so I had ... I was a channel of communication back to the Air Force on the requirements of the Radio Physics Laboratory. I spent about three months in Sydney, more or less just attached to the laboratory going there every day and helping them with their development work on installations and the requirements for the various types of installations.

> This is after you've come back from ...

New Guinea.

> New Guinea, been assigned to install these set of radar beacons ...

Well, no I think this took place before the location of the radar beacons.

> So, and the work you're doing then with the radio physics people within the grounds of Sydney University, that was daily turning up there and just what? Being available ...

It was being available, normal working hours. I almost became a civilian again, for about three months.

> With those beacons, clearly the idea is that they are not on all the time so that they are acting as a kind of target for enemy aircraft, it's just that they were signaled on, they were switched on by the friendly radar, if you ....

Well they were switched on by the friendly radar ... I don't think this was a problem. I think they could've been switched on by Japanese radar but in those days, I don't know whether Japanese had much radar in their planes. They wouldn't have been switched on by radar in ships because there was very little of that in the Japanese ships and they didn't come close and that worked on a different frequency.

> And there was no HF beacon system in Australia at that stage?

Oh, yes there was, the orginary single beacon yes, that was run by the civil aurhorities.

> Were they operating during the war?

I think so, I'm not sure whether they were switched off in theatres of war.

> I'm just wondering why – what the need was for this extra radar system? What your rationale was for it, apart from the safety of the air crew?

Well, the safety of the air crew was one and also, I don't think the ordinary direction finding radio stations which also could be used, they didn't exist up in the northern parts of Australia. They probably existed as far as Townsville but further north than that, at that time, there would have been possibly some at Darwin.

> Sorry to keep jumping backwards and forwards but I think we're roughly chronological.

Yes.

> The time with radio physics then, what specific projects were you liaison on? Was it to do with LWAW?

It was to do with LWAW and to some extent the ASV aircraft to surface vessel equipment. The other thing that they did some development work in there was on I think, adapting the IFF which was eventually manufactured in Australia, that was ... The IFF was a little black box which was Identification Friend or Foe, and this was an English invention I believe, that was purely, I would say, almost purely a technical problem because the thing had to be installed in the aircraft which was a mechanical

problem, but I'm not an aircraft engineer so I wouldn't have been much use on that and the development of it was in the hands of the radio physics staff and of course at that time, Dr Bowen was the head of Radio Physics and he, as you know, was quite famous and well know personality in the development of radar itself in England and Australia.

(10.00) Just talking about that liaison – that relationship between radio physics and radar unit within RAAF – what was the relationship like? Was it smooth?

Yes it was very smooth on the whole, there were a few strange people in radio physics. But of course, since they were working on radar there were no security problems there or other, security problems were the responsibility of radio physics so, once you got inside the building which you had to go through a security check, the staff there, we assumed that they knew as much as we did or they assumed that we were party to their secrets so there was no problems in that respect and most of the scientists there that I knew were very – quite conscientious and brought up some very good ideas.

What about the ... Were they practical in their application of it? Because the third party in this liaison, this technical liaison that's going on is the railways ...

... Yes ...

... who are actually fabricating it ...

... Yes ...

... the man's name ...?

I don't remember now ... I can't remember, sorry.

Woolwich?

That's right, yes. I didn't have too much to do with the fabrication of the towers which the radar used because I'm not really a trained engineer and they had some trained engineers in radio physics so I didn't have anything to do with the liaison. What we did suggest was the – or talk about – was the portability of these and some of them were made to be carried on utilities or trucks and then they would develop their – partly at my suggestion, party Bert Israel's and partly radio physics, I mean we had conversations about this – how to dismantle the things so that it was carried portably in manpack loads and of course that wasn't all that easy, it had to be bolted together fairly quickly under difficult conditions. But eventually they got a very successful design for these portable sets.

So that design, that prefabrication I suppose, as the result of just sitting around at tables and with papers and ...

Just sitting around tables and talking to people and also discussing you know, whether they could be carried as two man loads or single man packages. And then of course the actual radar equipment itself, the electronic equipment had to be packaged too and that meant putting something that could be in one box. We didn't have transistors in

those days so they were all electronic tubes, valves and that makes them much more bulky, you see.

Which word did you use in those days?

I think valves mainly.

`Tubes' is a rather American expression, isn't it?

Yes, yes and it came into being after the war. In other words, I think a lot of people talked about `the wireless' in those days and of course, that's completely gone out. Nobody talks of `wireless' any more, these days.

Only nostalgic people ... So, you're working then for that three month period on the IFF, LWAW and then moving into the radar beacons, how long did all that time take?

Look, I'm not too clear on the exact times, if we had another interview on this, I'll get the times much more accurately.

So after that then, your impressions then of working with the radio ... Was that the closest you'd come to work with radio physics in that period?

Well I ... I had a scientific training and I knew of some of the people in radio physics and I knew CSIRO people, a lot of my university colleagues went into CSIRO, some of them so, I didn't have any difficulties in working with them and also, there were some people at the National Standards Laboratory which was in the same building, who were graduates of my father so I had a couple of acquaintances there, I won't say they were close friends but I sort of knew my way about there. That was possibly why I was posted there, I don't know ...

Was it kind of distance nepotism or something ...?

Yes, yes, you could call it that, if you like ...

One of the other organisations set up to coordinate scientific research during that period was a thing called the Scientific Liaison Bureau, which was I suppose under the control of the CSIR ....

Yes it was all CSIR, of course, in those days, I've been saying CSIRO because that's how I think of it at the present.

Did you have any dealings with some of the Scientific Liaison Bureau people at all or were you strictly ...?

Well, Neville Wiffen, no, no it was a chap called Cumming – Cummings who was the head of the Scientific Bureau in those days, I knew him and later on in the war, I was seconded from the Air Force to take part in a three man scientific team which looked at the deterioration of tropical – in tropical service – of defence material and three of us wrote a report on that, which I can show, I have a copy in Melbourne.

Who were the other two?

There was an entomologist by the name of Dr McGree and was I think, with the New South Wales Department of Agriculture and there an industrial chemist I think, he was named Hansen, who had been with the Shell Oil Company and the three of us. I retained my Air Force status, the others were given some sort of temporary army rank and we went around a lot of army and air force establishments in New Guinea and even up to the Philippines in the end, to have a look at equipment.

This is to do with fungal deterioration of fabrics and ...

Fungal deterioration, corrosion – corrosion in bearings and things like that – and invasion by, in equipment by very small mites and beetles which made their nests inside binoculars and other sorts of optical equipment. And also, especially small spiders which used to put spider web over the glass. Now, the spider webs or other material from, exudations from insects, actually in very wet conditions can corrode the glass, there must be some acid in them which attacks the glass. And so, the glass not only had this ... these pieces of spider web and so on across it, plus dust and dirt which under the moist conditions stuck to the glass but also was actually etched so that the lenses became much less effective.

What about radio gear? We've talked about that briefly before ...

Radio gear yes, radio gear ... A lot of radio gear was made up of waxed paper. Now, under tropical conditions, though it has a wax coating which is satisfactory under ordinary conditions, the wax paper absorbed moisture and instead of forming an insulator it formed a conductor so the equipment gradually broke down and didn't work you see, and then you had to replace various components in it, so that it made a lot more work for the maintenance technicians who were looking after the equipment. And this happened to everything from signals` radio sets to parts of radar equipment to ... oh ... In some cases to electrical gear for power supplies.

How soon did people realise this? I mean, when was the first inklings of something really going wrong up in the tropics electrical gear?

There was some problems in the United States quite early and the American electronic gear was a bit better manufactured I think, than the Australian electronic gear, they used plastics which were more resistant. Some of the early plastics were not very resistant to moisture and the other thing that happened was that, in those days we used an insulation tubing which was known in the trade as `spaghetti' which was put over wires to prevent them from touching other wires. Now, `spaghetti' at that time was made of a woven fabric which was dipped in some insulating material, varnish or something like that and the fabric used to absorb moisture, so instead of providing insulation, it acted as a short circuit. So a lot of trouble was had with that. And nowadays of course you only see plastic `spaghetti'.

The varnish wasn't a protection then ... for that `spaghetti'?

No, because when you ... The end of it exposed the fabric, exposed the fibres – cotton fibres – and the moisture got in there and then the whole thing would deteriorate. It was quite a revelation to see the worst cases.

So the components that were, I suppose, most damaged or affected by the tropical conditions, were fixed capacitors and the insulation on the wiring?

Oh, and relays too. Because, first of all the bearings on the relay would go or they'd get clogged up so the relays did not operate well and then the coils on the relays were soemtimes made with cotton covered or even sick covered wire and they would get moisture in them. So relays were a lot of trouble.

And sealing these things didn't help because there was condensation?

Well no, sealing them was usually not 100%. What was done by most of the maintenance crews was that hey, this was in the later stage of the war, I would say about 1943 or thereabouts, towards the end of 1943, most established camps had some sort of power supply so they had a box with a couple of light globes in it which kept the equipment at a temperature which dried it out and once you got it dry it'd work again until it got wet, the only problem was that once having been saturated and if you dried it out it might work but it, having lost the protection of the insulation to some extent, it only took a day or so before it deteriorated again so, it was a lot of maintenance required on this equipment and a lot of drying out and in some places it was almost impossible to keep up with it. The other place where we saw some very bad examples of this were in various depots where equipment was brought up from Australia or from overseas and put in storage as spare parts and if the depots, as they were in the first place, they were just thatched huts, even if they were Nissen Huts or some sort of steel or iron structure, in order to ventilate them and live in them you had to have currents of air going through and air was nealry 100% humidity, so it didn't matter where it was, unless it was stored in a heated enclosure which is impossible in a large hut and anyway, very, very uncomfortable if you had to work in it. There were very few areas where the material could be corrected in the depots and with a lot of spare equipment, it was almost impossible to protect them. The people who looked after these were storemen and not technicians so they didn't have the technique to do any repairs on them. Sometimes the depots did have a couple of technicians there but this was difficult.

So when you got back then, and your team of three and you wrote up the report, what was the response to that report?

Well, it came out in about 1945, it must've been 1944 that we did this or perhaps at the beginning of 1945. The report came out in about three months and was published fairly quickly. But by that time the war was nearly over and a lot of recommendations were made but by the time this filtered down to the manufacturers and so on, it had no immediate response – no really effective response on the conduct of the war and by that time equipment was being manufactured of much better quality. Even before the report came out, because there were a lot of reports that condensers were breaking down and you used these certain imported condensers from America or from England, the English had also had a lot of trouble in their ships, their naval vessels with this, so they started producing tropic-proofed material.

What? Devising special shellac and things that you could use or ...?

Well, moulding stuff in plastics was the best way and then not using connections – making connections with stiff wire so that the wires didn't touch, I mean air is a pretty good insulator in most cases.

So filling it with `gunk' rather than ...

Well that's the other way, you encase the whole thing in plastic. You either have it, the wires exposed but not touching or encase the whole thing in plastic and also you didn't have terminals close to – or lead in soldered points – close to one another as you did if you open up a modern transistor set, components are very, very close to each other, but in those days you spaced them out so that the resistance path was longer otherwise, if you got condensation you easily get a film of moisture which would impair the operation of the equipment.

On this work, I mean coming back to the Scientific Liaison Bureau, did you ever deal with a character in Sydney called Arthur Penfold?

I didn't deal with him personally, I just heard his name, but I don't remember ... I think I may have met him, I'm not sure.

He had an interest in tropicalising.

Yes, I know.

And he's a paints person or emulsions person, oils person a – essential oils?

That's right, yes. Incidentially, Hansen was concerned with two aspects, one was paints and the other was rusting of steel bearings and things like that which was again a problem of a humid atmosphere. I mean, the obvious answer to that was better maintenance. One of McGee's main problems was that, the tents developed a mould over them mainly *Aspergullus* pencillin types of mould and that rotted the canvas of the tents and in the worst areas you saw tents that were absolutely black with *Aspergillus* moulds on them and you could put your fingers through the canvas, those are the worst cases, I don't say that too many were like that. But, people had to live in tents for long periods so – they had a lot of problems with that. The RAAF was mainly more permanent so these problems were not as bad, but they existed in certain areas of the RAAF like Madang, for RAAF personnel.

Yes because the actual ... Especially with the LWAW installations, they could add on quite a comfortable and semi-permanent living or you know – accommodation to take advantage of the climate and local materials ...

Yes, and if you had some New Guinea workmen around you could put up a thatched hut which was I think much more pleasant to live in than a tent.

With the steel cabinets that housed all the gear and the ...

Yeah! ... yeah.

Did they think much of comfort and things like that, in those days? Or was it ...?

Yes, everybody was trying to make themselves ... especially if you were stationed at a non-mobile place, people developed a sort of semi-permanent lifestyle.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

START TAPE 2, SIDE B.

Identification: This is side 2, tape 2 of an interview with Mr Colin Kerr-Grant. End of identification.

You were just telling me about the accommodation of these – `creature comforts' I suppose on the radar stations on the more remote places, especially in the tropics, did you ever visit any of those places?

I visited, yes a few radar stations, but when I was attached to this scientific liaison bureau unit, we had sort of *carte blanche* to go to a whole lot of stations and we were .... This was a scientific, you could call it `an expedition' almost to find out the extent of the tropical deterioration and I should have mentioned earlier that the leader of the expedition was an army brigadier by the name of Brigadier Chapman, who was an engineer, he had a somewhat scientific background because his father was a distinguished palaeontologist I think with the Australian Museum in Sydney, and Chapman had a certain amount of rank which none of us had and he would introduce himself to the CO of whatever unit we were visiting. We even visited some naval establishments and even some American establishments too and all this was usually done by a signal advising the CO of our arrival and so we were welcomed and given some guest accommodation, at these stations and usually made quite welcome while we were there, in perhaps a somewhat formal way because nobody knew us as a rule and we were problems, usually the technical officer of some sort or maybe an adjutant and we saw a lot of camps ... a lot of establishments. The later ones I visited probably more on my own than with this unit.
We went I think, to two radar units – maybe more – but a very few on this, it was mainly a general air force signals, army signals, army artillery because of the optical stuff or general army battle units, and a few naval bases. I had a couple of visits to American naval shore units and one was treated very well by them, you usually got better .... Well, you got steaks there flown out from Australia, they lived pretty well the American Navy, I don't think the American Army did it as well. And toward the end of the war I think, the facilities improved quite considerably for all the units in the war. I don't know whether this actually helped to win the war but, I think the sheer weight of numbers and the improved techniques and possibly the tiring of the Japanese forces, sort of eased the pressure. The main tension in the war, that I remember, was in the early days when the army was trying to cross the Owen Stanley Ranges from the ground point of view and from the naval point of view, I suppose the Coral Sea Battle, but I had very little to do with the navy except for, my brother was in it.

(5.00) From the radar point of view though, I suppose the light weight air warning equipment had a big role to play in that final surge towards Japan, because so many of them were established in that New Guinea – north of New Guinea – island there in that kind of final assault?

Yes, well we were sort of advancing installations as the war hopped from island to island. And I don't know whether we ever got to the stage of putting equipment in the Philippines or not, or whether that ... I think that was mainly US equipment that went in there.

> Tell me, the other thing I suppose, radar is a new area when we're talking about in the forties, was there much resentment – rivalry between the other radio trained people ... the signals people within the RAAF?

Well, yes radar started off as a small offshoot of signals and Pither I think, was a signals officer originally and then he went to England for training as a radar officer and he came back as the radar expert in the RAAF and he was ... oh, very effective at that I think. I think the head of signals in RAAF was Group Captain Wiggins, and on that bound between Pither and Wiggins I think, there was a fairly good understanding, however, there was a tendency amongst some of the signals officers to regard the radar people as, to some extent, as `upstarts' and people who were too big for their boots and had swollen heads because they were dealing with something that was quite secret and if you couldn't talk to them ... there was a little bit of that.

> What kind of feeling of superiority on the part of the radio people? Or were they seeing you as `boffins'?

Well they saw us as `boffins' to some extent and perhaps there was a feeling that we were sort of trying to be a little bit superior because we knew things that some of the signals people didn't. I think it depended a great deal on your own personality, if you didn't try and pull the wool over the other peoples' eyes, you got a good reception, but it also depended on who the other person you were talking to.

> So your work, as the Radar Liaison Officer, was that your official title for a lot of that period?

No, I don't think so, it was ... perhaps my title at Radio Physics when I was there. But, when I was at headquarters I was a junior staff officer attached to this branch.

> So a lot of your work then, is gathering information and collating that information, is it?

Or planning for radar installations and then, at a later stage in the war I was posted to the No. 1 RIMU – which was a Radar Installation and Maintenance Unit – back at Croydon and my work there was trying to keep all the radar units that we serviced supplied with spare parts, even personnel. I was not particularly concerned with the posting of personnel, that was done by other people in No. 1 RIMU but my particular job was to ensure that supplies got out to all the stations that send signals to us requesting supplies, replacements or even, getting new supplies to new stations and therefore, I was mainly engaged in telephoning various people to see what happened to these components that we were shipping.

> So that means you had to negotiate with what – suppliers outside the RAAF?

Occasionally with suppliers outside the RAAF but usually with RAAF depots and not always. In fact, I think about at least fifty percent had nothing to do with radar, and then I also was responsible for getting supplies of kitchen utensils and things like that up to radar stations, because we were the supply depot for most of the radar stations.

Quite a broad role?

Yes.

It actually went into ... you were saying, of posting people and it was more of a coordination unit rather than just a simple electronics maintenance?

Well, it was an installation and maintenance unit and the maintenance involved, keeping these people supplied with enough materials to carry on and sufficient supply of spares for their equipment and if necessary tents or other sleeping and accommodation requirements and then, postings. Now, I was not involved with the posting side at all, I don't think I ever had much to do with posting people. I perhaps heard about it but I didn't have any authority in that way.

How long were you in charge of that No. 1 RIMU?

I wasn't in charge. The person in charge was ... oh, what was his name? I'm sorry, my memory is not what it ought to be ... Wing Commander – he was a Wing Commander – let's leave that for a moment if we can.

How long were you there for?

I was there for the best part of a year, I think – seven months – about nine months at least. There again, I can look up dates but I can't give you the exact dates at the moment.

And this is all before that final trip up to ....

This was before the scientific liaison trip, yes.

It's just before it? I mean, that's what you went on to afterwards? Did you enjoy that work in the RIMU? It sounds probably not as challenging as a lot of the other things?

Well, it wasn't as challenging, in one sense but it was challenging because I felt I was playing an essential part in keeping the various stations supplied with the equipment they needed and before RIMU was set up, the distribution of equipment was quite haphazard. I think the stores branch of the Air Force was responsible for getting accommodation, materials and other things up to a new unit but the radar units were very small as you realise, and therefore, they didn't become a major priority of the stores people, I mean, if you've got a squadron wanting something and that was an active unit – active fighting unit – and then some small radar group of ten people wanting some equipment obviously the squadron would be entitled to priority service and so, the radar people were very often struggling along under rather primitive conditions and more or less camping ... living off the land almost, up in their remote positions and the radar installations maintenance unit was set up to remedy the situation.

What? To argue their case almost to ... to represent their interests?

To represent their interests, yes definitely.

You were saying you remember the name of the ...

Yes, it was Wing Commander Preston, he was an old fashioned sort of person, he organised church parades for instance, at the local church in Croydon. No. 1 RIMU was established in the Presbyterian Ladies College at Croydon. Some of the quarters there were quite comfortable. They also put up some galvanised iron dormitories in the grounds – much to I suppose the consternation of the PLC owners – but I think these have been taken down and the place restored since then, and the mess hall was indoors ... in the building so we had quite comfortable surroundings there and we were a small unit. It was a very friendly sort of an organisation and Preston organised church parades to the local church and recreation for the troops and it was a very genial but somewhat of a disciplinarian in a not too aggressive way.

How do you mean, did you ever come ... across him?

Oh ... I think I had some minor arguments with him but nothing in particular. I think a couple of other people resented his authority and he also had a difficulty in that, he was not a technical person or certainly not trained in electronics so that he had to defer to whoever his 2IC was and they changed a couple of times, in technical matters and this always creates a slight difficulty in the chain of command.

(15.00) That erodes the authority?

Yes, it erodes authority, as you say.

Tell me the RAFs got a reputation for its specific language and slang that it uses. Did the RAAF have any comparable?

I think we adopted .... We had ... George Day was a British officer, a RAF officer attached to No. 1 RIMU for some time. I met him only recently at the radar reunion in Canberra and he looks just the same. His hair hasn't even gone grey now, and he has remained in Australia and been attached to CSIRO ever since and was involved in the construction of the Parkes Radio Telescope and so, we adopted a few of the British expressions but not very many.

Can you remember some of them?

Not really no, I don't think I can. I can remember some of the slang Australian expressions such as the .... Of course we had the pounds, shillings and pence then and we used words like `dina' and `tray' and of course `two bob' in those days but – and then there were several popular Australian expressions but they were not specific to radar, or to the RAAF that I can think of, perhaps some of the flying expressions were. There was one which told people how to get out of a spin which was `hooley-dooley, back stick and forward rudder ... no, back stick and opposite rudder', I think it is.

Where's the `hooley-dooley' fit in?

I don't know ... I know some of the flying people used it. I think it was `back stick and top rudder' because you're on your side in a spin.

So you're in a really .... It's a weird place to be in a flying force but in a kind of ground based occupation, except for you know, ASV when you're trying those out?

Yes. Well, I did a couple of patrols on Catalinas where I was part of the air crew but these were very unspectacular things, I mean we were searching for lost ships or something like that and this is rather boring, you just fly up and down over the ocean and it's like an airliner these Catalinas except not quite as roomy and we had ... I think a tail gunner in them but, I wasn't a tail gunner and I wouldn't want to be either, particularly.

That was pretty clear? I mean, people realised how dangerous it was to be in that position at that stage?

Well, very few Catalinas were involved in combat manoeuvres with fighter aircraft in our theatre of war. I'm not sure on the other side of the Atlantic what happened to flying boats, but they usually flew close to the surface of the water and fortunately, very few of them were attacked by fighters as far as I know. It was usually the bombers that the fighters were after you see, and they were much more vulnerable altogether.

Just on that thing of language, were there expressions people had for officers, you know, slang expressions for officers?

Oh yes, well .... Of course, the staff officers were always supposed to wear `scrambled egg' around their hats which was the term for the gold braid that was on their caps. The officers were sometimes called `pigs' I think, by the other ranks and I can't remember many of the others. You know, its forty years and I have lived in the United States since then, for several years and overseas for another couple of years and I don't have as good a memory as some of my friends who can remember things that went on. I remember a few details perhaps occasionally.

Of what? Of ...

Oh, the expressions of one or two people.

(20.00) Was there a special word for rumour ... rumours?

Yes, there was. Well the army word of course was `furphy' and that was the First World War expression which, you known the origin of that I presume? Well ... as I understand, the First World War people in Gallipoli and other theatres of war, used to rely on these water guns manufactured by Joseph Furphy who was an Australian and very often they didn't come when they were expected and so, somebody would see one and say `There's a Furphy' and it didn't eventuate so it meant a rumour that wasn't absolutely true, but it was used up till the Second World War and during the Second World War, I haven't heard it used much in the last ten or fifteen years – or say twenty to twenty-five years.

No other expressions that ...?

No, I relly can't think of too many. If I have another interview with you I might have them, I might remember a few.

We'll do that. Look, just a broader thing, you were talking about the First World War, was that ... idea about ... were notions about the First World War about Gallipoli about that tradition ... the ANZAC tradition, were they things that say, you and your colleagues in the CMF and Militia were conscious of? Or do you remember reading books about those things and talking about things you'd found?

Well, my family's friends in those days, a lot of them had served in the First World War and some of my relatives, and when I was growing up, those people had come back from the war and I think their experiences were much more intense than – their war experiences were much more intense than say, people like myself in the Air Force who, although we had a few contacts with enemy action, these were rather sporadic, we had along periods away from any major danger, whereas these people lived in a situation of imminent danger for months on end in trenches and that was a much more harrowing experience than anything a lot of people had in the Second World War. You know, you become perhaps more fatalistic in a sense, I don't know that you could be but, you just felt that if a bomb dropped on you that was it and ... otherwise you'd probably be okay.

Did that experience have an effect – say your experience, have an effect on your notions of religious feeling I suppose – spirituality?

Yes ... to a slight extent. I think the war made me feel that the people who counted, you didn't judge them on their material or financial success. We seem to be drifting back to that sort of society these days, when financial success or power is one of the main criterions in national life and political life and industrial life and I think that's a bad thing. Now, in the Air Force and in the army, the people who were real leaders, just stood out because of their courage and their personality and it wasn't always their courage but it certainly was their personalities to a large extent, and they were the people who could do something when a crisis occurred and unfortunately we don't have enough crises at the present time ... That's a funny thing to say but, I feel now that life is so controlled that it makes the young people especially, and I'm thinking of friends of my own children perhaps more than my own children themselves, they have a sense of frustration at the way life is so unchangeable.

(25.00) The crises you're talking about are grand global type of crises rather than the personal crises?

No, not only grand, they can be personal crises that people in army units, they're surrounded and somebody with an act of bravery gets them out of the situation, or one man goes and ... if he's in an army unit and attacks a machine gun post or something like that and you learn to respect the people that will not willingly take risks that are avoidable but, manage to get a lot done by only taking calculated risks and this is something that perhaps leaders of industry do in a financial sense but very few people have to do it in a personal sense these days. I think taking risks is one of the attributes of leadership in civilisation but ... and you seem to meet more and more people who don't want to take risks these days.

Do you think that – that with your own personal views, I mean, do you miss that excitement of that time?

Yes of course, I ... being a technical person, being in radar which, a lot of it was involved in sitting and watching a TV screen and reporting on what was going on, though I didn't do a very great deal of that myself, you don't feel that you're taking any great risk at the time, it's a job that you're doing because of the fact that you are conscious that if you don't do it properly, other people's lives might be in danger. It's saying that the majority of people who do it, I felt in the war were very loyal to the services and the cause. They did their job very conscientiously. Now in everyday life you're watching a word processor. The same feelings don't exist. I mean, if you make a mistake all you suffer is the annoyance of your boss probably, if you're a stenographer using a word processor and this doesn't give the same intensity of concentration that you have in other ... therefore life is in some ways less exhausting and I think a little bit of effort and exhaustion helps to make life more interesting.

> I started off asking you about spirituality because you used the term ... you said, `a kind of fatalistic outlook' or ... `whether that little bomb is going to land on you or fifty feet away'?

Well, it does make you wonder perhaps more about the possibility of divine intervention, although I'm very mixed up on this subject, I mean, you read people who say, `How can I believe in Christianity when both sides invoke the same God?' and I think you have to look at life somewhat differently from that. Being trained as a scientist although I was not a biologist, you look at evolution, you find that most life is built on destroying other life, I mean, even if you eat a piece of bread, you have eaten the germ of wheat in which would've created a new wheat plant. Now I have no objections doing that because I'm not one of those people that think plants have feelings so I'm all very ... feelings so, I don't have any qualms about that, of any sort whatever but life is built ... Civilised life is built on other life especially for carnivorous animals, and most birds and a lot of animals are carnivorous at least – they eat insects at least. So, it is my big paradox there and I don't consider myself enough of a philosopher to know the answers to that.

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

START TAPE 3, SIDE A.

> Identification: This is tape 3 of the interview with Colin Kerr-Grant recorded on the 10th January, 1989. End of identification.

I was reading an interesting book by a physicist at the Institute of Advanced Studies his name ... I can't remember ... this is bad! And he writes of his experiences ... very amusing book – various experiences in the development of the rocket propulsion and satellites and other things like that. I met him at a conference in Adelaide last year, at the beginning of last year, and at the end of the book he expresses some feelings, which is interesting of a physicist because o lot of them are thought to be, if not atheistic very agnostic, and the feeling that he couldn't see how all the coincidences that are necessary to provide civilised existence as we know it could have occurred without some sort of divine guidance. Now, I feel a bit that way that it's rather hard to imagine everything being created purely by accident. This doesn't mean that evolution hasn't taken place, I'm not a creationist in any sense of the word and I just think that creationism is an aberration of even of religious thought as a most adanced thing ... in the established churches also think this I believe. But, I don't think we were a

particularly spiritual group. What war, if you see it at reasonably close hand, does to you, it makes you believe much more in the inner qualities of people, their spiritual qualities rather than their actual abilities even and certainly in their attitudes towards other people. It makes you develop your spiritual qualities in a rather deeper way, I think.

And what? ... the way you articulate those or just the way ...

Well if you believe in yourself, you may or may not articulate them. I mean, some of my acquaintances on this are very reticent and others are reasonably out-spoken, though one doesn't normally talk about it in every day life, unless you're fanatic about this.

So, there's clearly a camaraderie amongst the former radar people, although ... this last September, in 1988, was the first time there's ever been a national gathering so, were they a lot of individualists or what?

Well, I think there's two reasons for this, one is we were to a large extent more indivdual than people in an army unit or a fighter squadron or a bomber squadron. Second is – that radar being a very small group, the personnel recruited from people who had some previous electronic experience and who were not in reserved occupations or for some other reason didn't want to go to the war and this was a small group in Australia in the early 1940s and I suppose a lot of them were not available for recruitment to the Air Force, or didn't want to be involved and therefore in any unit, you often got people from different countries, different parts of the country and we didn't know each other before the war or we didn't know much about each other. We went back to our original cities and we lost touch and arranging a meeting of the people you knew when some of them are in Perth and some of them are in Brisbane and you live in Adelaide or Melbourne it's quite difficult, you see.
(5.00) I only wish that this Commonwealth reunion thing had been organised say, fifteen to twenty years ago, but it wasn't. We had our own local branches. I went to some of the South Australian meetings after I got back because I was in South Australia until 1954 and after that, I went overseas to the United States and I lost a lot of contacts then, and I didn't come back until 1958 and then I went to Melbourne where I didn't know nearly as many people so I haven't kept up my contacts probably as much as people like Bert Israel has.

Can be we talk I suppose, in the final section about some of the people. I mean, we haven't really described Pither, Group Captain, final rank wasn't it?

Yes .... Certainly Group Captain, I don't think he got higher than that. Pither I think was the CO at Wommera much later, probably in the .... I don't know when Woomera closed down ... but it had a military command, defence command from Australia, I think 1st and Army Command and then Pither I think, was the commander of it. Which was not entirely inapproriate because it was dealing with rockets and long range missiles testing. And, of course, it was fairly adjacent to Maralinga. Though, I don't know what the liaison between Woomera and Maralinga was at all.

Can you tell me just your impressions of the man? ... A description of him for people who've not seen him.

Well he was a very reserved sort of person to me. He didn't sort of join the boys and have a drink with them. Group Captain Wiggins, I didn't meet socially but I saw him in a couple of mess gatherings, officer's mess gatherings and he seemed to me a more jovial sort of person. However, apparently he did go out to parties because I think, this was when I was at RIMU, I met some female acquaintances who had met Pither and one of them called him `Pither-Dither'. Now, whether that was his relationships with other women I don't know.

Meaning what?

Meaning, I don't know! I just don't ... and I said `Well, what do you mean by `Pither-Dither'?' I think, and they said, `Oh, just `Pither-Dither' sort of thing'. And these were young girls I mean. I wasn't all that young in the Air Force, I was in my thirties, at the end of the war, and I suppose they were in their ... they weren't teenagers, they were in their twenties, about twenty-five to twenty-six something like that.

These would've been WAAFs ...?

No, no, no, they were Sydney civilians that I knew. As far as the WAAF went, I didn't associate very much with the WAAF, I mean, when I was at RIMU I had a WAAF secretary who was a very pleasant girl and occasionally we'd meet at sort of Air Force parties but I never took her out as a .... One of my good friends who was also in radar, he died a year or so ago, John Smith he married a WAAF whom I knew and I know several others did but he was the only one of my personal friends who had a romance with a WAAF. But, WAAFs were very pleasant, we had a ... and in the warning stations around the coast, apparently the WAAFs formed groups of people and mostly the postings to those stations were from groups who knew each other and some of them have kept up much closer reunions than the general ones.

And the men ...

Yes, and the men, they keep up their own reunions and especially in New South Wales because, going back to South Australia, I don't think we had more than about two or three radar stations in South Australia and the people on them, I'd left South Australia, I went back, so I had nothing to do with them at all, so I didn't really know the people who worked on the stations.

You would've known John Allen, wouldn't you?

I knew John Allen, yes.

You still know him ...

I still know him, yes. Yes, well if I'm in South Australia at the right time I go to their ANZAC Day or Christmas reunions and all that, and at some other times of the year. I was there at the reunion two years ago. But the numbers are decreasing for various reasons people get too old or they live in the country and they can't come and the last one I went to was a combined radar and signals reunion in South Australia, that was in about 1986. I just haven't been back in the right place at the right time to go to that. Are you going to interview John Allen?

I've spoken to him a few times but I haven't actually recorded an interview with him ...

I see ... yeah.

> Certainly ... yeah. He's another one of those people who as a background in radio like Bert Israel ...

Yes ... an extensive background in radio.

> With the National Radio. Were there other people like that that you came across, who had that commercial manufacturing background?

There were – but not very many and I can't at the moment recall their names – there were two or three – and a couple of the people in radio physics had a commercial radio background. A man I saw most of there was a fellow called Dick Beard who stayed with them for a long time and I think he's now – he went into commercial work afterwards. I haven't seen him since the war, but Bert knows a little bit about him and I'd like to try and look him up again.

> One of the things I found interesting, just reading about radar within the RAAF was how few people stayed on, the minute the war was over everyone left and only a handful – a couple of people stayed on, do you know why?

I think, there was, in the Air Force a certain amount of prejudice against .... Well, there was a feeling in the Air Force that nobody would get real promotion unless they belonged to the general duties branch. Now the general duties is the flying branch and if you were a GD Officer, then you could get up to be Air Vice Marshal or something like that, whereas, if you were a technical person, even an engineer ... an aircraft engineer, you could hardly do that and then, radar was such a small branch of the Air Force that the technical officers in the engineering and signals also would've had much more selection unless the man was really outstanding ... the oustanding person always comes to the top somehow but, so I think most radar people thought, `well ... there's not much opportunity for me in a peace-time air force'. I knew a couple of people who stayed on in general duties branch.
And apparently, well ... Jimmy Waddell did stay on, but he eventually became CO of the station which of course would be quite posible without being a GD man. But I think there's another aspect of this that, pilots have a limited operation life, even if they're flying in peace-time, I mean they get too old to be ... or they don't want to be trained in the latest aircraft that comes out because you have to have a conversion course every time you change to another aircraft and eventually they become grounded. Now, what do you do with a grounded pilot who is not yet reached the retiring age for the Air Force ... you put him into an administrative job. If he's confident to do that and a lot of them are so, they turn into COs of stations or sometimes adjutants or other administrative personnel.

> What age are you talking about there?

Oh ... early forties, late forties perhaps but certainly a lot of flying people don't fly after they're forty-five or something like that. I mean they might fly privately. I've heard of some people who are seventy or over who are still flying but, very few of them fly operationally after they're forty-five – forty-eight perhaps.

(15.00) During your time in the war did you feel that you were paid fairly?

I had no complaints about pay. After all you have everything provided, apart from your drink and cigarettes, if you smoked and most of us did in those days. You have your transport provided back to your home state, if your station is in New South Wales or Queensland, you go back to your home state so your requirements are very few unless you're engaged in some other occupation. I mean, I knew a few people who sort of dabbled in financial things in the war, well, that was their own business and if they lost their money ...

What type of financial things?

Oh ... well, some people who had some money were still playing around with it, buying shares ... or selling shares, but most of us didn't do that and most of us were happy to live on our Air Force pay. And then at the end of the war, I had deferred service pay of course and I used that to take a trip to the United States.

What does `Deferred Service Pay' mean?

Well, one has a certain proportion of one's pay put aside and it's paid to you when your duties terminate, with the air force or with the services, I think the army has it too.

Did you have any arrangement for some of it to be deducted and given to someone else, like your mother or ...?

Oh, I think I did, in the case of death I had to nominate a recipient for it.

But not of the money you were earning? That you were drawing each week or fortnightly?

No, I think I made a Will but I made another Will after I got married and I can't remember what happened to the first Will.

Would have have had any involvement with some of those army publications from the education section there? That wouldn't have been relevant, like *Salt* and things like that, do you remember those?

Yes, I remember *Salt* no, I didn't have much to do with that.

Did you read it though, as a ...

I did if it came my way, but otherwise I didn't. There were a few Air Force publications floating around that we saw. I can't remember their names now, but I know that there was sort of Air Force flyer that came around and there was some radar news that was circulated around some radar stations in the latter stages of the war and ...

What type of information were they?

Oh, it was just `so and so has been posted to such and such a station' ... and so on.

Wouldn't that be vaguely sensitive or not?

Wouldn't that be what?

Sensitive, I mean material that you should keep under lock and key, in some senses ...

Well, it was probably marked `confidential' I suppose but in most cases it wouldn't have been particularly confidential because I would've thought that most of the radar stations along the coast could've been found by any active spy in the country because they were fixed installations. I mean, it's like saying, `Do you know where there's a naval base' ... well, it's very hard to disguise a naval base ... and I think most of this would've been gathered by intelligence, so I don't think it was considered absolutely `top priority' by security. And you could see these radar stations, the local population could see them so, I doubt if installations in New Guinea and on the islands were publicised but in most cases, it only gave the number of the station, which wasn't supposed to be known anyway.

So was it a kind of social chit-chat?

Yes, that sort of thing, yes.

Any other publications that you remember reading a lot of or? Were they regularly distributed enough?

Oh .... We had our journals that came around, on technical orders that came around. Of course one read them as a matter of course and just to see if it concerned you personally and you had to do anything about it. Apart from that, I sort of read a few general books and life was ... I used to do, when I was in a steady situation, I used to do a bit of reading not necessarily technical reading.

(20.00) What type of reading would you have ... what were your favourite authors?

A few biographies, I think I read some Linklater books and things like that at that time, and other sort of fiction or literary books that were on the station sometimes because, you didn't always have access to too many books. One of the things about being in an Air Force unit and I think more so than in the army or perhaps the navy is that you have quite a few postings at fairly short notice, now if you, like myself like to keep a few books you had to carry these with you in your luggage and you had a kit bag and in some cases I think I had a suitcase but you can't carry a great deal of luggage around on a posting, you've got to carry it yourself, you see. I brought a few mementoes back from New Guinea.

Like what?

Oh, there's one in this house, there's a Kiraweena pig here, which I can show you in a few minutes, if you like. That was a carved wooden pig about 15cm long with a ... you know looks rather like one of these African carvings, nicely done but in a primitive way.

It would've taken up a bit of space.

Oh, you could jam that in your kit bag.

What about magazines – *Smith's Weekly*, did you read that?

Only if it came my way. I mean, if somebody had a *Smith's Weekly* I'd probably read it and most people in New Guinea if any issue was about, it went from one person to another. I would've read *Smith's Weekly* occasionally, in Sydney perhaps, but I wouldn't go out and buy it every week. I wasn't particularly interested in the local scandals or you could get most of that by reading the Sydney current newspapers.

The Herald ...

Well, *The Herald ... The Sun ... The Mirror* or *The Telegraph*, any of those.

What about political views during the war? Did your political ideas change because of all the organisation you saw ... working?

Well, my political ideas have always been fairly middle of the road in other words, I've never joined a political party and we had a sort of coalition government for part of the war which I thought was probably the best solution to Australia being at war. The Labor Party and the Liberal Party didn't – I don't know whether it was the Liberal Party – yes it was – was it the Liberal Party then? It was the United Australia Party or something. They didn't seem to have very much difference on foreign policy. Even now, I don't think there's a tremendous difference on foreign policy. There's a great difference in other spheres but our foreign policies have been usually fairly apolitical in Australia and the internal policies during the wartime seemed a little bit remote, you know, those of us who were in the war, were there to win the war or that was our intention, we weren't concerned with the industrial disputes or problems with the economy.
I remember, when I got out of the Air Force back in Melbourne, we used to travel very cheaply, we could travel on the tram cars – service personnel for a penny but the tram conductors who hadn't had – and a lot of them were female – hadn't had a rise for about seven or eight years, went on strike in Melbourne and I thought they had a very well deserved case, I don't always ... I mean sometimes I subscribe to strikes and other cases I think strikes are quite unjustified, so I tend to be very middle of the road in my politics.

Did it change though ... I mean do you think your ideas about politics changed in that time from being say a young cadet ...

Well I don't .... If I can disgress for a moment, my last birthday, my daughter gave me a copy of *Spy Catcher* which I had heard was a very bad book in many respects and I agree with that. I've just finished reading it only a few weeks ago and I was at Cambridge after my Adelaide University education, and at Cambridge there was a big group in England as a lot of people will recall ... well, not so much in Cambridge as in Oxford, there was this famous debate that this house will under no circumstances want `To Fight for King and Country', you probably remember that, that was a very famous debate.
(25.00) In Cambridge I met a lot of people who had very definite communist sympathies. I was asked to go to a few, I think I went to a couple of meetings, I found these people and I've found communists since, to have certain characteristics, and that doesn't necessarily apply to socialists, I draw a distinction. The communists were very one eyed, they had no sense of humour whatever, and several of the scientists I knew there, were very ardent communists because they thought that communism was a way of putting all people on an equal basis and saving mankind from exploitation. Well, as

you know, this has the ... events subsequent to the war have disillusioned a lot of communist supporters since then but *Spy Catcher* talks about people who were in this and I was actually taught by – I did a physics course over there in advance ... physics course ... now this was before the war, wasn't it? Yes – and I was taught by Dr Aaron Nunnay who was subsequently gaoled in Britain I think, for his spying activities. Now, Nunnay was an interesting ... he wasn't particularly interesting, he new his physics, he knew his subject, he wasn't inspiring and there was something odd about him which I didn't place at the time, I didn't know that he ... obviously, I wouldn't guessed that he was a spy of any sort. But there were several other physicists there some of whom were mentioned in *Spy Catcher* but they mainly ... Philby, of course, was there at the same time and this was mainly on the ... they were mainly historians or literary people, on the arts side however there were some physicists who were very keen. One was the famous crystallographer named Jackie Burnell, I also knew a biochemist and they had very very strong communist sympathisers. I'm not saying that they were spies but they gave me a lot of books on ... there was a series of publications ... I can't remember the names. I've still got some of them in Melbourne, on the overthrow of the capitalist system and all sorts of things like that.

What `The Left Bookclub'?

`*Left Bookclub*' that's what it was, `*The Left Bookclub*'. I've still got a couple of `*The Left Bookclub*' publications.

Collectors' items!

Yes, they are probably now. Well, the other thing was that I also joined the Officer Training Corps in England and I began to study `*The Science of War*' – what people call war-games, which is well, perhaps an art, perhaps a science. And I read some of Little Heart's books which treat war as a sort of business, which is necessary, not a sadistic sort of business but something that's very – just something that you have to treat in a logical and perhaps you could call it a scientific way and I found these very interesting. So you see, I have quite divided sympathies on this.

END TAPE 3, SIDE A.

START TAPE 3, SIDE B.

Identification: This is side 3 [sic. side 2] – Tape 3 of the interview with Colin Kerr-Grant, 10th January 1989. End of identification.

There's some questions here about Americans, competing with them for taxis, drinks of beer and girls. Did you ever have any dealings, say in Sydney, or – I dare say you ...

Oh yes, yes. I don't think anyone who was in the services could escape that. And there were two aspects to this I think, one was in Sydney where you were competing with Americans and the attentions of women. Taxis never bothered me I could always get a taxi if I wanted to, I mean in those days, taxis were very, very cheap and very easy to get in Sydney if you didn't want to go out to the back-blocks or it wasn't right at the time the pubs closed, so that didn't worry me at all.
I did feel resentment yes, I won't hide that, I felt the Americans had privileges because of better pay and also, I felt resentment against some of the Australian girls who really

chased the Americans. Now, as it happened, about four or five of my acquaintances, whom I knew usually not particularly well but certainly knew, married Americans. I mean, war-time marriages and one of those is a middle-aged woman who's a widow, that's been a very successful marriage. Another was an interesting girl I knew who was a skater and after the war I went to the United States and worked there for a year, so I'm not very anti-American in all ways but she happened to be on the `Bride's Ship' that I got on and so I saw a bit of her going over there, she was by that time engaged, then I saw here again in Melbourne some years later and that marriage didn't last.

When you say `A Bride's Ship' was this a shipload of women heading over to the States?

Yes, after the war finished.

What year?

1946.

Oh, right!

Fairly soon after the war finished. The war finished in 1945, and I stayed in Sydney, yes, that's right.

That must've been a weird experience being on a shipload – loaded with all these women waiting to meet up with their ...

Well I wanted to go. I was impressed by American technology at that time and I wanted to go to the United States and get some experience, which I did. Through some contacts arranged by my father to some extent, I worked for the General Electric Company in New York State ... near New York and there I got to know a lot of average middle-class Americans whom I liked very much and I also went back to the United States quite recently in the late 1970s and early 1980s and I've worked there again for some time.
But to come back to the wartime situation, I resented the way that some of the girls at that time sort of really threw themselves at the Americans, it was so obvious but there were a lot of others who, not so much out of ... well sometimes out of loyalty for Australians which perhaps wasn't always correct, but sometimes misplaced, because not all Australians are `golden boys' but there were a lot of them who didn't particularly want to be involved with Americans. They had perhaps a preference for Australians or in some cases, they felt that a temporary remote romance was not the thing they wanted. So, most of the people I knew were – I didn't really notice that there was a lack of female company.
(5.00) Now I was in a very privileged position compared to some of the army people who, this was before most of the army units that were sent overseas came back and I had several peiods of being stationed in Sydney. But up in Townsville of course, things were different, there were very few female people – females in Townsville, except after the AWAS came up there and there was a lot of pressure on the pubs, which are normally closed at six and there were a lot of brawls that went on and Townsville wasn't too good a place when a lot of Americans were there.

When were you in Townsville?

Oh, in transit on two or three occasions. I was never stationed there, but I was in Townsville for about a week once and waiting for a posting. I also spent some time in Cairns, after coming back from New Guinea, I was due to be posted south. I was going to leave I think, and in – Cairns was always a relaxing place, there weren't enough Americans there and 10 Squadron had a great big old house there, which you stepped on the front balcony. It was a very nice place to be stranded in transport – you'd go and have a swim. I should perhaps mention that apart from the time I spent in Sydney posted, when we were looking for beacon sites I was up going around New Guinea and I went to Thursday Island and unfortunately, I was laid low with an attack of dysentery which started some varicose veins so I spent some time in hospital in Concord in Sydney and that was another peiod of, six or eight weeks which I spent in hospital because I got sick leave after that, and that was about 1943, I think. So, I spent a lot of my – much more than the average person, of my wartime career in Sydney.

How long were you on Thursday Island? Was that just a short visit?

It was a short visit. I went there to look at a site for a beacon and it wasn't hard to do that, because it's a pretty small island. So I spent about four or five days there and I was in camp and unfortunately I got the `wog' and was more or less invalided out.

Any other sickness that you had during the war?

No, no. Oh, I had a few minor attacks of troop-tinea and things like that, but that's all.

What about all the anxieties about malaria because when you were in Moresby?

I never got malaria, I was very conscientious about taking atebrin.

END TAPE 3, SIDE B.

END OF INTERVIEW