

Teaching unit 10: Stan – life in the army

Transcript

Stan, male, aged 77, White British from outer London

5 of course I got called up for the army . when I was eighteen .
6 and er by then I'd become a fully fledged huh terrible amateur magician .
7 and when I had to go and register
8 and the chap said "what would you like to go in?"
9 I said "Ensa" which was the entertainments unit
10 so I finished up in infantry of course that was er ...
11 but I got into the regimental concert party .
12 erm eventually I was trained as an army signaller .
13 and er . course when I got called up the war had just finished [Interviewer: right]
14 so I thought "oh well that's you know that's a bit safe"
15 but of course the war with Japan was still going on
16 and we were being trained to fight the Japanese
17 how they thought we were gonna get out there quickly to do it I don't know
18 well then of course they dropped the terrible bomb and finished that .
19 ended up . doing basic training
20 the um a great big fat corporal from the signal corps . t. turned up
21 and we all went in this side room
22 and he put on this record .
23 and it sort of scratched away like the old records used to the wind up gramophones
24 and he s. it said "this is a dot peep and this is a dash perp and if you think beep beep
25 beep is the same as bur bur bur put A and not put B"
26 well course I'd learnt Morse code in the scouts .
27 and er . after a few weeks when we'd thought "well that was a good half hour sitting
28 down doing nothing" .
29 come up and they said "oh you've got a natural aptitude"
30 they sent me to the signal school for six weeks
31 and er . when I went back to the unit with these lovely crossed flags
32 you know you sort of walk about like this <interviewer laugh>
33 no-one takes a blind bit of notice

34 then eventually I got posted abroad
35 and we were supposed to have gone to Austria as part of the Northamptonshire
36 regiment
37 and we finished up in Greece as part of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire regiment
38 which is typical of army organisation .
39 and after being used to standing to attention to lance corporals
40 being shouted at
41 when I got off the troop ship
42 and this corporal said "any signallers?"
43 and I put me hand up
44 "what's yer name?"
45 I said "(name) corporal"
46 "my name's .." oh blimey I can't think of his name now doesn't make any difference
47 and I thought "talk to a corporal and call him by his christian name?"
48 then I found the signal sergeant liked to be called (name) .
49 and that was it no .
50 then one day oh we were posted then the whole battalion was posted from just outside
51 Athens right up to the mountains in northern Greece little place called Odessa
52 why they wanted British troops there I've never understood .
53 occasionally we used to get a parachute drop for food cos we were cut off by the snow
54 and one day I was on the . switchboard
55 and they said "oh the signal sergeant wants to see you"
56 so I went down to his little office
57 and he said "come in corporal"
58 and I looked round
59 and I thought "who's he talking to?"
60 he said "get to the tailors and get a stripe up"
61 he said "you've been promoted to lance corporal"
62 I said "why?"
63 he said "you're going to brigade headquarters as an instructor"
64 I said "why an instructor?"
65 he said "well you were the last one to come through the signalling school"
66 he said "so if there's anybody who's had the latest information it's you" .
67 anyway I went . eventually went to headquarters at brigade headquarters and met this

68 corporal in signals
69 and he said to me you know "why have they sent you?"
70 and I explained
71 and he said "oh what do you know about?"
72 and I said "well I don't know"
73 I said "I was on the switchboard when they sent for me and told me"
74 "oh" he said "you know all about the switchboard?"
75 so I said "yes"
76 "right that's gonna be the first lecture" he said "you can do that"
77 . so I was waffling away to this class of about thirty chaps
78 . come from all over the brigade area
79 and er while I'm talking .
80 their. their signals officer the East Surrey regiment it was
81 he came in and stood at the back of the class .
82 well in those days if you got hold of a little box a strong box you went down to the
83 local market
84 and you could fill it up with currants sultanas or raisins
85 send it home to mum because dried fruit in this country was like gold dust
86 and course when you dismantle the switchboard all the cords and plugs all go in the
87 box at the end
88 and I'm saying "you don't use this box for sending fruit home to mum that goes here"
89 you see and I put in one or two little wise cracks
90 well when that part was finished they all have to go outside if they want to have a
91 smoke
92 and this officer went ..
93 so I staggered down the end of the hall in fear and trembling
94 and he shook hands
95 and he said er "this line of patter"
96 he said "where do you get that from?"
97 I said "well I do a little bit of amateur magic"
98 I said "probably from that"
99 and he put his hand out
100 he said "I'm (name) from the magic circle" and I couldn't do a thing wrong