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

Life in the army

of course I got called up for the army . when I was eighteen .
and er by then I'd become a fully fledged huh terrible amateur magician .
and when I had to go and register
and the chap said "what would you like to go in?"
I said "Ensa" which was the entertainments unit
so I finished up in infantry of course that was er …
but I got into the regimental concert party .
erm eventually I was trained as an army signaller .
and er . course when I got called up the war had just finished [Interviewer: right]
so I thought “oh well that’s you know that’s a bit safe”
but of course the war with Japan was still going on
and we were being trained to fight the Japanese
how they thought we were gonna get out there quickly to do it I don't know
well then of course they dropped the terrible bomb and finished that .
ended up . doing basic training
the erm a great big fat corporal from the signal corps . t. turned up
and then we all went in this side room
and he put on this record .
and it sort of scratched away like the old records used to the wind up gramophones
and he s. and it said "this is a dot peep and this is a dash perp and if you think beep
beep beep is the same as bur bur bur put A and not put B"
well course I'd learnt Morse code in the scouts .
and er . after a few weeks when we'd thought “well that was a good half hour sitting down doing nothing” .
come up and they said "oh you've got a natural aptitude"
they sent me to the signal school for six weeks
and er . when I went back to the unit with these lovely crossed flags
you know you sort of walk about like this <interviewer laugh>
no-one takes a blind bit of notice
then eventually I got posted abroad
and we were supposed to have gone to Austria as part of the Northamptonshire regiment
and we finished up in Greece as part of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire regiment
which is typical of army organisation .
and after being used to standing to attention to lance corporals
being shouted at
when I got off the troop ship
and this corporal said "any signallers?"
and I put me hand up
"what’s yer name?"
I said "(name) corporal"
"my name’s .." oh blimey I can't think of his name now doesn't make any difference
and I thought "talk to a corporal and call him by his christian name?"
then I found the signal sergeant liked to be called (name) .
and that was it no .

then one day oh we were posted then the whole battalion was posted from just outside Athens right up to the mountains in northern Greece little place called Odessa
why they wanted British troops there I've never understood .
occasionally we used to get a parachute drop for food cos we were cut off by the snow and one day I was on the . switchboard
and they said "oh the signal sergeant wants to see you"
so I went down to his little office
and he said "come in corporal"
and I looked round
and I thought “who’s he talking to?”
he said "get to the tailors and get a stripe up"
he said "you've been promoted to lance corporal"
I said "why?"
he said "you're going to brigade headquarters as an instructor"
I said "why an instructor?"
he said "well you were the last one to come through the signalling school"
he said "so if there’s anybody who's had the latest information it’s you" .
anyway I went . eventually went to headquarters at brigade headquarters and met this corporal in signals
and he said to me you know "why have they sent you?"
and I explained
and he said "oh what do you know about?"
and I said "well I don't know"
I said "I was on the switchboard when they sent for me and told me"
"oh" he said "you know all about the switchboard?"
so I said "yes"
"right that’s gonna be the first lecture" he said "you can do that"
. so I was waffling away to this class of about thirty chaps
. come from all over the brigade area
and er while I'm talking .
their. their signals officer the East Surrey regiment it was
he came in and stood at the back of the class .
well in those days if you got hold of a little box a strong box you went down to the local market
and you could fill it up with currants sultanas or raisins
send it home to mum because dried fruit in this country was like gold dust
and course when you dismantle the switchboard all the cords and plugs all go in the box at the end
and I'm saying "you don't use this box for sending fruit home to mum that goes here"
you see and I put in one or two little wise cracks
well when that part was finished they all have to go outside if they want to have a smoke
and this officer went <gesture>
so I staggered down the end of the hall in fear and trembling
and he shook hands
and he said er "this line of patter"
he said "where do you get that from?"
I said "well I do a little bit of amateur magic"
I said "probably from that"
and he put his hand out

100 he said "I'm (name) from the magic circle" and I couldn't do a thing wrong