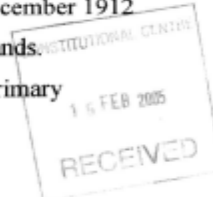

Edward Roberts

My name is Edward (Eddie) Roberts and I was born on 8 December 1912 at Highgate Hill, East Perth and lived, and still live, in Nedlands. My education was to 7th grade at Nedlands and Claremont Primary Schools.



At 14 years of age I started work with the Metropolitan Water Supply in time becoming a labourer and truck driver. I joined the militia in the 13th Mixed Brigade Signals, which was based in the barracks in Beaufort Street, in 1930. I left the Water Supply and went to a sand blasting firm for more money, but they went broke and then I had to find another job.

The bad depression was on and work was scarce so I went to Bridgetown picking apples. While I was in Bridgetown I used to teach the boy scouts how to signal.

In about 1933, when my father died, I had to come home and look after Mum. From then on it was anywhere I could make a few shillings – any part time work I could find.

When I returned to the Water Supply I was working six weeks on and five weeks off. After a while I was made semi permanent.

On a stinking hot day in 1939 when we were cleaning pipes (to stop them going rusty), Beasley and Coleman (fellow employees at the Water Supply) approached me to join a signals section for an artillery regiment. I had a lot of experience from being with the 13th Mixed Brigade Signals. Beasley and Coleman, who were in the Signals in WWI, had been asked to get a signals section of 29 personnel together to be attached to 2nd 2nd Field Regiment. I joined up on the 11th day of the 11th month of 1939.

Edward Roberts- Signaller 6th Australian Division 2nd 2nd Field Regiment

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The spirit of adventure, the fact that I liked uniforms, and had knowledge of signals all contributed to my decision to enlist.

My brother joined up with me and we went away together. We both came back. I had three brothers who all served and we all came back.

During the war I was a Signaller attached to the Artillery 6th Australian Division 2nd 2nd Field Regiment. We were known as G Section Sigs. This was the AIF and I had overseas service.

Our training took place at Northam. We were the first ones in the Northam camp, mainly to prepare the camp.

We did not have any uniforms just fatigues which consisted of a khaki outfit with a white hat – and we were called *Blamey's Daisies*. We could not be sent to NSW in the “giggle suits” (as we called them) so they gave us militia uniforms and when we got to Ingleburn in NSW we got our proper AIF uniforms.

All we had available for training was WWI equipment. It was not until we got to the Middle East that we got modern equipment like wirelasses and vehicles. The signals until that time were in Morse code.

The Ingleburn camp was a “sort of a get to know everybody” camp, lecturing and so forth. In 1940 we came back to Perth on the *Manunda* on the last trip she made as a passenger boat before being converted to a hospital ship.

We were camped at South Street, Melville and on 20 April 1940 we embarked on the *SS Nevasa* (an old Indian troop ship) for the Middle East. We came back in October 1942.

While we were away we did duty in Kilo 89, from there we went to Helwan in Egypt, we took all our equipment and after a short time training at Alexandria we went to war against the Italians.

We were equipped with 1500 cwt utilities with the wireless on the front and the aerial was at the back. We ran wires from the signal office to the guns so that they had communication and if they got shelled we had to go and repair the signals cables to make sure the messages got through. The gunners had enough to do looking after their guns. . We were on the move. My van was C2 and I had to follow the commanding officer around and send his messages back to the signal office and they could give his orders out through the wires to the guns. The wire messages gave a better signal than the wireless.

We started off at Mercer Matroo then to Bardia, Tobruk, Derna, Barci, Benghazi. The Italians set up a 6 inch navel gun near Bardia which was nicknamed Bardia Bill and it fired shells at us. This was our first experience of war.

We returned to Egypt and the unit then went to Greece and Crete. We re-formed in Palestine and went as garrison troops to Syria. We were camped at Balbeck in Syria. We went back to Palestine then to Egypt where we boarded a boat called *Durban Castle* at Port Tewfik.

We stopped off at Ceylon as garrison troops. By this time Japan had entered the war and we were there to stop them from taking Ceylon. Japan got blocked in the battle of the Coral Sea and as there was no threat to Ceylon we came back to Fremantle, Western Australia in 1942.

The thought of going overseas was one of excitement and being thrilled to be going. The thoughts of being killed never entered our heads, but that changed as time went on.

When we came back to Fremantle, I had special leave as my mother was ill. After she passed away I returned to the unit at Church Point near Newcastle in NSW. From there we went to Singleton, back to Newcastle, and boarded as guards on a train load of vehicles going up to the Atherton Tablelands. We unloaded all the transport in the Atherton Tablelands and were allowed pre-embarkation leave in WA. There were thousands of blokes at the staging camp at Claremont Showgrounds.

I returned to Wandekla in the Atherton Tablelands and I was given promotion and put in charge of wireless operators for the 3rd Australian Mobile Meteorological Flight run by the air force. I changed from artillery to the air force. I did not join the air force but was attached to look after the wireless operators. There we were issued with jungle greens and headed to New Guinea from Cairns on the *Katoomba*.

We were dropped off at a place called Aitapi where we were taking the weather reports for the air force and artillery. We then went down the coast, the Japanese were retreating from Aitapi, until we got to Wewak. We camped there and the Japanese had just about had it by then. We did not know of course. I was operating on a world range radio and picked

up the news that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Japan. The other wireless operators asked me what the news was and I said "They dropped some sort of a bomb on Japan" – we did not know what sort of a bomb it was. But that was the end of the war.

I had enough points for an immediate discharge. The old *Katoomba* came back and picked us up from Wewa. We went into Madang, picked up troops for the occupation of Rabaul and dropped them off as occupation forces.

We came back to Brisbane and then boarded a train for discharge at Karrakatta, Western Australia. That was the end of the war as far as I was concerned. I was discharged on 22 October 1945.

The impact of these experiences was life changing - not much physically but a lot emotionally.

I was happy when the war ended and glad it was over. I was excited about getting home and picking up my life again. When I was invited to go to Japan in an occupation force I declined. I just wanted to go home and to hear the ladies speaking with an Australian accent.

There were no welcome home parties or marches through Perth (they had all finished I think), the reason being that people were coming back from the war in dribs and drabs.

The way of life was completely different from army life. There was no discipline in civil life and you had to watch yourself so that you did not

go off the rails. A lot of blokes could not handle it away from the army, but I was okay.

On my return from the war and discharge, I went back to work for the Water Supply. I got my job back because when I joined up I signed a form for Leave of Absence During Hostilities, so they had to give me my job back. We were paid holiday pay even though we were not working.

I met my childhood sweetheart again. We married in 1947 and lived in Nedlands where we raised a family of three children - two boys and a girl.

I was not involved in any other conflicts.

Edward Roberts
13 February 2005