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Fares Please! Retired Transport Workers' Oral History Project

Interview with Ray Coppin
Biographical Notes and Timed Summary



HMSS 0367 "Fares, Please!", Retired ACT Transport Employees Club Oral History Project

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Interviewee: Ray Coppin, BEM

Occupation: former bus conductor, bus driver and Prime Ministerial car driver.

Year of birth: 1923

Name of Interviewer:... Barry York

Number of Minutes: Track 1 is 36:36; track 2 is 19:49

(Total time: 56:25)

Date: 22 February 2010

Restrictions on Use: None

Biographical summary: Ray Coppin was born at Bungendore, New South Wales, in 1923 but his family moved to Canberra the following year. His father worked at Duntroon. Ray Coppin worked as a bus conductor, bus driver and Commonwealth car driver from around 1939. After the War, he became Prime Ministerial driver for Menzies, Holt and Gorton. In 1966, Mr. Coppin was awarded the British Empire Medal for services as a Prime Ministerial driver. He retired in 1970.

Counter (time)	Subject matter
00:00 Track 1	Introduction by interviewer; Mr. Coppin recalls childhood and early work, including employment as conductor in the Transport Section, Department of Interior (1938); recalls Inspectors; money collected at depot for food parcels for Transport workers in the armed forces; "a lot of new people" after the War, those who served in armed forces did not get former jobs back; Prime Minister Menzies' drivers; Mr. Coppin's role as Menzies' and Holt's driver; recalls Holt's funeral; period as Gorton's driver; other work, retirement in 1970.
06:54	Married Iris Croker on Anzac Day 1949; describes bus routes 1, 2 and 3 (before and after the War); petrol buses, recalls opening of provisional Parliament House (1927); recalls horses being tied up in Civic; development of Civic; Sir John Overall; rapid development during Menzies years; changes under Gorton.
10:55	More about old bus routes; "punching your Bundy"; types of passengers; school pupil passengers; Army service; awarded British Empire Medal (for services as Prime Ministerial driver); Holt's disappearance and security.
15:00	Cowper Street shelter; Tyson Street (Ted Tormey's house); recalls drivers and conductors back then; recalls driving the Queen on her second tour; drove Princess Alexandria on Queensland tour; Duke of Edinburgh "a larrikin".
19:17	Bus driving prior to the War; obtaining a bus driver license; training with bus drivers at Kingston depot; drove Sir Garfield Barwick; started driving Commonwealth cars after the War; "none of our jobs were available" after the War; recalls mechanics and officers at the depot; Sir Roland Wilson; bus drivers generally wanted to be car drivers; bus Inspectors; "a canary".



24:26	Resided at Booroondara Street (Reid) with parents and then moved to Giraween Gardens and then Bonney Street, Ainslie; moving into own home with wife; travelling to work by "push-bike"; rates of pay in early jobs; dress code and uniforms.
28:38	Working over-time on the buses; Albert Hall, Worth's Circus, picture theatres; behaviour code on the buses and cars; Menzies would enter from the side of Parliament House; more about behaviour code on buses; rates of pay; working as car driver after bus shifts; 'Larry' Anthony.
31:54	Forms of penalty for misbehaviour; attitude to advent of Self-Government in Canberra; more about rates of pay (after the War); meal breaks (at Kingston depot); responds to question about how buses changed over time; anecdote about Billy Kinnane; relations among workers at the depot (difference between those who previously worked there and returned from War and the rest – "We didn't want to be used as broom sweepers"), the Transport Workers Union; more about uniforms.
36:36 End of Track 1	End of Track 1
00:00 Track 2	Track 2: Continues talking about uniforms (including special uniform as driver for Prime Minister Menzies); more about changes to buses; describes role of Bundy clock and key; talks about old schools and the hospital in Canberra back then; outlines his children's current situations in employment; talks about his brother (who also worked on the buses).
05:46	Women in the industry in Canberra; talks about joining Menzies staff as a driver; talks about Menzies; reflects on the old Canberra; more about Menzies; talks about Harold Holt; bed in the Prime Minister's suite; dealing with the Press.
10:20	More about Menzies and Holt; memories of Gorton.
15:03	Medical and security assessments for ministerial drivers; security arrangement for Prime Ministers when driving anywhere; more about being a Prime Ministerial driver; receiving the British Empire Medal for services as a driver; recalls pressure from 'Sixty Minutes' television program for him to talk about Holt's death (which he declined).
19:49	End of track 2 END OF INTERVIEW

