

Timed Summary

Interview with Robert Martin

OH 19/16

Interviewer: Peter Donovan

Date: 31st May 1989

Note: Key words shown in bold.

START TIME	SUMMARY
Tape 1	
00.00	There is an explanation that the interview is conducted at the Adelaide Gaol and that it moves through various sections of the Gaol. Robert Martin explains that he arrived at the gaol in a paddy wagon straight from the court. He was imprisoned as a conscientious non-complier with the National Service Act – he was a draft resister and opposed conscription. His first sentence was for a week because he had refused to go for a medical test. He later served a major sentence for refusing to go to Keswick Barracks .
1.38	He arrived with several other prisoners.
2.37	Robert describes the initial processes undertaken at the gatehouse. There were lots of forms to fill out. It was quite scary but it was only for a week and later he was facing an 18-month sentence. This first sentence was not traumatic and was quite bearable.
5.59	<i>This part of the interview is conducted standing in the visiting area.</i> Visits were allowed once a week at weekends and he had several visitors. He was there in 1971/72. There were separate booths for each prisoner and this was used to prevent physical contact with visitor. The partition was a metal grille, and today it is glass. His girlfriend used to visit him.
8.24	<i>Standing in Number 3 Yard.</i> Robert explains he was briefly in this yard for the induction process where he exchanged his clothes for prison garb. The daily routine began when prisoners were woken up by the intercom system and breakfast came through a slot in the door. They emptied the toilet bucket then lined up to be counted and went off to workplace for the day. He worked in the garden, and it was a short working day and not very demanding. After their evening meal they were put back in their cells.
12.14	<i>Standing in the exercise yard near the new building.</i> He remembers this exercise yard and being impressed by the Victorian aspect of the building. His exercise consisted of walking up and down the yard and talking to other prisoners. There were also sports facilities but he never used them. He became friendly with another draft resistor Ken Wycherley . Most of the prisoners were in prison for a short term.
15.23	There was constant counting and recounting of prisoners by the prison officers.
17.01	<i>Standing in a cell in B top wing of the New Wing.</i> Robert shared his cell for only one night and had it to himself for the rest of his stay. He was locked in from 4.30 pm to 7.30 am but he did not mind the solitude and spent the time reading. He had his own books as well as access to the prison library. Prison life was monotonous with little variation in routine. Weekends were different as there was no work to be done and they got visitors. There were security checks when they had visitors.

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22.19	Robert explains that he was treated slightly better than other prisoners because the prison officers accepted that he was not an ordinary prisoner and he also had the sympathy of the Dunstan government. He was imprisoned under Federal laws. An example of this better treatment was getting a larger cell at Yatala in A Division – these cells were usually earned as a privilege.
24.01	The cells had a double bunk bed and had a little cupboard and a toilet bucket which was a major indignity. It was argued that it was too expensive to put in proper toilets.
25.55	When he was at Yatala he was able to decorate his cell with whatever he wanted. Some of the prisoners who had hobbies turned their cells into little craft shops. He mainly had books.
28.06	Robert says that the experience of 10 months in Yatala in 1972 changed him. He was a stronger person and enriched by the experience. He spent a second week at Adelaide Gaol in February 1972 after he had been sentenced to 18 months for refusing to report to Keswick Barracks. That was the major sentence for draft resistance. He spent time in Yard No.4 which was the remand yard at that time.
30.31	A short time before he went to Adelaide Gaol the law was changed so that he could keep his hair long; several other prisoners also had long hair. Robert explains the first time he saw the whole gaol was when he came back for a visit on an open day in 1988. Yard 4 was used by a lot of the prisoners who were on remand or waiting to be transferred to another prison. They were not given work duties and spent most of the day just standing around in the yard. There were a number of prisoners that he talked to but he didn't make any friends until he moved to Yatala.
35.19	<i>Standing in a recreation room in Yard 4.</i> A lot of prisoners had artistic talent and developed that while in prison. This room was used as a common room.
36.56	<i>Standing in Cell 17.</i> Robert had a cell in this area. He recalls that it had a vaulted ceiling and was painted a dreadful green. He was looking at an 18 month sentence in Yatala and the only way to prepare was to take whatever came and he hoped that it would not be too bad.
39.25	No one resented the small favours that he was given and there were only a few jokes about it as many were sympathetic to his position. Robert says that he was not ill treated. It was normal procedure that after a short stay in Adelaide prisoners would be sent to Yatala. For reasons of good behaviour he was sent to Cadell where he stayed for about three or four months. Yatala was better as it had better facilities.
43.02	Robert describes that he was hand-cuffed when he left Adelaide Gaol and transferred by paddy wagon. There were large quantities of food at Yatala. It was just basic food and overcooked but there was a reasonable variety. A menu was published for the week. There was a large dining room/cafeteria where the prisoners had meals.
45.50	He explains that people in remand at Adelaide were playing the waiting game and were often bored and frustrated. Everything depended on their upcoming court case. Others like him, were waiting to go to another prison.
47.56	He remembers how important the sky was as it was the only part of the outside world that you could see. In Yatala he almost lost the sense of existence of Adelaide as he was surrounded by high walls. The sky and sunshine were important.

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49.30	<i>Standing in the garden.</i> This was where Robert worked in 1971. The prisoners went through several doors, and were counted each time and taken out in a group. They worked in the vegetable garden but it wasn't hard work and there were smokos and lunch breaks. It was good to be in the open air and to see the city and the trains going past. There were 15-20 prisoners who worked in the garden.
52.42	A meal was brought out to them at lunch time. The prison officer in charge was affable and kind hearted. There were a pair of wild ducks nesting in the garden and this was a source of constant interest.
55.59	Robert recalls that he was allowed to write one letter a week while in Adelaide and in Yatala. At Cadell there was no limit and he wrote a lot of letters, and he received many letters from family and friends. Some letters were hostile but he never received them. The letters were censored.
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