

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Harold Rowell (Young Harry) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 14th January 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1081>

### Tape 1

00:34 **So where did you actually grow up Harry?**

In Perth, in Victoria Park.

**What was Victoria Park like in those days?**

Well we weren't that far from the causeway and we were opposite a big park and I was the youngest of five

01:00 and we were very much one of the mob to a point but we were different for no reason at all. Do you want....

**What sort of things did you get up to on the weekends?**

Oh protect myself from my elder brothers and elder sisters.

01:30 There is only six years and five months between my eldest brother and myself and my mother and father were fiercely independent, independent self funded migrants with no family and no friends of long standing. Five kids in six years. My father was asthmatic. That's reason he left England.

02:00 It was because of his asthma he was told to get to a finer climate and the silly bugger chose Melbourne. Melbourne wasn't a success and so we came to Perth for weather wise but they both landed in Northumberland, Cumberland North East England farming communities, farming in Australia was very different. There was no freehold farming in England and

02:30 my father took a temporary job as a tram conductor and when he died he was a tram conductor.

**He never got back to farming?**

No on the farm in England, he was rather a journeyman handy man, mother was from a, had lived on a farm and they did very well. Mick's farm in England

03:00 had pigs and cows and sheep and poultry and hot houses and if you were energetic and managed well all you needed was dry goods and clothing and I think that attracted Father. But so we weren't well off but we were never hungry and I have no recollection of any hardship even though

03:30 it was soon after the great war. I was born in 1920 and that meant that I was 10 in 1930 and my brother was only 16 so, 10 to 16 years old, 5 kids, Depression, but my parents worked hard and long and sacrificed a lot. Well I am fairly healthy.

**What do you remember of the Depression?**

At

04:00 that stage I did most of the shopping for the family. Early on we used to have butchers and bakers and grocery men and dairy produce men and everyone, milkman twice a day used to call. The Depression seemed to put all of that out of the window and I did quite a bit of shopping and I remember bread at 2 pound loaf for a thruppence if you

04:30 cycled a mile and a half to get it and you thought nothing of it with 7, 5 kids with the youngest 10 or 12 you needed a lot of bread and a lot of this and that. I established a bit of a rapport with a particular butcher and a particular green grocer and

05:00 I was a good bargain hunter anyway. I remember most things were 2 1/2 pound for sixpence whether they were peaches or tomatoes or peas or beans and with seven we could do with that. And for 20 shillings, at two dollars you could get more than enough to feed a family in those days.

05:30 **I think we are going to have to put Melba in a confined space somewhere because we can hear**

**her quite clearly.**

Oh that is for the birds. Do you want me to shift her?

**We were just talking about there were seven of you so you had to**

06:00 **collect quite a bit of food.**

Yeah . I was quite adept at putting a sugar bag full of food across the handlebars on my second hand bicycle but no they were. Actually I think we were better off than anyone else in that the first people that were put off were the bachelors and the married men with no children.

06:30 Married men by the time they got to five must have been 1935 - 36 and father was put on short, less than a full week but better off than most others. Having a big family was a good idea.

**What sort of other little jobs would you do to contribute to the family?**

I used to

07:00 blow the bellows at the blacksmith's shop or clean the weeds out of the wood yard or throw the papers over the fence at five or six in the morning.

**Bellows. That sounds pretty messy.**

We used to fill the, we used to weigh up sugar into 70 pound bags into one, two or four pound and the grocery used to expect me to get 70 pounds of sugar out

07:30 of a 70 pound bag and we used to bottle kerosene, bag potatoes, seven and ½ stone seven and 14 pound bags of potatoes and if you got some money and I saw the proprietor's wife and she was very generous. A penny with a broken up chocolate used to be quite substantial but

08:00 one of the staff would weigh it out and I wouldn't get as much but there you are so I always shopped with the ladies.

**Well done.**

So we had, well we collected bottles and we lived opposite a park that had football, cricket, soccer and cool drink bottles and beer bottles were worth something in those days

08:30 so eventually we got \$8 towards a second hand bike.

**How long did that take you to save up for?**

Oh I have no idea at this stage but it seemed a long time then. No we all did things around the place or helped around the place with. Father in the early days was

09:00 very practical and very methodical. In fact he was quite astute for a tram conductor. He had the full lot of Dickens and Wordsworth and Shakespeare and Patterson and Lawson and could quote from them. And also he had

09:30 bought two blocks of land facing Geddes Street in Victoria Park and switched them around to Gloucester Street facing the park and cut them into three. So we had three blocks, sold one, kept two. Built a house on the corner block and we more or less farmed the other one. We had lemon, orange, peach, nectarine,

10:00 mulberry, couple of almond trees, couple of fig trees, apple tree, pomegranate tree, maybe 30 grapevines of four or five different varieties that meant we had early producing ones and late producing ones and chickens and ducks and we grew vegetables, peas and beans, too many broad beans

10:30 and that sort of stuff. All of the onions we needed for the year. But once the boys got older we had to take those things on and father went into real estate. He bought a duplex, semi detached place near the car barn in East Perth in Adelaide Street which went from Adelaide Terrace to Hay Street.

11:00 And when he was ill once I collected the rent and one was \$1.10 [one pound ten shillings] and the other was \$1.15 [One pound fifteen shillings] a week. But I never worked out why they paid the extra 5 cents [shillings]. He borrowed money on that and bought another duplex in North Perth opposite a Roman Catholic Church and he said he would have no problems with tenants there and he didn't

11:30 and he used to maintain them him self while the kids kept the gardening going.

**He is a pretty smart operator.**

Yes, certainly he was in the Tramways Union but he argued with Effie Chamberlain more than once and began or finally began to be President of the Labor party I think. But he was Secretary of the tramway workers union at the time.

12:00 Father worked conscientiously but never, much the same as myself to a point, never aspired to be other than a tram conductor. He didn't want to check or spy on his fellow worker and didn't want to put up

with some of what may have been necessary in those days to get a promotion. I might have taken after him.

12:30 **Whereabouts did you go to school?**

Bigge Park Primary School in Carlyle Street. But there again I was fortunate in that post-war (First World War) most of the teachers were either widows, war widows or single women and it was permitted in those days. My sisters used to take me to school when I was three or four or whatever

13:00 and apparently I behaved myself and apparently I learnt a little, if nothing else the discipline of school. And when I eventually went to school, you would go to school in those days the year you turned six. Well I was born in December so I was barely 5 and a bit so I was already five or six months younger than the average. But having learnt a

13:30 little of the discipline and perhaps I was precocious, I wouldn't know, but they put me up a class. So for all my schooling I was roughly 17 months younger than the average so that I didn't hold my own in sporting matters but I held my own scholastically.

**You think because you were younger?**

Well that is my story anyway. The reason I didn't get in the first 11 or the first 18.

14:00 I only arrived at that decision in recent years actually. I was never any, I never made it. I played soccer in the school team or rugby or the secondary school sports in those days and it didn't phase me but I often wondered why but that is an excuse anyway.

14:30 **What sort of subjects did you enjoy?**

Did I enjoy?

**Yeah.**

Maths. I was always quite good at maths but I was very difficult. I always had difficulty if someone wanted me to write a composition about a penny. I'd drop my penny and it went down the drain in the first sentence. But I usually scraped through in English.

15:00 But Maths and other stuff I didn't do too badly. I went from Bigge Park School, primary school to Perth Boys. And I remember the first class at Perth Boys I was in 7G or 7H I think it was. And I had a conflict with the teacher and I thought the last so and so I want in my

15:30 class was 7G or 7H and they put me in 7A and low and behold there is my bloody teacher. But we became quite good, almost friends, he stayed with us from 7A, 8A, 9A at Perth Boys and he was Secretary of the Lifesaving Society and I think I did quite a bit of his secretarial work

16:00 during maths period.

**Oh really.**

But I still passed junior Maths or at least junior certificate or whatever in both maths and I think nine subjects so I didn't do too badly.

**Nine subjects is pretty good.**

Well we were all only allowed to take eight I think at school. But one of the teachers

16:30 ran a class after school for a couple of bob [bob = shilling] at a time so I got nine, I think it was nine subjects. I passed French much to the surprise of the French Master. I think the last term of the exam he pointed out that if he added French and Maths together I would have passed both. But finally he said why don't you drop the confounded subject but

17:00 I put a bit of work into it and passed junior French.

**Well done. So how old were you when you actually left school?**

I was only 16. Actually I sat for the modern school scholarship from Perth Boys because of my age. The scholarship subjects I believed had passed by a bit

17:30 and I think as I remember I was given an extra penny for an iceblock and I finished the iceblock during the first few minutes or ten minutes of the scholarship time. I got my priorities right, I didn't get many iceblocks in those days. But I went onto Modern School after Perth Boys but I only had 15 months there and this would have been 1936 - 37.

18:00 16.

**How was Modern School different from Perth Boys?**

Modern School was a selective school and I think a very good school. And one that I am sad that it lost its status. I had reason over the years as an airline pilot to have various people on board and I usually tried to learn from them or

- 18:30 give them my opinion. And one was an inspector of education and he had been to America and said that Modern School was bad and the problem was you got the best from a primary school in Timbuktu and went to Modern School and instead of being the best he was maybe in the middle or the bottom and that upset their ego or psyche or whatever.
- 19:00 And that was a bad thing. My thing is, that was life, you had to learn to lose as well as win and sooner or later you lose and the sooner you get the experience the better. Ironically perhaps our oldest son got a scholarship at Modern School. I promised him a new bike if he got it. I didn't think he ever would but he did. But I knew Modern School was fading out. It used to get priority with
- 19:30 teachers. Teachers liked to go there. I think it got priority with some equipment. And to the Bob Hawkes and Nugget Coons and some of the others speak to some of the successors that kind of education gave. When the young bloke got a scholarship I knew that it was fading and wasn't what it used to be and being a diligent father I interviewed the headmaster at Wesley
- 20:00 and he was on sabbatical and I got on very well with the deputy head and that was alright. I went to Hale School and interviewed their headmaster but Hale was in West Perth and about to slip up north and I thought that would be a bad thing so I went to Modern School and ironically in the end I think he said "Mr Rowell I think you are interviewing me" and I said

20:30 "Yeah I would put it that way, yes".

**That is very funny.**

Anyway the young bloke went to Wesley and we had the second boy coming on he may of or probably wouldn't have got a scholarship and then he goes Modern School was deteriorating and they don't like sibling differentials. One going to private school and one public and a deteriorating modern school.

- 21:00 So they both went to Wesley and the headmaster came back and I didn't get on with him well as I did the deputy and that was more his problem than mine.

**Did your parents actually value education?**

Yes, yes we were tram conductors sons and daughters and although there was a depression on

- 21:30 we were better by for about 12 or 18 months, better, spent more time at school than the average of anyone that I can recall in the primary school. I could be wrong there could be two or three others that did much better but during the Depression a tram conductor didn't get much more than the average, five kids, no relations no,

- 22:00 they had a battle and I am grateful to them for coming to Australia rather than. We have all been back to England and we are bigger, better and brighter than most of the relations over there that spread from Plymouth to Dundee and a couple in Canada and South Africa.

**Spread all over the place?**

Well that seemed to be the

- 22:30 thing in those days.

**So when did you get into working?**

My brothers and sisters went to school, went to work I think as soon as they were 14 or 15. My brother got a junior, my eldest brother got a junior, the others. One of my sisters went to business training college.

- 23:00 They pointed the bone at me. My mother particularly wanted me to finish leaving and my father was getting a bit conscious of the work load and also his failing health. In fairness to him I was told to get a job so I interviewed the manager, the state manager of Shell and he wanted me to ride a bicycle for 12 months delivering mail to the CBD [Central Business District].
- 23:30 I got him down to three months I think. That didn't appeal. I got to a bank at one stage and I got him down but then I had to agree to country service and I didn't fancy that very much. And then a letter came around I think to most of the private schools and to modern school, T&G [Temperance and General] Life Society wanted a bloke,
- 24:00 a clerk and old Joe the headmaster sent me along and I got on quite well with James Edward Daniel Battie but then he noticed my age and I was 17 months younger than what he had expected so he said "come back next year" but the family were beginning to think that I was getting a bit selective,
- 24:30 and the pressure was on. And a letter came from the T&G to come and see them and apparently they changed their mind and even though I was young they put me on. But the condition was that I didn't study for my leaving, the change from 9 to 5 at work with more than from 9 to 3.30 at school so he said "No leaving" so I didn't continue with the leaving
- 25:00 and I did quite well. Jimmy Battie was the accountant and he and I got on very well together and so did

most of the staff and I was at T&G Life Society.

**What sort of things did you do as part of your job?**

I was in the cashiers accountants department and not very long after I started I was on the counter taking cash and writing out receipts and dealing with

- 25:30 public and enquiries. I remember at one stage we were supposed to put up with shortages and I pointed out that if I was, I'd forgotten, ten pound short I would have to starve for ten weeks because I was only earning ten shillings a week. They said it would never happen but taking money from the agents on a Saturday morning. I
- 26:00 would personally take maybe eight hundred pounds and some of the agents at that stage, not many but one or two were collecting money and perhaps burning a hole in their pocket with Mum and the kids at home starving what not they might spend more than their commission. But there was a bit of tension there between agencies and staff so we had to be a bit careful
- 26:30 of money but I was never under so I never starved. But I think by then it was somehow or other I was interested in what, the world affairs and I can remember Japan being in the news from the mid to early 30s everyday going through
- 27:00 Manchuria and China and Hitler of course was thumbing his nose at Versailles [Peace Treaty after World War I] and Alsace Lorraine and Austria and Czechoslovakia and then Poland and no one was doing anything about it, League of Nations. Oh Mussolini was having a go at Eritrea and Abyssinia. League of Nations was doing nothing
- 27:30 so it didn't come as a great surprise that Mr Chamberlain [Prime Minister of England at the outbreak of WW2] did something. I think there is an allegory in today that you have got troubles here there and everywhere and the United Nations is doing nothing. And I wasn't against Mr Bush's [American President at time of Iraq conflict] intrusion, perhaps I would have done it differently but he didn't ask me.

**It is interesting with Chamberlain.**

- 28:00 **You know he thought Hitler would be quite happy if they fed them Czechoslovakia? Well it took him a while to do something.**

Well I think that is unfair. I came to the conclusion, not at the time but later. Britain had a problem in that they seemed to think the choice was between Communism and Hitler and a lot of people preferred Hitler to

- 28:30 Communism including a nurse that had my second Christian name, Unity Freeman Mitford. She was a mate of Hitler's and she and many others in the society in England were pro Hitler because they were anti communism and anti Russian anti communism and I think Chamberlain won a bit of time
- 29:00 with peace in our time. Lord knows we needed that time and more in that we nearly went under.

**Did you at all suspect that Japan would end up doing what they did in those early days?**

Yes and no. I think we were fed the thought that they were little yellow slantly-eyed people that didn't know much and their Zeros [fighter plane] weren't much good but

- 29:30 they might be successful against Manchurians and Chinese but not with us. I didn't think we thought much in the early days of the war from 39 - 41 and pretty much occupied in Europe particularly after France went under but it was an unsettling time.
- 30:00 I took on rowing. One of the blokes at the T & G was a state rower and I rowed with him and one of the ironies there was that the West Australian Rowing Club, the State Gardeners Board - Shapcott I think his name was, sent us a letter that the place had to be demolished. In fact he said all of the buildings from Barrack Street up to Victoria Avenue.
- 30:30 I think ours was the oldest. And it was a part of a deputation to see Mr Shapcott and tell him what we thought of him. And as at today the only building that is still standing is the old West Australian Rowing Club with a more modern ANA [Australian Natives Association] and Swans [Swan River Club] and I think the Dinghy club, the buidings have all gone but that is life.

**It is a nice old building.**

- 31:00 **So at what point did you start considering joining up?**

Well my eldest brother was in Derby at this time and he was well out of way and man powered and my second brother applied to join the aircrew, air force and their one and only baby boy could join the army or the navy but not the air force.

- 31:30 My parents were born mid 80s early 80s they had never been air borne. The steam engine was only 1850 or 1860. They were only 20 when the Wright brothers flew so aeroplanes were taboo and being

shot at and the air was too much for their two of their little boys so they wouldn't sign for me to join the  
32:00 air force.

**So was your brother actually a pilot? Was your brother a pilot?**

No he missed out on the Ishihara colour blind test but that took time. I often wondered why I wanted to join the air force. Actually I had never looked, we saw a little of. There were two drownings near the causeway when they were building the retaining wall

32:30 for Babbage Island. They grabbed dredges and dug trenches. Two brothers drowned there so we were forbidden to swim there any longer. We used to swim alongside the causeway there and we used to walk or ride our bicycles to the springs in Rivervale which is opposite mainland so when the Bristol Bulldogs or Wapitis or the aeroplanes,

33:00 we had a look at them but that is as far as it went. I had a or my family, I spent a bit of time with an ex army fellow British army who lost seemingly more than a leg at the Somme. He didn't even seem to have half a backside and his wife was a very good cook and they didn't have any children and

33:30 we worked up a bit of a relationship. I was allowed to go across. I used to be a gopher for him. He couldn't get around but he spent all his day in the garden or he had a pile of bricks that he spent days chopping the mortar off to build driveways etc. and I would be able to bring his chisel or his bucket or empty his bucket and

34:00 as I said his wife was a good cook and she used to spoil me rotten. Old Uncle George as we called him we got on quite well and I was able to bring his trowel or empty his bucket but I never wanted to be a cripple like he was. I, maybe subconsciously. We had another friend who was a navy bloke and he lost an eye. And I got

34:30 tuffed over the ear once or twice and in those days spare eyes were just like a glass marble and they were fixed and Ramsey was his name. You know he would look there but this eye would still be here. As a youngster I used to be fascinated but I didn't want a glass eye so.

**So that knocked out the army and the navy?**

35:00 And when Churchill was singing on the radio. My parents of course had brothers and sisters and family in England and Mr Churchill was doing "Blood, tears, toils and sweat" and both my parents were listening to it on the radio so being me I got my application out and got them both to sign. In case there

35:30 was some argument afterwards as to who was responsible for my lack of future. By then there was an aircrew reserve, anyone that had any flying experience was called up but then they formed an aircrew reserve and I think I was on the reserve from about September 14. Twenty two

36:00 lessons and orange box that we did and I wanted to get into the air force so I ran through them fairly quickly and I finished up at the University of WA [Western Australia] with Professor Ross teaching me all about Sidereal time and spherical trigonometry and astro nav and I was thoroughly confused. And he used to whistle as well as talk, well he whistled when he talked.

36:30 Fortunately before there was any exam and test I got called up but quite fascinating astro nav I got quite curious about it.

**Because that is quite mathematical isn't it?**

Yes. Actually he had a log of a flying boat that went from Port Hedland to Mozambique and it was quite fascinating to see

37:00 how they got across the Indian Ocean and I think they were only a couple of miles out in the end which was sort of conclusive evidence that it worked. My doubting mind or whatever so I was called up.

**So then you, what sort of process are you put through after you were called up, how is it different to what you were doing before?**

Well I was in the T & G

37:30 as a clerk. And I went

**I thought you were doing these sorts of lessons?**

Oh that was, I was working all the time. Oh no I was on the payroll of the T & G.

**So it was like a part time...**

Actually I had a reservers badge, it was a bit premature. But if I hadn't had a reservers badge I would never have met the women upstairs.

38:00 That is a story in itself for later perhaps.

**Well we will definitely get to that one. So after you were called up what was the process that**

### **you were put through?**

Well I think I was the third youngest of about 60 that went into No 1 initial training school at Pearce. I think it was May winter time and we felt very sorry for ourselves. We were in ill fitting goon skins and a beret

- 38:30 and we were given injections against anything and everything and we had a sore arm and living in a tin shed with cold water showers and wishing you were home with Mother but we survived.

### **How was the food there? What was the food like?**

Different. But there was

- 39:00 nothing else, it was substantial enough but you can't, I wouldn't know there might be 120 in the mess and you can't feed 120 blokes on lamb roast as Mother used to call it. It was substantial. I don't think I lost any weight. But it was winter time and a bit cool and as
- 39:30 fate would have it I got specialist treatment from the Drill Sergeant. And he was particularly loud, crude mouthed and upsetting, so I won a delegation to the CO [Commanding Officer] to complain about him. When you are an ACT [Aircraftsman in Training] you don't complain about flight sergeants but he lessened
- 40:00 his criticism but partly he was on my back it would appear that he was trying to knock some sense into me and I'd become marker after two to three weeks so that apparently his loud mouthed and cursing and whatnot got results. But there was a parade through Perth after we had been in the air force for about three or four weeks.
- 40:30 I think they wanted us to be certain which was our left leg, to put out first. But that in itself was a bit. It was July I think and raining and the order was that we should wear great coats and there was a course just out from Geraldton that had their wings and they had lost the white piece of flannel in their caps so we were marching through Perth and the only ones that they knew
- 41:00 were air crew or potential air crew, the blokes that had been in the service three weeks. All the boys from Geraldton had their precious wings up had great coats on and nobody knew. There was a bit of chiacking but that was how it worked out. From Pearce we had eight weeks there. Oh I was
- 41:30 nearly reprimanded severely. In the last 6 people, 50 or 60 went up and we were all due at ANA House in St Georges Terrace together and they took us in at about 6 at a time as I will swear to the Queen or the King and being a Rowell
- 42:00 we were in the last 6 and

## **Tape 2**

- 00:32 Where were we?

### **We were at ITS [Initial Training School] at Pearce**

Oh ITS Pearce, I was going to say I nearly scrubbed it ITS yes.?

### **I think you were telling us a story about leave.**

Sorry I think we were onto women. And the women decided amongst themselves that firstly we would go out together and someone had influence with the second fourth machine

- 01:00 gun regiment and they were having a final do at the Adelphia Hotel and apparently they wanted numbers to make up the numbers to fill the place. So they booked us for the second fourth machine gun regiment's farewell dinner at the Adelphia. What air men did there I didn't know but the women arranged it. And at the last minute it was
- 01:30 officers only and we were ACTs. So at the last minute we decided that we would wear black tie and I was a bit mindful of it and they said "Oh well there is a naval and military club ball on so anyone that is anyone will be there". Half a dozen of us were in the foyer of the Adelphia and who should turn up, but the CO and the adjutant and the six of us in black ties.
- 02:00 The CO said "Evening Rowell". I had been one of the deputy with him for his abusive drill instructor, that was that. The day or next couple of days it was category selection, whether you were going to be an air gunner, a navigator or a pilot and we went to the category selection board and of course everybody wants to be a pilot. And the
- 02:30 CO said "Rowell did I see you Saturday night?" "Yes Sir". "You were out of order". "Yes sir". I am going to be a gunner. I won't be a pilot but then bless his socks the adjutant for no reason that I knew him said "Well he is a big fella he hasn't got his uniform yet so he couldn't have worn it". So I was very grateful to that adjutant in

03:00 that one I had a uniform and he trusted that I would not blurt out “Oh yes I have got a uniform” so I got through the category selection board and made a pilot and passed out at ITS [Initial Training School] and went to 9 Elementary Training School at Cunderdin.

**How long were you at Pearce for Harry?**

Eight weeks.

**Can you describe the base?**

Pearce, well there was the normal

03:30 peace time bricks and mortar show and tin sheds for the new arrivals of war time people. It was an air force base primarily until the war started. So it was basic but perhaps I could say that I turned up once with a sore throat expecting a lozenge

04:00 or something and they put me in bed. And it was nice to be in hospital brick and tiles and sheets and things. I barely enjoyed it and they told me what was wrong with me and it was in words of six syllables etc. and I rehearsed that a bit. And low and behold the Air Officer in Commanding came to inspect the hospital and he said “How are you Rowell?” and “I have got xxxx”

04:30 and he went out one door and they gave me my goon skin back and I beat him down to our training squad to be inspected down there fit and well. So they had to make up their numbers for their air officer in commanding to check the hospital. But that was Pearce for eight weeks.

**What was your initial training consist of?**

Anything with flying.

05:00 In fact that is not quite so. I had a mate that was a Wirraway pilot and they conned him into taking me up on my first air borne ever and he was on air camera gunnery with another sergeant pilot. Sergeant pilots seemed to be more air minded or aerobatic crazy

05:30 than. Our first trip up I finished up I wouldn't know which way was up let alone anything else but that was my first flight, a fellow called him White, I don't know his Christian name.

**Were you overwhelmed by that experience?**

Yes to the extent that we went straight onto the drill square and my unfriendly flight Sergeant, I was still a bit woozy and he finished making me

06:00 double round the muddy drill square with two 303s which I didn't think kindly of him but at least when I had finished I got my balance organism back to square one but carried on.

**What type of classroom instruction was there?**

Cold water, cold showers, cold shaving if you are up to

06:30 that. No it was not quite like, even in those days we didn't have hot water systems or bath heaters or what not but at least a little more civilised than the services, well there was a war on and we were there to fight the good fight.

**Were you learning anything about aeronautics?**

Yes we learnt the Morse code there

07:00 or part of it and we learnt basics. I have forgotten precisely, but one of the things about you, you get all stirred up. I am going to war. I am going to war and your eight weeks at initial training and don't look at an aeroplane and then you have eight weeks in Tiger Moths [aeroplanes] and well it is all wondrous but hardly war and then you have 16 weeks up at Geraldton

07:30 and nobody mentions the war and you wonder if it was still on. And I think that perhaps was one of the shortcomings of training to a point you, for want of a better word, you go off the boil.

**I am just curious as to whether or not your initial training at Pearce was based on entering the military services or were you starting to learn about.....**

It was an expert's course

08:00 with pilot training. The empire training school was an optimistic and a very good basis for training pilots. But they were optimistic in that it was a minimum of 32 weeks. Thirty two weeks to train someone and then you are only up to, we went from Geraldton service flying training to operational training and then eventually

08:30 perhaps after the best part of a year you get into operations.

**How was your time spent at Cuunderdin?**



Cuunderdin well it was wondrous. This flying business is a bit different from walking and you begin to wonder whether you will ever make it. My philosophy in those days was to look around at the course ahead of me and invariably I would find someone that I reckon I was as good or better than him

- 09:00 and he had learnt to go solo so there is hope for me yet. But I had a particularly good instructor, good for me anyway, at Cunderdin, Henry Maitland Thomas and perhaps, he sent me solo. He was sufficiently senior and most instructors had to send their pupils up to someone else to be checked to go solo but Henry
- 09:30 sent me solo. But after you have gone solo for two hours they give you what they call a second solo check. Just to see if you had learnt any bad habits and Henry was listed. I daren't have called him Henry in those days it was "Yes Sir, no Sir" Rowell, very polite, he was a gentlemen and a scholar and he was an instructor and a flying
- 10:00 officer and I was a LAC [leading aircraftsmen] by then. And I was listed to do my second solo check with Henry first thing. The timetable being in July, the weather had stopped training and we had been behind in hours. And the idea was just first period he would take me for a quick circuit. If I hadn't learnt any bad habits he would send me off again. But Henry got a tooth ache
- 10:30 and went to the dentist. So I was listed to do a first solo check and the flight commander had given himself a day off and no doubt had work to do but he may have stayed up a bit late the night before, he, because they were behind he had to, well he took me up. I was used to polite, articulate, no adjectives, no blasphemy
- 11:00 from old mate Henry Maitland and the flight commander was far from plain talk. And we got into a slipstream on take off I think. There are about 30 Tiger Moths taking off and I got into one and it upset him a bit and he stirred the aircraft control column, which I thought meant he took
- 11:30 over, so I let it go and he thought he only did this to complain and we went off into the wild blue yonder with no one flying the thing and he got impatient and said "You are scrubbed" and took me back and all the way back was very very critical with lots of adjectives and we got onto the ground and he said "You are scrubbed. Get out of my sight" and my
- 12:00 flying career finished before I got into double figures and on the way back up to Cuunderdin I was up to our hut I am walking up very, head down and on the other side of the road old Henry is coming down from the dentist, "Morning Rowell". "Morning Sir". "What are you doing?" "I have been scrubbed Sir" "Scrubbed, who scrubbed you?" "Flight commander Sir"
- 12:30 "Come with me". And we went back and about half an hour later I only hear one voice but Henry prevailed and took me for a quick circuit and I was unscrubbed and finished up flying for nearly 24000 hours so from under ten to 24000 thank you to Henry Maitland Thomas and
- 13:00 perhaps the scare no thank you to the Dentist for a tooth ache. But we passed out at Cuunderdin.

**How long were you at Cuunderdin sorry?**

Eight weeks. Eight weeks

**How much further flying did you do there once you had soloed?**

I think about 50 hours or so.

**What kind of flights did you take?**

Tiger Moths, it was, circuits and bumps, we did a bit of cross-country, a few aerobatics,

- 13:30 a little bit of night flying. And we thought we were king of the air.

**What was it like flying a Tiger Moth?**

I think if you got very cunning you did nothing and it flew very well on its own, if you interfered with it you might get into trouble, particularly with recovery under the hood in the spin, if you fought it too hard

- 14:00 you never got, you went one way to the other but if you let it go and you were high enough it would get out on its own.

**Was that an exercise you had to complete?**

Well we had to get out of a spin and we had methods of getting out of it and we were told and we were supposed to interfere but you could interfere too much.

**What causes a plane to go into a spin and how do you recover?**

Well it stalls. The

- 14:30 aeroplanes stay in the air because of the airflow over the wings, if you increase the angle of attack you stop flying, you stop the airflow and you are just like a bag of chaff, or bricks, so you have to stop the

spin and get some speed up and then you are flying again. All very exciting

15:00 for a 20 year old, better than a Harley Davidson, but there was a timetable to be met and you had to measure up. They required a standard and maintained the standard if you didn't attain it. Some of the pupils or cadets or whatever were unfortunate or not as fortunate

15:30 as I believed I was in getting an instructor who was genuinely interested in providing a good background to a flying career. I am grateful to Henry Maitland Thomas but we passed out of there and went up to Geraldton for.

**Before we move to Geraldton can I just ask you a few more things about Cunderdin?**

Ok.

16:00 **What was the base like at Contention?**

Well it was purely tin sheds. There was no bricks and mortar and tiles and what not but it was well organised and efficient for what it was meant to do and perhaps we had a little white flannel thing in our caps that showed that we were air crew. Mine was pinched at Cunderdin.

16:30 So I went to the store and asked for another one and I offered to pay for it and they said no there was no charge. I might get to the story of when about three, 1941, 1944 my leave was cancelled because I hadn't paid it.

**The air force catches up with you?**

17:00 Well though we won't go into three years of Cunderdin and Geraldton and Lavington, Barnsdale, Sale, la di da di da, New Guinea and back again but that was a fact. But the CO was an acquaintance of mine from New Guinea days and he insisted I take the leave even without the approval of the Station Administrative Officer.

17:30 In fact the file got into this size and weighed about a kilo and a half, every page was about two foolscap pages and he picked it up and dropped it in the waste paper basket. And in fact I had three weeks leave and that wasn't taken off my card so later I got a posting they insisted I take the leave I already had before they would

18:00 accept me so I had it twice. Thanks to the cost of the air force. I think the bill was five, five pence.

**With interest?**

Bureaucrats, it would have cost them \$500 by then and I got an extra three weeks leave.

**Well that is a nice consolation.**

Which was handy when my father had died however.

**So you went to Geraldton from Cunderdin?**

Yeah.

18:30 Oh Geraldton were big twin engine rag and wood Avro Ansons. Two engines, lots more instruments and heavy stuff, I wondered if I would ever make it. Once again you look around and find someone in the class or the course above you, find a drongo [idiotic person] or two that you reckon if they can do it, you can and away you go.

19:00 One thing we had an aircrew mess there, there were four courses at Geraldton at the one time. I think four, yeah. And they had an aircrew mess that was funded, we had a mess committee that did a bit of shopping for about four pence a day and I was on the committee and we managed to get an air force

19:30 truck with the sympathy that went with the air crew at the time we ended up having crayfish three times a week and lots of fresh vegetables and stuff and bought a piano from the profits but that was Geraldton.

**Sounds very civilised?**

Oh yes we made it so but when Japan came into the war

20:00 they made it army catering and most of us lost our appetites.

**Had you been on army catering in Cunderdin?**

No it would have been air force show there.

**What is the difference between air force and army catering?**

Well in the aircrew mess we are a group of 150, 200 blokes, and it is much easier to cater for

20:30 one or two hundred than one or two thousand and particularly if you are going to add a crayfish or two for the cook or pantry maid it helps. It was still bulk catering and bulk catering is never like Mother

used to make and then the army well they

21:00 wouldn't be able to approach individual growers or fisherman or whatever. They had to do everything through headquarters and that is time consuming and the freshness gets off the food or what have you. But oh no I don't think I lost any weight so we were quite energetic.

21:30 **How long did it take you to master flying the Avro Anson?**

I got through with the average time. I have forgotten we got our wings after about eight weeks I think. And then we had another eight weeks in a bit of camera gunnery and air gunnery and more practical flying, formation flying. Actually our

22:00 training was interrupted a bit by the Sydney sinking, November 41. A belated message came through that said Sydney was sunk and we were never crewing the old Anson but we used to go up with it as an extra pair of eyes looking for survivors or wreck or what have you and got as far as Canarvon and round

22:30 and about but it was flying experience but we weren't manipulating or navigating we were sitting there staring.

**How did it affect you at the time when you heard that the Sydney had been sunk?**

We knew there was a war on. Actually the reports that came through never ever gave the full story. I said

23:00 earlier my wife was at naval base headquarters in Sydney at the time and was in the cipher section, signal section and even there she will tell you given the chance that everyone clammed up. That was something that shouldn't have happened, it did happen and nobody quite knew why, nobody perhaps wanted to know and

23:30 it was never brought home to us how tragic it was. Not to me anyway in that. I think too there was nothing you could do about it except keep bright eyed and bushy tailed [enthusiastic and energetic] and do your best to see anything that might have been there. But in any event nobody saw anything that they will admit to. But

24:00 December, late December 41 we were given our postings and I was posted to Europe. I think about that time too we were told whether we would get a commission or not. I think I was the third youngest on the course. But good luck or something or other I got a commission on course. I was the youngest to get

24:30 one. So I became an officer and a gentlemen. But there was no room in the officer's mess when Japan came into the war. Our postings were delayed and we were remained in the trainee's mess, as they gave us a cap and made us take over all the officer's job and you go through the trainee's mess and check for any complaints

25:00 and then you would double back and plead for a late lunch. But they were fairly heady days. All leave was cancelled. We used to go up and down in the old Midland railway train. And they cancelled leave and a few of us and a few of us got, they cancelled leave and then they reinstituted leave but there was no transport and half a dozen of us conned

25:30 a fellow with a gas powered charcoal burner truck, a table top in the Baralee Club Hotel I think. And we conned him into taking us to Perth with bags of charcoal and whatnot in a tabletop and by the time I got

26:00 to my then girlfriends place I went to sleep I think and was not very popular. By the time we got down to Perth it was almost time to go back again and get charcoal in your hair and bumped about on a tabletop. But we did get to Perth.

**That is a long way in a back of a truck.**

Yes a bloody long way. But I had my 21st birthday in Geraldton

26:30 and you are young and silly and past caring to a certain point and you put up with all sorts of things if you need to or if there is no alternative. And there seemed to be an imperative in those days, well to get home for a lamb roast with Mother if nothing else.

**How often did you take leave to Perth?**

I have forgotten really, but I would say every fortnight,

27:00 perhaps month, fortnight, month. I really can't remember. We did go up and down on the old Midland train. Midland railways used to run the train on the Midland line. That was taken over by the government after they had trouble with oil drilling licences but that is another story.

**And that line extended to Geraldton?**

27:30 It went all the way from Perth to Geraldton, it was the only line the government used to go north from Northam and hit the Geraldton, Meekatharra line and come in.

**That is interesting I didn't know that was a private line?**

Well it was Midland Railway company was a separate entity. And ran from

28:00 Midland to Geraldton on the inland route. And it hit Dongara and then Geraldton. Actually Midland railway they got thousands of acres of freehold and then the old original. I think

28:30 it was British freehold you owned what was underneath as well but in the Australian freehold you need miners right and approval to mine on your land even though you have the freehold. And I have reason to believe that the state government gave oil drilling licences to the midland some of the midland. And

29:00 I don't know if it was politically correct or whether it was a problem but eventually the state government had no alternative to buy the midland line to honour the permits they had given. Because of the differentiation between the title rights. I believe that, don't hold me to it if that is so but that is the story.

**Well I noticed there are no oil fields there now.**

29:30 Well gas field Wodonga was on their show but the British company was given a whole lot of land down Dandaragan and elsewhere, it was give us this that and the other and we will build and operate the railway line. And it was quite an efficient line.

**Was it a comfortable trip?**

Would have been

30:00 in peace time and peace time crowds, but no it was, generally speaking you would be sitting up all the way or you would, you used to work out the little blokes might get to sleep in the hat racks and the longer fellows would have their feet in the toilet if there was one and the cushion from the seat would be on the floor and blokes that were sleeping on the seats, didn't have a cushion and

30:30 the blokes on the floor did and you would work something out and arrived a little rested.

**Did you take leave in Geraldton very often?**

No, I had my 21st birthday party in Geraldton at the Victoria Hotel. But we didn't spend much time in there.

31:00 One thing perhaps of interest, when Japan came into the war and we were playing merry hell towards Singapore the panic button was hit and we had to dig slit trenches and fill sand bags and put the sand bags around the operations room and other places of importance about the town.

**About town or about the?**

No the airport, Geraldton airport.

31:30 I don't quite no why but they got me and a mob of trainees to get some slit trenches done and fill some sand bags and the CO came round and inspected us. I might add it was December, January, bloody hot, and he congratulated us on whether we had filled 1000 or 1200, I have forgotten the numbers

32:00 of sand bags. And said we were doing a good job etc etc. Perhaps being me I followed him up and said "Excuse me Sir" I have forgotten the number I think it was 1500 we had filled and I said "If we fill 2000 tomorrow can we have a truck to go swimming?" and he said "Yes" so I went back to the blokes I said "Look

32:30 next morning 2500 bags we go swimming" so we would get organised. And after we filled 2500 it was only about 2.30 - 3.00 I went to the old CO Patty Heffernan [Patrick Heffernan] Group Captain, "Excuse me Sir we have filled 2500 bags" he said "Oh I thought you said 2000?" I said "Yes I thought you

33:00 might have upped it to 2500 and we were capable of it". So he gave us a truck and we went swimming in the city pool. But I didn't ask for a truck the second day. So we had, we made the most of it. They wanted us to dig slit trenches and fill sand bags with what we pulled out of it, so we did it.

33:30 **So what did you think of the CO?**

He was a fine bloke. In fact I didn't know at the time, but my brother was tied up with him but that is a completely different story. The Wellesley geodetics, a constructed aircraft of the RAF [Royal Air Force] wrested the long distance aircraft

34:00 record from the Russians by flying from Egypt and they hoped to get to Australia or even Brisbane and they lost. One landed in Timor and the rest got to Darwin. They did a lap of honour around the east coast and Patty was in charge, Patty Heffernan. And the 22 squadron escort or was it the 23 squadron, Anson

34:30 escort for these blokes to do a lap of honour around Australia and then back to England. By the time they got to Pearce there was only one left. But the Brits reckon the Russkies [Russians] only had one that broke the record. Well they were going to have three. Well the bloke in Timor I think just broke it

and the two that got to Darwin smashed it and the Brits can do it in threes while the Russkies only had one.

35:00 Only had one Welesley and it crashed north east of Derby, miles from anywhere but the crew survived and it was only a broken oil pipe that they didn't know it at the time. But they couldn't get there, there was no roads and no tracks. And to get donkeys and horses and whatnot in, the crews were there and they were quite fit and

35:30 well. And someone suggested, you know what should we drop them and they said "Well the RAF boys wouldn't know how to boil an egg or boil a Billy". So they dropped a bottle of scotch and a bag of chaff and a block of ice in another bag and some fresh steak and fresh bread every morning to keep the RAF boys alive while the

36:00 horses and donkeys and stock boys got there the hard way. When the donkeys and stockmen got there having lived on hard cake and rice and little else, the RAF boys gave them scotch on the rocks and grilled steak. But my brother was in Derby at the time and he helped Patty Heffernen with

36:30 the supplying of the combustible, But I didn't know that at the time. But no he was a good CO. Albeit at a play they ran at the time a bit of a concert. Old Patty had four stripes and he always had a South African fly whisk with donkey hair or some sort of hair on a handle.

37:00 At the concert they took off old Patty and the fellow had a mop I think, great four ring stripes and "What do you think you are? A bloody zebra?", so many stripes. There is a photo there of Patty pinning my wings on.

**He sounds like a fairly distinguished looking chap?**

37:30 Yes I spoke to him later, they wrote a history of the 22 squadron and I wrote to him and said that "It is all wrong". And Patty was good enough I think he had about 18 different types that he had flown and I had about ten times the flying that he had done. But he was a good bloke, as we had little to do with him,

38:00 he was, there would have been a couple of hundred trainees at the station and when Japan came into the war he was a bit pre occupied.

**Did you observe the public's reaction in Geraldton when Japan came into the war?**

No not really. We were all very isolated and pre occupied and had very little interaction with the public and

38:30 the training was full time, daylight till dark and sometimes night flying and studying for exams and whatnot.

**We should talk about the daily routine?**

Oh I can't remember much about it. You had to get up too early and shave too

39:00 often and salute too much and some of the stuff they insisted on teaching us was not as quite as relevant as it might have been but I think that is a pupil's idea of most courses and obviously if you are training pilots they finish up

39:30 bombers or strafers or fighters or whatnot. The relevance of some sections of the course particularly say navigation is not as relevant to some as others.

**I would be interested to know how you were introduced to the Avro Anson after having only have flown a little by-plane from World War I?**

Everyone did it so we did it. It was a challenge but as I said one

40:00 of my thoughts, you know running around in this stuff, we were taught the theory but it is still a bit of mumbo jumbo. I mean I see a 747 floating in even now and you think there are 3 or 400 people there and it hasn't even got a thing going around in front. And they only suck in air one end and blow it out the other and stay up there.

40:30 I mean I flew jets for dozens of years and it works but it is still invisible stuff and I can understand why people perhaps give inflated ideas of what pilots do or can do in that you can't see it and I think it is a problem

41:00 with modern aviation that in the old days the aero club or the air force were the only people that taught pilots to fly and once you got into the manufacturers saying you know buy the aeroplane we will teach you how to fly. They made it seem like Sunday driving whereas it is more demanding and the laws that keep you in the air are quite strict and if you forget

41:30 them you don't often get a second chance.

**The ground is not very forgiving?**

No and I have been warned more than once by official bureaucrats I was getting too close to it, but when gravity is going to take over you take some risks.

**It is great that you are still mystified by flight.**

Well not mystified I have known the theory of

42:00 flight since 1941 but

## Tape 3

00:31 **So how did you feel when you actually got your wings?**

King of the earth. Better than poncho as a pilot. No it was an achievement and some fellow dropped by the way side and well I was scrubbed myself, it is a nasty feeling. But it is almost, you know as I told you I am as good as that fellow

01:00 and if he can do it I can do it. And I have done it. Thank you very much.

**What, with some of the folk that got scrubbed how would the other men treat the blokes that got scrubbed?**

Oh with sympathy and what, I mean, but for the grace of god it goes anyone of us. I believed with perhaps one exception that if I had any of the other instructors at elementary I

01:30 may not have made it myself. You had some instructors that didn't want to be instructors. And some fellows that wanted to go to war rather than be instructors. Some weren't born to be instructors. I became one myself.

**What do you think makes a good instructor?**

Put yourself where the other bloke is. Remember how

02:00 you felt when you began. I think it is one of the old Sunday school things "Do unto others" and not a bad dictamenore there are all sorts of ways that should never be forgotten. None of my pupils were scrubbed.

**Excellent. Where were your instructors, where did**

02:30 **they actually come from as far as experience?**

Oh anywhere and everywhere. It was during the war. If they wanted pilots in Rhodesia, if they wanted pilots in Canada, or if they wanted pilots in Europe or North Africa. It is supply and demand and if you happened to be here and waiting for a posting, you just went so it

03:00 was all a lap of whether you became a pilot or a navigator or a gunner even if there was a new gunnery school opening up and they wanted 50 blokes well many more became gunners than pilots. Or if they wanted navigators, it was in the lap of the gods. Some were fortunate and some were unfortunate. I would never be. It

03:30 was never that personal generally as to who got there and when and who, at top of the class or bottom of the class or got scrubbed. It was in the inevitable you had to take the result and learn to live with it and quite of few injustices were done in my view but I was lucky and I am

04:00 happy I was lucky.

**How did your family and friends react to you getting your wings?**

We were away from home and we were all boys together we didn't see much of it, there would have been a reaction no doubt if we had failed but I think my parents thought

04:30 their little boy should do as well or better than others and I think there is a degree of self confidence. It is a difficult thing to engender and it can be over bearing if it is over done but it is an essential if you want to learn to

05:00 fly and if you want to fool yourself that you are able and you succeed that is that. I have, I was never a romantic flyer, it was something that seemed like a pleasant thing and it was a bit different even through commercial flying it was

05:30 a means to an end. I enjoyed it but you change with the weather and if you were captain there was no other buggger to be critical of what you did or didn't do and if you succeed it was your problem. As pilot I think you got all the blame and not always all the credit. But so you

06:00 had to make decisions and if they were the right one you kept flying and if they were the wrong ones

you may not be able to. No one would give you an aeroplane to be in.

**Did you make any good mates when you were at in training?**

Yes yes I made some very good mates but none of my course were friends of mine until we got on course.

06:30 My two greatest, longer standing friends from primary school and secondary school were killed as pilots and that has always and still strikes home. But particularly this one was an only boy and the other was the

07:00 third of three pilots, three brothers two of whom were killed. But it is the way the cookie crumbles, you are grateful if it not one and you are passed caring if it is.

**Where were you hoping to be, what is the word I have lost the word.**

Posted?

**Posted. Thank you I can't believe I lost**

07:30 **that word.**

I was ignorant really as to what was what and who was who. I mean there is a glamour in being a spitfire pilot, but it was sitting around waiting for the enemy to turn up. That is a bomber pilot a few of them. And again you couldn't do much about it, if they wanted fighter pilots they got

08:00 them if they wanted bomber pilots or they wanted people to fly Lancasters or Wellingtons or Wellesleys or Blenheims or Bostons or Beaufighters or Beauforts and your name happened to be there waiting to be occupied well that is what happened. So you know I was a Spitfire pilot or I was a boston pilot is little or nothing to do other than the fact that you

08:30 were given the job to do and you succeeded or failed. But I was posted to Europe from Geraldton and got as far as the embarkation depot. But Japan made itself felt and it stopped all postings to Europe even though we didn't have any aeroplanes

09:00 and we fussed about. And I did a course in Lavington for a while and the good blokes on the course remained as instructors for the time for other people.

**So at what point did you actually go to Lavington?**

When my posting to Europe was cancelled. I sat around in Perth and eventually they said

09:30 we can teach these blokes a bit more and we went to Lavington. They called it a Number 22NR course, navigational reconnaissance. We learnt a bit more of navigation, we were supposed to know the individual ships of the Australian navy and the classes of ships and the allied navy's. And one interesting thing that I thoroughly enjoyed but I wouldn't have been very popular in was an

10:00 Avro Anson, 1927 model aeroplane. I did an anti submarine patrol on the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth perhaps one other going through Bass Strait and at that time the Australian navy didn't have anything to keep up with them. The Dutch ship the Van Tromp and the French ship Triomphe

10:30 something like that and they were flat out escorting their ships through Bass Strait and my rag and wood thing with a couple of yellow bombs in it was sitting up top drawing the hornets if there were any around. What are they going around and around there for? But it was a wonderful sight to see the old Queens going along as a Queen should and the

11:00 Dutch and Frenchmen flat out, tail down, bone in the teeth trying to keep up. That was Lavington.

**How long were you at Lavington?**

About eight weeks I think.

**It must have been a bit disappointing to be ready to go to Europe and then to get it revoked?**

With hindsight it was a bloody good thing but

11:30 there were advantages and disadvantages in Europe over New Guinea but New Guinea wasn't in sight then. It was well, you went where you were sent and if it was North Africa or England. Singapore would have been bad but, no point in being disappointed or what not. You

12:00 virtually did what you were told. We could complain about it of course. But from Lavington we went to Number 1 Beaufort course. The Australians were trying to build aeroplanes and the Beaufort was the biggest thing they had tried to build and I believe I was told that the Minister for Air,

12:30 the Chief of Air Staff, my brothers in law married the sisters and the Chief of Air Staff couldn't complain about the Beaufort that his brother in law was making.

**What did you think of the Beauforts?**

The British made one that I flew. Excellent.

### **And the Australian ones?**

They had problems. No new enterprise

- 13:00 of that nature with anyone anywhere can be built without some teething trouble into tackle it in war time in a war time schedule was well trouble. Was inevitable so we had trouble on Number 1 Beaufort course. Actually we had lots of trouble and in spite of what Mr Keating said. We had five British made
- 13:30 Beauforts and my instructor was an RAF officer. And his the two best experienced Beaufort, I think the only two instructors were RAF fellows, British and my little bloke was a very tolerant bloke but we got I think at one stage we finished up with five British made ones and 47 Australians ones.
- 14:00 And we got more flying out of the British ones than the Australian ones.

### **Were they constantly in the fix it shop?**

Well they, I think the colonialists can improve on what the Brits have done. And one or two of their improvements didn't quite work not the least of which was in my view substantiated by the Chief of the CIB in Victoria.

- 14:30 The British made ones had heating, cockpit heating. In Europe you needed and Australians quite brightly decided we didn't need heating, they blanked it off. Cockpit heating, they take very hot air from the engine itself and mix it with other air and put it in so that its engine heat
- 15:00 that heats the cockpit and in some circumstances and some variations the blocking off of the heating system wasn't as efficient as it should have been and you got carbon monoxide into the cockpit and that caused a lot of Beaufort crashes. But we didn't have any on the Number 1 course. Mainly because we only got ten hours
- 15:30 flying and most of it was in British made ones. We never did long trips and I don't know whether the operational training was 100 hours or 150 hours or how many but certainly many more than ten. And even the ten we got, it was thought that the propeller I think the Australian men
- 16:00 had had the electric production gear and the props and Brits had hydraulic or something or other so they reckon that taking off and landing was a bad thing. So half a dozen of us would go up at once and draw straws as to who did the take off and who did the landing and the rest of us had a fiddle around Lakes Entrance up and down flying low along the lakes and upsetting the locals. You would
- 16:30 disappear under the sand hills. And Lakes Entrance is about 20 mile long and you would come up above and be reported as missing and in fact you were flying low and leaving awash and turned up quite safe and sound.

### **What are the main differences between an Anson and a Beaufort?**

An Anson was 1927 model, I think the Beaufort

- 17:00 was probably 1940 but I don't know I am guessing, so that 13 years in aviation is a long time particularly when there is a war effort on. No they were, they were quite sophisticated aircraft and quite a challenge. You look at the top bit of a Tiger Moth and you wonder and then you look at
- 17:30 an Anson and you look at the Beaufort and you think I have to learn that. You are a modern airliner and you make it and sometimes wonder why or how. But no they were very pleasant aircraft but when they kept going they also had a structural fault. Charlie Learmonth went in off Yanchep
- 18:00 because of a I think a mild steel attached bolt should have been stainless steel or some other sort of steel and it gave way and hence the name of Learmonth up north. But that is another story.

### **That is Exmouth isn't it? Was that around Exmouth?**

Yes Learmonth's airstrip. It was a bomber strip during the war

- 18:30 and was upgraded to civil flying.

### **As far as flying was the Beaufort a more comfortable plane to fly?**

Yes it was, well it was between a Ford Laser and a Falcon. You know one was worth a lot more than the other and one was more powerful etc but then you get onto the Boston.

- 19:00 We did ten hours and we were mixed up with some of the senior boys from the air force, the permanent air force and the word went out that they wanted, I have forgotten the numbers, but ten blokes for Bostons and ten blokes for Beaufort fighters. And they had to be innocent, ignorant untrained blokes that only got
- 19:30 perhaps about 10 per cent of their operational training that they should have had. But headquarters



looked at the book and said, "Oh they have been at Out [Operational Training Unit] for the required time they must have had the time we organised it". So it must have been done and there was a lot of, quite rightly, a lot of unhappiness for some of the permanent air force blokes. But ignorant fellows were going onto Bostons and

20:00 Boefet fighters and their ignorance went to the point that we didn't know what they were.

**So you actually never got your hands on a Boston, so you never got your hands on a Boston?**

Never seen one. We got them by accident.

**How did that happen by accident?**

France ordered them, got them on the production line, when France went under the Brits took over the order in the production line and when Japan came into the war the Brits gave it to the

20:30 Dutch. And they were completed to the Dutch specifications. The first six and all the equipment needed to maintain them and all the spares and all went to Java. Four of them got into the air and they were shot down and the other two were damaged and fixed on the ground. The next 22 left America with yellow, sorry orange triangles on them and Java had gone under so they were dumped in

21:00 Melbourne, in April 42. Our engineers and others did a wonderful job in putting them together. I think they had the wrong size spanners for a start. And anything they had and equipment and stuff was already in Java and most of the thing was in Dutch or double Dutch and so they were the

21:30 only aircraft that the RAF flew at squadron strength that they never ordered and never paid for and they wanted some blokes to fly them. They had got, the Brits in spite of again what Mr Keating said again, the Brits sacrificed a hell of a lot in sending three squadrons and spit fires to Australia and quite a few Beauforts, Beaufighters, Beaufighters. So there is a Beaufighter squadron and a Boston squadron.

22:00 They wanted pilots to fly them and they said the blokes at Number 1 Beaufort course 20 of them. And we were that ignorant of what a Beaufighter was and what a Boston was. We said "We don't know what they are but we have got pairs. I would like to stay with Charlie and Charlie said he would like to be with Bill" so he sent in ten pairs of names. But

22:30 whether there is a misunderstanding or whether the CO wasn't told and he put every second one onto Bostons and every second one onto Beaufighters. By that time we had. I don't know quite how the association started off or finished but four of us had got together at Sale and later Bairnsdale and we raced around together even went to church together.

23:00 Thereby hangs a story if you want it, ask for it. Anyway four of us, two of us went onto Beaufighters and one or some reason or other was stopped and stayed on Beauforts and I god bless whoever made the decision I went to Bostons. Anyone could fly a Boston. You had to fight to make them misbehave. But

23:30 both the blokes that went on the Beaufighters were dead within about six or eight weeks and the bloke that stayed on the Beauforts was dead in about eight weeks.

**Where were they posted?**

The two on Beaufighters were in Richmond and one of them got as far as New Guinea. And the bloke on Beauforts was in South East Australia.

**And how come they managed to die?**

Well the Beaufighter was

24:00 a very frisky lady compared with the Boston.

**So harder to handle is what you are saying?**

Well the Boston was made by Douglas and designed that way and you had to fight to make it misbehave. A Beaufighter if you didn't keep your wits about you particularly when you were inexperienced as we were it

24:30 got a bit flirty and flighty and misbehaved and experience in flying, I mean basic experience is essential. And we didn't have it and you could get well because of the Bostons and the way we got them there was no dual instruction.

**So there was absolutely nobody who could teach you how to fly them?**

25:00 The first time you are airborne in the cockpit of a Boston was the first time ever. And...

**Well that must have been a bit alarming?**

Well in fact they brought five blokes back from England who had done. My particular mates I finished up with two of them, they were Sydney blokes and they were trained in Canada and went to England

25:30 and did a full operational training unit course and a full course to fly Bostons in England in fact

particular, Bostons of all things fitted with a great search light and they were supposed to have a hurricane format on each wing tip and when the Germans came over in force, the old Boston with the two

26:00 hurricanes would line up behind the Germans and they would switch the light on and...

**Blind them.**

It wasn't very successful. But none the less they did a lot of training. I got alongside a couple of them and asked questions and picked their brains and they were very supportive. Unfortunately in my opinion they were

26:30 empire air training scheme fellows all of them and a lot of the permanent air force people in Australia hadn't quite got to the stage as empire air training corp people were any good. Particularly when a lot of them were going in on the Beaufort and it was blamed for lack of training and lack of expertise when in fact it was basic

27:00 and fundamental in my view.

**It just seems to be ridiculous you know, that you have got these expensive planes and you have made a bit of a cock up with the amount of training hours?**

Well there was a war on, but.

**Well you know it is the difference of a few weeks of decent training.**

Well I think it is the manufacture. The basic problem with the Beaufort was manufacture. Carbon monoxide in the cockpit

27:30 and attached bolts on the trim tab and the elevator, no matter how much, well Charlie Learmonth was permanent air force squadron and DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] bar and he went. But in the early days the majority of blokes were in the empire training scheme at the ATU so it was the easiest thing in my view

28:00 to blame the pilot rather than the carbon monoxide or whatever.

**I see what you are saying.**

One fellow was going to write a book but not publish it until the Chief of Air Staff old George Jones died, but old George lived until he was 95 or something or other, he lost sight of it. But George Jones he was,

28:30 he was head of training in the RAF in 1939 and anyone that was anyone went overseas. The war was a long way away from Australia. The RAF in Australia was 99 per cent or 90 per cent training and George was made Chief of Air Staff and that was that. He was a fairly

29:00 chalky pilot.

**What does that mean?**

Well chalky is the teachers, some teachers are wonderful other teachers it is just a job. I wouldn't know. He got a bit pedantic in New Guinea but that was another story if you want to hear about it.

**Well we will get to New Guinea a little later on but just wondering were you actually quite excited that you had managed to literally land yourself into a Boston?**

29:30 Yes it is a bit of a. I had never seen a tricycle under carriage aircraft. You know one that, and 3300 horsepower, 320 mile an hour I think. No dual. And in fact when we arrived there

30:00 about half a dozen of us turned up at the one time and the CO quite rightly with some justification said "Well I don't want you. I don't need you. I have been trying to get rid of you ever since I heard you were coming and I haven't stopped trying" and he to a point quite rightly wouldn't let us near the Boston and we fiddled around fairing Tiger Moths and we, they were making Tiger

30:30 Moths at Mascot. At the time and we would take off from Richmond in an Avro Anson, maybe half a dozen of us and I did it quite often, fly them down to Mascot. And five of them would get out and fly Tiger Moths to Moree or Parkes or someplace in New South Wales. And I would run around later in the day and pick up the pilots and bring them back to

31:00 Richmond and we didn't officially get near the Bostons. If ever one was stopped I would jump in it and if ever there was one of the blokes from England there, I would ask him to tell me what was what and who was who so that whenever the chance was there and there was a cockpit empty, I used to ask and plead and ask one of the

31:30 blokes that had done the full course to fill my ears and I used to annoy them no doubt. But two of them Bob Irons and Harry Craig were very helpful and a fellow called Claude Sladen. Claude was a permanent air force fellow but he had been demoted in the service two or three times for

32:00 punching senior officers in the nose or some such. He was a fine fellow and I respect him and he helped

the ignorant young blokes quite a bit so did Harry and Bob. And I think the CO was, I don't know but I believe that the CO was instructed to convert us onto Bostons so we.

32:30 One of the blokes early on, the only advice that the Boston had was if the, in my view, was if the equivalent of a motor car shock absorbers if the main wheel was high and the nose wheel was lower you almost got a negative angle of incidence for the wing and if you gathered too much speed before take off you had to really

33:00 fight to get them off the ground once you got them up. And one of the fellows left it a bit late and didn't or wouldn't put his foot against, and he went through the fence and across a road and finished up against a tree.

**And how does that happen?**

Well he didn't take off.

**Well obviously, but was it because he didn't wrestle hard enough with it?**

33:30 Yeah, the idea was I don't anyone told us but almost as soon as you had enough speed you started to get the nose wheel up and if you didn't or if the nose wheel was down, any rate he finished. We didn't take any crews when we went on our first solo. But the navigator used

34:00 to be in the nose section. He had three to six inches of perspex to protect him. And at his back there is three eights of steel to protect the pilot. Three eights of steel to protect the pilot from behind. But the poor old navigator he finished up against the tree and the Perspex was back against the steel and the poor old navigator said

34:30 "Well that is where I would have been". But there was a bit of a hiccup if that happened. They might do it to more than one Boston but we all got away with it and went solo and finished up. I think they gave us six or seven hours and then there was another drought but eventually in August 42 they gave me an aircraft and said

35:00 "This is yours".

**How did you feel about that at the time?**

There was not enough to go around so I was very happy. And being an ignorant untrained inexperienced so and so I was very grateful, but and that was say for Jessica, and that

35:30 was mine although as I said there weren't enough to go around so other people flew it. But if I was rostered to fly she was mine and that was that. However when we, the war was coming on Milne Bay and Japanese coming a bit closer and we were a bit frightened.

**Were you following what was going on in the Pacific?**

Yes oh yes. We got a bulletin

36:00 and got newspapers and were aware of it. But once we got these aeroplanes all the boffins and all the bureaucrats and all the shiny bums and wanted to do something with the Boston. And the squadron song went something like

36:30 "We were to, we were to be night fighters, we were to be GR general reconnaissance, we were to drop torpedos what do they think we are?" In the end we finished up with dive bombers and strafers, which is what they were in North Africa.

**When you say squadron song was this....**

Oh one of the doggerels that they came out with. The other verse I remember was

37:00 when I got into strife in a thunderstorm. But that was a bit later

**I am just wondering with the songs, is it a song that the men make up or is it an official song? Is it an official song?**

No no no, doggerel is for singing around when some of them had had too many beers, never me. No I told my

37:30 grandson not so long ago I didn't know whether I would have drunk more if I had the money but I never had the money so I didn't drink that much and when I got a bit of money I thought it was wasted. I enjoyed one or two but some of the blokes at Richmond would get to the long bar in Australia and we would get there before lunch. And I used to before I

38:00 met my wife take the ferry to Manly and back or the tram to Bondi or the ferry up the river or a tram to the gap and go back to the long bar three hours later and found out that it was always my turn to buy but they had been there all the time and I was much better off but...

38:30 **How did people or civilians treat you in your uniform?**

Good question. I had a couple of experiences. My first navigator fellow called Merv, Merv King was senior to me in rank and about eight years older. Merv and I went from Richmond into Sydney,

39:00 hopeful of getting cancellations to go to a theatre show and we were sitting around or standing around the booking office looking hopeful and a charming lady, young lady raced and put two tickets in my hand and raced off. So Merve

39:30 and I had a show and I am perennially grateful particularly that when they gave Merve the sack with my navigator and replaced him with 4.5 guns, he went onto Beauforts and was killed within a short time.

**Oh that is tragic.**

The other time was Jenolan, before I met a fellow called Les Canway before I went up to Jenolan to have a look around

40:00 and apparently some of the caves, some of the sections of the caves have different lightings for different tours and the tour guide was kind enough to keep us back when they went through a narrow pathway, keep us back and put the other set of switches on so we got a tour and a half for the price of one purely because we were air crew.

40:30 Sadly again poor old Les took the chop in New Guinea so he was grateful I suppose for seeing a double show that he may not have seen otherwise.

**Was the uniform popular with the girls?**

I never, I didn't need a uniform.

41:00 Certainly you tended to go around with your left chest forward. It was a bit of a cue I guess to being a pilot. But I don't think it ever went to my head. The lady upstairs of course was one civilian too she is in the navy and I think I mentioned earlier the aircrew reserve

41:30 when I was with the T & G had an inspector over from Sydney to inspect West Australian operations. And he said "Oh Rowell I notice you are on the air crew reserve. Should you ever get to Sydney call on me we might have lunch together". So being me I trotted up.

**Showed up.**

Mr so and so "He is not in" so I went to his secretary

42:00 who was a fellow called Burt Barnett...

## Tape 4

00:30 If you were trying to get a free meal from the inspector that had been Perth but he wasn't in so Burt took over and apart from allowing me one of his staff for the rest of the day, while we were waiting for her to powder her nose he invited me home for the weekend. And I accepted and as a direct result of that his wife got quite upset

01:00 that she had to put up with a strange bloke in the house with their two kids that were 8 and 10 and with the whole weekend. And she pleaded with the lady next door if her daughter had any time to spare to take this stranger off her hands and it happens to be the women upstairs that I have been married to for 60 years. So she was persuaded by her mother to do the

01:30 neighbour a good turn.

**That is very neighbourly.**

Well perhaps significant, the best she could think to do with me was take me to the zoo. So our romance started at the Taronga Park Zoo and she played hard to get. She was or a navy bloke thought that he was engaged to her, a navy officer. But

02:00 as the governor of New South Wales said it was at a reception we were at in Legacy [Charitable organisation for war widows and their children] . "What is a nice navy girl like you doing marrying an airman?". But

**So did you politely explain the situation to the navy man?**

I never met him until through Legacy, he came over to the state conference of Legacy or the Australia wide conference of Legacy

02:30 when I was president of Legacy and we had, oh you know we had chief justices and governors and 780 odd sitting down to a dinner. He was one of the delegates from Townsville and he was, you know. His wife was quite nice and my wife sort of was, we entertained them here with all the state presidents etc. and

03:00 my wife remarked to his wife that you know it was rather remarkable that they got on so well together having just me and her report was "Well we were in love with the same bloke". My wife denies it but there you are.

**So you think you came out better off?**

Oh

03:30 I should never have married the woman but I did. She was an only child, she was from Sydney, she was navy. And we only knew each other for 17 months total and of that I had 11 months in New Guinea. She writes a good letter. And I had sometime in Mount Gambia, Port Perry and in Perth so that it wasn't a long

04:00 engagement, in fact we didn't get engaged until after we had been married for 30 years. I often wondered how and when and why. However it has lasted 60 years. She saw something in me and I saw something in her and there was no blind flashes or blue lights or across a crowded room, she was just doing her next door neighbour

04:30 a favour and finished up with me.

**I believe your anniversary was yesterday.**

Yes, yes and the partying for convenience and for family. My daughter is coming over from Sydney with her husband. But next weekend we let our hair down. But yesterday was the day. But we got this far.

**Congratulations.**

And I perhaps for good measure

05:00 she finished up going from Sydney to Derby and our first son was born in Derby so it took a bit of an adjustment to go from civilised Sydney in a harbour side home inside of the bridge to Derby by the marsh.

**That is commitment.**

With 110 in the

05:30 water bag and no air conditioning and only child. To being a mother up there but she stayed with me and the young bloke got a master of science degree etc. and survived, he will be at the shindig [party] on Saturday and Sunday. But back to Sydney. We haven't got to New Guinea yet.

06:00 **Were you involved in any exercises in Sydney or what was your...**

I was called upon to find midget submarines in Sydney harbour. Low level but they shalt not go under the bridge. So we cut the speed down to about 200 mile an hour and raced around Sydney harbour at low level looking for midget

06:30 submarines. But that might have been recompense. I mentioned earlier about getting tied up, all the aircraft went from Richmond to Wagga. Wagga was a major mechanical workshop area and they were to modify it I think. They got sludged in something or other and they had to be modified so all the aircraft went to Wagga

07:00 and they were in various stages of disrepair and Sydney said "Must have a Boston for the defence of Sydney". And they said back "Haven't got one serviceable" and they said "Thou shalt. We must have one". And the blokes had arranged a party that night and I wasn't the belle of the ball or the chief party goer,

07:30 I was a very young innocent, ignorant bloke from the west. Since the air force decided they must have an aircraft they found one, actually the bosses, and the back hatch had been taken off and they wired it back on. The compass was out of the cockpit and the navigator had a compass and I had a giro and the PA [Public Address]

08:00 worked. One disadvantage with the Boston was no personal direct contact between crewmembers. I couldn't see or hear them or contact them. I touched the finger of the navigator or the gunner at the back so off we went. The weather at Wagga was atrocious. I think the word of the met man was if you stand on your tip toes you will see fine weather. Away we went

08:30 and I got caught up into a thunderstorm and I think they called it an upset and when we came to we lost all PA so even the giro had spun so I didn't have a compass and the maps had gone back out

09:00 of reach and I looked out and I thought the main planes had been bent but in fact they had been strained to the extent that some of the camouflage painting had come off so that the paint looked as though it had come up. So we got out of that and shook your head and found a railway line around Goulburn way I think and

09:30 followed it eastward. And we were going merrily and I set my giro on my guest heading of the railway line and it went into a tunnel, it wasn't wide enough for me to follow through so I went over the top. We

eventually got to Richmond and when I got there, it would appear that there was a bit of mayhem at the back end of the aircraft. Oh I forgot when

10:00 we were about to leave Wagga the wing commander came and said he wanted a lift to Sydney. And wing commanders were someone and he was a bit insistent. So I said "Alright I am leaving in 10 minutes if you have got a parachute you can come" he said "Get me a parachute" and I said "My orders are to get to Sydney, if you get a parachute and if you are here you can come". Pilot officer

10:30 wing commander, he raced around and got himself a parachute and he sat on the floor in the back with his parachute on the back hatch and he was leaning back on it and when we got the upset the back hatch well it was tied on untied and went out and the parachute went out and apparently

11:00 half the wing commander went out with the parachute. They grabbed him and got him back on board but that was that. I knew nothing about that. But when we got to Richmond I sat still in the cockpit to shake my head a little and the wing commander I never saw him again. But that was it. Obviously we should never have taken off from Wagga

11:30 but it was a near miss due to weather and if you want the squadron song on that one "They had Rowell's aeroplane, they had wings on and he flew into cloud and when he came out bottoms up he nearly wore a shroud". So that is what I thought in recompense for that experience they gave me the job of low level around Sydney harbour

12:00 at 200 mile an hour looking for submarines with a girlfriend at naval base headquarters, much more impressive than driving a Harley Davidson.

**I imagine it must have been quite a thrill flying the harbour at that altitude?**

Yes for a 21 year old it was 3300 horsepower, you get quite a belt in your backside when you put the power on.

12:30 No they were.

**It is a bit more than 1200 isn't it? It is a bit more than 1200 on a motorcycle?**

Well they were a wonderful aeroplane and anyone could fly them. If they weren't that good I wouldn't be here.

**Would you have put it under the bridge if you were permitted?**

It would have been much better to put it under the bridge. It wouldn't upset the traffic much if you

13:00 just went straight under. I wasn't game to misbehave.

**You might have been overstepping the mark a little?**

Oh it was one of those things. I think generally the air force prohibited it because it was quite a popular thing to do, I think, but you might have a bit of fun doing a stall turn over the bridge.

13:30 **So you reinterpreted the orders to suit you?**

Well I obeyed the letter of the law.

**What was wartime Sydney like?**

Early on before I met my wife, we didn't see much of it, we were fairly busy at Richmond and it was a bit of a trek to get into Sydney and back

14:00 and certainly as I said before when the boys got stuck into the long bar at the Australia I tendered to have a ferry trip to Manly or a tram trip to Bondi for a couple of hours anyway but it was still. All the yanks [Americans] were there, in fact the lady upstairs is alleged to have had a dance with some yanks and one

14:30 of the yanks she was dancing with said he was "Charlie blah blah junior the III" or something, and "I am a millionaire". "Oh yes and I am the Queen of Sheba" And the next day in the newspaper there is this photo of the millionaire. But she burnt her boats and she had to put up with me that was before we met actually. But she had her chance of getting

15:00 a millionaire instead of getting a Victoria Park boy.

**Obviously the midget subs were discovered in Sydney harbour while you were based at Richmond. Do you remember reading that news in the press? Do you remember receiving that news in the press?**

What news?

**Of the midget subs?**

Oh yes

- 15:30 actually Silvia was on duty in naval base headquarters when the torpedo went under Chicago, the US [United States] battle ship and the Australian navy training ship combo, some name or other. Or on the other hand we had been doing anti sub patrol off the east coast and several ships
- 16:00 had been sunk like submarines over the month. It was crazy really to have a Boston that couldn't fly any less than about 110, 120 mile an hour going around and around, a convoy of coal burners that couldn't do eight knots particularly in the winter time. You would spend the few
- 16:30 hours going around and around and getting dizzy and then you would go back to Richmond and have a cold beer and a hot meal and get up the next morning and instead of going there you went 10 degrees and the poor buggers had been there all night rocking around in the sea making good, or some of them I remember one signal the fella dropped behind and said he cannot
- 17:00 maintain the speed of a four knot convoy. We stalled at 110 and they couldn't make four. They put up with all sorts of weather for weeks on end perhaps and we had a dry bed and a good meal and tried to make them feel happy that we may or may not have been able to do something
- 17:30 about a submarine if it turned up.

**So how effective do you think your patrols were in preventing the ships being sunk there?**

Oh very attractive we never saw a submarine.

**Because you were going too fast or?**

No it was a matter of time, one of the blokes thought he saw one but they were to attack at night or in a rainstorm. In the event I never saw one, but

- 18:00 they were there.

**Well ships were being sunk.**

Yes.

**Were those ships or convoys that your squadron was patrolling so?**

I believe so. I don't know the statistics. We were only tiny tiny clogs in a very big security and it was top secret and we weren't told too much and my wife knows more about it than I do.

- 18:30 In that naval base headquarters she could tell you probably the names of the ships that were sunk. And actually the names of the Americans that might have been sunk further up north. She in fact deciphered our attack our squadron attack on ports when we were in New Guinea

- 19:00 and she knew much more about what was going on than I did.

**I am just curious Harry to know what your reaction was when subs that actually entered the harbour whilst your squadron was actively patrolling the coastline for subs?**

They were midget subs and they were a great surprise to everyone. It only happened once and it was almost shock horror and next morning it didn't really happen. There

- 19:30 wasn't well, perhaps there wasn't much point in taking it too seriously. You took it, you took note of it but there was nothing that you could do about it and it was one off and they only, they missed their target, which was Chicago
- 20:00 and it is a tiny bit old Ma Sheen would have told you about the midget submarines in Norway I think it was. I heard it wasn't a regular occurrence in Australia it was one off over there. Except old Max got up to Indochina later. In Europe there was a bit of it that went on
- 20:30 but certainly they were heady days. The Brisbane lion was a reasonable and rational deal no matter what the politicians say or who they want to blame, it was. We didn't at the time if Japan had continued on its merry way as it had done from Manchuria down to Singapore and right through
- 21:00 Hawaii. We were very close to being invaded whether you like it or not. And I might get round to suggesting that whilst I have unqualified respect for our own army and what they did and they did a fantastic and marvellous job, dysentery may have played a part in the Japanese army
- 21:30 but that had nothing to do with them being cannibals. But we haven't left Richmond yet have we.

**No we will leave those thoughts for later. Well ok we will move on from Richmond.**

Well as I said earlier they gave me an aeroplane in August, my Jessica. The squadron was to go north,

- 22:00 Australia might be invaded, it was September. The Japanese got within 17 miles of Port Moresby and if you know Port Moresby country it is down hill and fairly open country. And there was a bit of a panic on. Our squadron was ordered north but my Jessica was given to someone else and I was put in charge of a road convoy.

- 22:30 The trains were full etc. and they said our squadron vehicles, tankers and servicing trucks utilities up by road. And as a 21 year old I was given charge of it with some of the transport workers and others, there might be over 40. But away we went and set off and in those days there were a lot of
- 23:00 what they call, not barges, but across the rivers, they had. I will think of the name of it later, and they were sometimes on wires across the river and they pulled themselves across, punts, punts. And we couldn't get all of the cars in one punt,
- 23:30 punt in two or three of the rivers but we managed and got the whole lot up to join the squadron. My aircraft went from Richmond to Charters towers. They thought the invasion might come down through Townsville but when the heat was off by the time I got up there they were in Townsville and whoever had taken my aircraft my Jessica had
- 24:00 mistreated her and she needed servicing back at Wagga. So I took her back from Townsville down to Wagga to be serviced. And while they were servicing her of course there was some interest in Sydney. So I went to Sydney for a night or two and went back to Wagga to do a test flight, first thing in the morning. I took off but
- 24:30 I got an engine fire soon after take off and that didn't, the cockpit in the Boston is way out front and the engines are down the back and it didn't look too bad from the front. And on the final leg I will never forget it was a cloudless sky and yet I saw a cloud shadow on the ground and I thought that is funny I didn't see any cloud
- 25:00 shadow. But when I got closer to the ground, the closer I saw a silhouette of an aeroplane at the head of the two or three miles of cloud was smoke. So I got my tails on fire so I, by the time I got onto the ground there was more damage. So I didn't get away from Wagga but I got back to Sydney again which helped my romance really.
- 25:30 **You were able to visit your future wife or your future bride. You were able to visit your future bride?**
- Yes she was working shift work at Kings Cross naval base headquarters and between shifts I would catch up with her but it was a consequential sort of
- 26:00 deal. No blinding lights but we got to know each other.
- Did you discuss the war often together?**
- Not really. She was not allowed to discuss her part of it and I wasn't in it up till then. She, her stuff was really top secret really, surprisingly top secret but
- 26:30 she never discussed it with me and actually I didn't know until the end that she knew what I was up to while we were in New Guinea. When I say what the squadron did. The navy got copies of our attack report but so we were a little longer in Wagga. Sorry I should have mentioned it perhaps. The
- 27:00 test flight was done first thing in the morning before the troops had arrived and when they saw the fire and whatnot they all gathered around to see the show. And when I landed no problems, except the firemen etc. started playing merry hell and I was walking away you know nonchalant and carefree with a parachute over my back
- 27:30 and got about 10 metres from the aircraft and the main wheel, main tyre blew out and I dragged myself down from about 6 foot up and continued walking, but no it made a bit of a mess one way or another. But it gave me more time in Sydney but I didn't get to New Guinea until the
- 28:00 end of November. So incidentally Bill Newton he was in the Boston squadron, he was a bit, he was citizen air force, senior to me and much more sophisticated but. Bill came back from Townsville to Wagga and so he was late getting up to New Guinea, but he didn't have a fire in his chest flight
- 28:30 so I was three or four weeks behind him.
- So he had problems with his craft as well?**
- Yes much the same as I did. Not, I can't recall precisely what was wrong, but we were ordered by our engineers to get something done and we delivered the aircraft down and they did it.
- How long were you grounded then in Sydney?**
- Well we started by road
- 29:00 in mid September. By the time we got to Townsville by road and played around up there for a while. I was on standby for night fighter defence of Townsville at one stage and perhaps it is an idea to tell you about the facilities we had or the
- 29:30 preparedness we had. A flying boat used to come over fairly regularly at 20,000 feet a reconnaissance plane, Japanese. And I was on the night fighter defence of Townsville and I was told that when they rang the gong I should get to 20,000 and "I said I haven't got any oxygen"



- 30:00 and they said "Well what do you want oxygen for?" and once you get about, the limit says 10,000 "But I will go to 12 maybe 13,000 but not 20 thank you". "Oh oh well". Again being me to a point he said, "Well you go and sleep under the wing of your aircraft and when we need you we will
- 30:30 race over and wake you up and you can go up in the air" and I said "Oh yeah" and I saw a camp stretcher in the corner of their office and I said "You don't sleep on duty do you?" I said "To save you running and I am younger than you I will camp on the stretcher and not in the dust and
- 31:00 the noise outside and you just have to reach over and wake me up". But that is how I spent the night, but nobody woke me up and that was that. But that was the defence of Townsville in September, October 1942.

**It sounds as though all of Australia was nearly asleep when Japan was about to invade?**

In fairness

- 31:30 the whole of the allied forces were up against it. In my opinion, if Hitler hadn't attacked Russia, Britain would have gone under. If Japan hadn't attacked Pearl Harbour [American Naval Base in Hawaii] when and the way it did, America
- 32:00 wouldn't have come in and as whole heartedly as they did. And Britain would have gone under and so would we. But thanks to Mr Hitler deciding not to invade England but attack Russia. And thanks to Hirohito [Emperor of Japan at the time] for attacking Pearl Harbour and persuading the Americans rather effectively that they should join in I believe
- 32:30 that we might have been speaking Japanese or German now. It was a very close show. What lead me to that?

**I said I thought Australia sounded as though it was asleep.**

We had nothing. We got Boston's by accident. They had yellow, orange triangles on them when they arrived. We had a few Beauforts that weren't very

- 33:00 air worthy early on, a couple of Hudsons, most of them were shot down in Singapore etc. and a growing number of beaufighters that were excellent I might add and get on my hobby horse at this stage. The national war museum in Canberra [The Australian War Memorial] does not have a beaufighter or a Boston in it. And the chief
- 33:30 of air staff in April 2003 in his brief on the squadron, his brief didn't include anything we had done in New Guinea in 1942, 43.

**So he is still asleep?**

No too many people in high places are dependent on their staff. I spoke to him

- 34:00 personally and he said his briefing didn't include anything. You can't expect the chief of air staff to know the history in 2003 what happened 60 years ago. I mean he relies on his staff to brief him on what he should say about 22 City of Sydney squadron. And whatever they did, they didn't connect with the history. But it was there to be had if they wanted it.
- 34:30 But there you are. I reckon, I wrote to him eventually and gave him a list of what was done in my memory and in my logbook in 42, 43 and I told him not to worry too much there were mistakes in fact. In Bill Newtons VC [Victoria Cross] citation, so they make mistakes in all sorts of places and you can't blame the
- 35:00 Chief of Air Staff or whoever dishes out VCs, when the bureaucrats or whatever gave them inadequate or incomplete information.

**What were the mistakes in?**

Oh I have got a record of it there. Bill arrived in November and he was killed in March I think. And they have got him there according to the

- 35:30 citation he was there in New Guinea, I think they said 10 months, where in fact he was there for four or five and the number of services and attacks he did they must have included anti sub patrols and one or two other. Bill is a wonderful bloke, marvellous fellow, man amongst men. I would never denigrate him for one
- 36:00 second but he got his head lopped off and that was unfortunate and that gave him well I don't know.

**Perhaps we should discuss your relationship with Bill and what happened to Bill a bit later on.**

Bill was a man amongst men. He was a wonderful fella but he, I was never in his group.

- 36:30 One of the Boston fellows that returned from England. There was a fellow called James Bulmore. You might know Kerry Bullmore Packer [Australian media mogul] with the son James Packer. Well James Bulmore was an uncle of Kerry Packer and James came back from England the same time as my mates,

he had been trained in Canada

37:00 and did his ATU etc and did a full course and was a full bottle on Bostons and was one of the five that came back from England. Well he obviously had a nice home base in Sydney and they had one or two parties and if there were one or two single ladies or widowed ladies etc. Bill was first choice to make up the numbers and

37:30 I was probably the 50th choice or 30th choice so I was never in the personal group that forms in these places.

**Not quite as eligible?**

No, no never. Bill was a son of a dentist whose home was near the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne. He was a CBD

38:00 youngster. Melbourne Grammar [school] and well a different background to any that I had had. And he was a great sportsman, a great, a competent and had great success. And as such he was a man amongst men and a welter amongst ladies.

38:30 But I didn't know him really in that he was in Sydney in a set that I wouldn't qualify or be in the same strata.

**Interesting. I believe you were asked to collect his things when he was killed in action.?**

Yes.

39:00 Yes, God knows why but I was given three pilots things to clear up. Three in a row, boom boom boom. Bill was the last and I cleared up his things, no big deal there. Being me perhaps I went to the CO and said, "Look you have given me three blokes boom boom boom.

39:30 Three in a row. And to every other bloke the same rank the same mustering was given three don't give me anymore" and he virtually said "You will do what you are told or else". I said "Well please don't embarrass me by asking me to do anymore until everyone else has done three, please don't embarrass me". It might embarrass you too. I was never asked to do another one so old

40:00 Bills, there was nothing much to do. We didn't have much gear up there and he was single and I don't think his contacts with the ladies was put in writing that often, not as bad as one of the others. Again theoretically for a 21, 22 year old by then

40:30 you are supposed to not delete anything and give everything and send everything back, but things like razor blades and stuff that was hard to get it was traditional to sort it out and even other matters, discretion could and did apply even illegally.

41:00 But I am known to be breaking laws...

**I think on that note we can break for lunch. We are getting the wind up.**

## Tape 5

00:31 **So how did you find out that you were going to be posted to New Guinea?**

Well we were in the squadron and the squadron was posted to New Guinea and we were attack bombers, ground strafing and dive bombing and that seemed where the war was supposed to go. Just do what you are told.

**So can you tell be about some of the preparation that you went through?**

Very little.

**I mean what did you pack?**

Well I went up by road

01:00 so there was, you didn't have much, you only had a kit bag and perhaps. It was appropriate, in vocation depot they gave me an overseas kitting allowance. Forty pounds and I spent it on whatever they needed to be sent on so I didn't get posted overseas. So the bureaucrats got

01:30 onto it. New Guinea wasn't overseas. It was mandated territory. So they took the 40 quid back and apparently somebody complained. We were out of touch and didn't need any money anyway. So they refunded it, but low and behold we were married in January 1944 and both went to Tasmania, neither

02:00 of us had much money. Both of us had savings bank accounts, the signatures hadn't crossed Bass Strait, they took the forty quid off me again and put me down to a shilling a day and we are living in the Launceston Hotel.

**That is bizarre.**

However they gave it back to me, so they gave it to me three times and took it back twice and there was a war on.

**Incredible when you hear stories like that you think gee there must be so much red tape?**

02:30 Well bureaucrats have a lot to answer for. Uniform bureaucrats are about the most worst in the world. There are some exceptions of course. A bureaucrat in uniform pulls his rank as well as his, however, that is fact.

**That is very funny and also true.**

But if you want the final bureaucrat deal, I had leave without pay.

03:00 I was manpowered out but when the war finished they put me back on the payroll to discharge me. I was granted. I applied for leave without pay on a manpower basis to go into business or help my brother in his business. I did that from Cunderdin, but in the meantime they posted me to Temora and in Cunderdin. I had twice as many instructors as pupils

03:30 and twice the time to train them in but in Temora they just released 40 policemen from manpower. It was April 45 and I was working like a drovers dog in Temora and they released me manpower. I couldn't take all of my flying kit back in the aircraft so they said we will send it through. By the time they wanted to discharge me

04:00 16 months later, it hadn't arrived. So they said you can't have your discharge until you pay two pound two for seven pence a penny for blankets and flying kit and stuff and I refused to pay it. I was on the payroll so I had another fortnight as flight lieutenants pay. So I decided I had had enough. I had done all I wanted to do. So I was happy to pay it.

04:30 I had already got a fortnight's or three weeks extra pay. So I went to get my discharge and pay my two pound two seven pence and before I opened my mouth they said we have decided to discharge you without you paying it. So about 10 months later the kit arrived.

**I was going to say how long did it take...**

I used the flying boots to play Father Christmas several times and the grey blankets are the same as at Rottneast and

05:00 the flying kit etc. is with the aviation museum and I never did pay the two pound two and seven pence apney.

**Well it certainly got some good use. Just as well it came to you eventually.**

However bureaucrats we have had enough of that, we will get onto it I hope with the Department of Civil Aviation.

**I am sure you have got a lot to say on that one too. Anyway**

05:30 **just getting back to where we were, where did you, did you fly into New Guinea?**

Yes well I took the road convoy up to the Queensland border and brought Jessica back to Wagga and got to and fro and eventually took Jessica to New Guinea in late November 42 and that was when we went to war

06:00 but.

**Before we go into that can you tell me the story of how your plane got called what it was. You told me in the hallway a little while ago, how it ended up being called Jessica?**

Well Jessica, the squadron letters were DU and all the aircraft were ABCDEF and mine was J. So the girlfriend's second Christian name

06:30 was, she told me it was Jessica, that is the only lie she has told me, in fact she was Jessie and Jessie was the elephant at Taronga Park Zoo and as a youngster she got chided with it because she was a bit chubby. So Jessica she was and Jessica it is but that was how Jessie became named.

07:00 Some of them had odd cartoons on the front but I never bothered and I almost insisted that the resurrected Jessica not have anything on it so it is in Point Cook with just a string of yellow bombs to indicate that it might have gone to war one day. But there is a photograph there of her on her belly and a photograph there that was published in America. We

07:30 could go to the bureaucrat in that. The censorship in Australia was very bureaucratic, particularly in the early days.

**Is this during the war?**

And they didn't take much notice of deadlines that newspapers have but the newspapers could reprint

anything, anything that was printed in America with the time difference.

08:00 A lot of the America, I believe a lot of the newspapers in Australia have a biased towards America because they reprinted stuff that was published rather than wait for the Australian side to be censored.

**So what you are saying is we got the American side of the story rather than the Australian?**

I will give you an example. The Australian forces fought for months through the worst conditions ever

08:30 on the ground. Worse than Kokoda. They battled from Wau to Salamaua or the coast, south and east of Salamaua. They got to a place called Nasour Bay, they lit flares on the beach and the Americans arrived. The headlines in the Australian papers were "Americans leap frog up the New Guinea coast".

09:00 Two days later about this much can now be revealed that the Australians also took part. They lit flares on the beach to show the yanks which way to come. I have little doubt they had some very nasty coffee waiting for them but. In some, I hate the phrase, socio-economic circumstances people read, "Where have you been?"

09:30 Nothing in the paper about you. You reckon you have been slogging it out for months and all we hear about".

**If it is in the paper it must be true?**

Very seldom is there anything in the paper on aviation true or completely true. We might get to that later.

**We will get to that one a bit later. So you have flown into Port Moresby is it?**

Yes board strip.

10:00 Actually we went there and we lost three aircraft in a hurry, more bureaucracy.

**Why did the three aircraft get lost quickly?**

Three yeah, we were dropping anti personnel bombs, 20 pound anti personnel bomb. Finished soon after World War I. And they were such, they were in canisters and the anti personnel side

10:30 were exposed above ground. They were jammed in a canister when they were loose a spring loaded pistol came out so they were live so that when they hit the ground the explosion was above ground. I don't know whether in the 1st World War or when they were invented they put them over the side and dropped them. But my view is that dropped maybe six at a time

11:00 from straight and level from about 60 miles and hour. We were dropping them, I don't know 20 at a time at maybe 300 miles an hour and as soon as they left the aircraft the pistol spring loaded in the slip stream, boom boom boom. And eventually

11:30 have you heard of Damien Parer the movie turned Parermount news fellow.

**Yep.**

He spent sometime with the squadron. I took him out a couple of times so he could photograph the CO or the flight commander doing his job. He is a nice bloke. We got Damien Parer to go up with the CO and God knows why but the CO gave me the job of flying above him with a load of 20 pound bombs

12:00 deloused and I dropped them and Damien Parer photographed them and they were. So we sent a message to Melbourne and said we are not going to drop these anymore we are killing ourself. And bless their socks they said, "Well yes very well done". We have got on file here of the same aircraft dropping the same bombs in North Africa, did the same thing, they killed themselves too. The date of that memo

12:30 is seven months ago. So if we had a serviceable aircraft I think Claude Sladen threatened to go down to airport and shoot the lot of them in that we lost including Jimmy Belmore. So that we weren't very efficient in Australia in some aspects of the war game.

**Well that is just, you know in seven months they could have just...**

13:00 Well.

**It makes you angry.**

There was, well a camel could have got from Melbourne to New Guinea if it could swim. No it is the lack of overall knowledge and understanding but more particular in my view you feel a damn arse and a fool,

13:30 why wave the flag and advertise it knowing the sensibilities of good friends and mates that have got the chop. Apart from three aircraft,

**Sure.**

which was shot. We didn't get any replacements between the ones that were dumped in Melbourne in

April 42 until January 44. So we were like the 22 little

14:00 green bottles hanging on the wall. But I think to go back to your question when we got back to New Guinea we lost three or four and there were more pilots than crews, that meant the proportion increased. A lot of the pilots, when I say a lot, a lot of my vintage were posted south. And two or three of the old blokes like Johnny Miles were post south.

14:30 And Charlie Learmonth came to me, he was a very nice bloke Charles, he was my flight commander and gently said I think you are inexperienced and we think you would be better if you went south and got more training. He was quite right of course but being young and silly I got to the war, and I can't say well I got to the war and I didn't do nothing.

**What did you think about that decision?**

I said to Charles "Please can I do one trip"

15:00 and Charles very kindly said "Yes". I don't think we ever dropped a bomb or done any strafing.

**As far as training was concerned?**

About four, five or six of us went across to Wau and I didn't quite know what button to press but we didn't come back with any bombs. And at the debriefing

15:30 I will never forget.

**So what did you actually do? You went to?**

Across to Wau. The Japanese got within a stone's throw of Wau, the 20. The DC3s loaded a 25 pound at Wau Strip. It was put together and fired from the end of the strip at the Japanese so they weren't far away and the army slogged and slogged and they got them back to the coast

16:00 at Salamaua. Our task in New Guinea was basically army close support. The army had a tough nut to crack or the Japanese were being particularly stubborn. They would ring up and say please will you come and soften them up. And we would say when, how and when and we would slip over and. One of our advantages was they didn't know if we were going to bomb them or strafe them. It was all dive

16:30 bombing and strafing. And you don't know if you are going to get 1500 pound of bombs or eight machine guns at you. You tend to duck your head and we went over. On the way back on debriefing, I didn't know how or where anything happened. They said, "Where did your bombs go?" I said "No idea".

**This is in Wau?**

Wau. Near Wau. And Harry Craig

17:00 who was on the trip said "Where did yours go Charles?", Charles was the flight commander, and he said "There" on the map. Well juniors went halfway between yours and the target. And I didn't know until 30 years later that I was posted south to Number 1 service flying training school for more experience.

17:30 But Charles had it cancelled so I stayed in New Guinea. So fate. My mother probably would have preferred that I got posted south. But here I am.

**So what made that change happen?**

You can only guess but first time round and you do better than the flight commander pure arse,

18:00 pure luck. Dive bombing and strafing is not an exact science. It is not an exact science on the flat but in the Owen Stanley ranges, particularly at the bottom of gorges etc. It is very much hit and miss.

**What is the land like over there in New Guinea can you describe what it looks like?**

Well the Owen Stanley's go up to about, madam wants to get through the

18:30 door, Mother will look after her I hope. Hills go up to, oh Mother is down, that is the trouble. Hills go up to 15,000 feet, rainfall gets up to an inch a day most days for year in, year out, and as a consequence there is

19:00 occasionally raging rivers and lots and lots of jungle and we much prefer that when the troops were fighting on top of the ridges when we had an open go but when they were on the bottom of a valley floor in a twisting river bed.

**They have got to be hard to see?**

Well it is hard to get down there but harder still to get out

19:30 particularly if the river went in more than a hairpin bend. So we brought back well I brought back. The gunners complained that the trees were coming through the back hatch so it was time to go a little higher. If you got too far at the bottom and spent too much time there sometimes it was touch and go whether you had enough speed to climb out again

20:00 **With the air currents did that make it difficult flying in those regions?**

Not so much near the ground but it was certainly that way in the build up, you could, well I got some skin trouble up there and for a while I was lying in the sun, taking up the sunshine with anything and everything to try and undo the

20:30 havoc of too much perspiration. I would lie and watch the build up of the daily cloud and they would spurt up you know 5,000 feet, 10,000 feet. If ever you had an ego of any sort if you saw about 30,000 foot of cloud going that way and 30,000 going that way. No

21:00 the weather, the terrain in New Guinea was bad enough for us, it was shocking for the troops. The army I think certainly I have written it. Bill Newton early in the day when we had done some work around Buna Gona, Sanananda and Wau towards Salamaua, Bill said until

21:30 every front line soldier got two gongs, two medals none of us should be considered for one. And we all agreed, the army, apart from dealing with an impeccable foe, it preferred death to being a prisoner of war. They had a shocking time and I dips

22:00 me lid [salute] to everyone of them. Perhaps to quote Damien Parer he came out several times with us, 30 squadron beauefighters he left us and flew to Wau and joined the army at the front line. I have got a letter somewhere or other from Damien, his contract with the Australian people was coming to an end and he had to make up his mind

22:30 and he said "Well if I don't get the job with Paramount News he would certainly join the air force and not the army" but he was quite interesting in being with us and dropping bombs and strafing than being with the army. And one thing they pointed out with eight machine guns firing at a time you are dropping a lot of empty cartridges and

23:00 whilst the arm blokes had tin hats on, the fuzzy wuzzies [natives of Papua New Guinea who helped allied troops] had a lot of fuzzy hair and more than once with the hot cartridges landing in their hair they tended to run off bush and the army complained bitterly that their carriers had gone walk about and gone bush and didn't come back for hours. And they blamed us.

**I didn't even think that that would happen I suppose,**

23:30 **how big are these cartridges?**

Well the 303s and .5 that is point five of an inch. They would be I say about that size.

**Finger size, you know that is coming from a reasonable height and hot.**

Oh now we are down low, we are aiming the aircraft at I wouldn't know.

**So how far above?**

You have to be fairly low to bring up the leaves.

24:00 **So you are literally tree top height?**

For strafing we carried on but bombing we usually used, if we didn't have delayed fuses well generally we had a nine or 11 second delay. So that even they could be dropped from fairly low. It is a fairly inaccurate sort of business if you are going along down hill at

24:30 over 300 mile an hour. It makes a big difference if you are not far away from your target, so we usually aimed our aircraft and held our fire till fairly late.

**So how many guns were there actually on board? There were eight on the front?**

Sadly I would always felt sympathy for the gunners. The pilot

25:00 was busy, busy busy busy, flying the aircraft and navigating bombing, strafing.

**Because you were navigating, flying the plane plus strafing? You have got a lot to do.**

Well you didn't have time to brew. But the poor old gunners in the back, I think there is a photograph, I had a gunner killed instantly and another one injured badly.

25:30 They copped it sweet if they got it themselves and if I copped it sweet there was no hope for them, so. And one gunner had two machine guns on a scarfering of two brownings, and the other bloke only had one. And if you look at the aircraft they were between the trading

26:00 edge of the main plane and the front of the elevators and in front of the great fin and rudder and behind the engines, so that their aim of fire was not great except downwards. And we never manoeuvred the aircraft to give them a shot, I meant targets of opportunity.

26:30 Please don't shoot me, they did occasionally shoot the aircraft themselves because their range of fire

was so poor. So that, and eventually very shortly I left the squadron they cut the gunners down from one, only one instead of two.

**What was the reasoning behind that?**

Well they weren't doing much good anyway. I mean with all due difference.

27:00 I was sorry for them, in that they had three guns between them, and we had eight. We were busy all the time, they had little to do but hoped the pilot didn't make a mistake.

**So you're saying from perspective it would have been much more stressful to be a gunner?**

Yes, yes far more, you have got time to think.

**With your eight guns at the front did you actually feel protected by that?**

27:30 On one occasion yes, very much so.

**Because it is right in front of your eyesight isn't it, so if something crosses your eyesight it is boom?**

And the thing that you hope for is that no one will attack you from that way. And the major problem I ever had with any fighters the silly buggers were 10,000 feet above me, three of them, and

28:00 I don't know whether we could, we were on the level. There wasn't much difference in our speed but they had 10,000 feet, and

**So you are actually travelling at the same speed as the fighters?**

If we were level, but if they had 10,000 feet, they had 10,000 feet of energy downhill is much faster than uphill.

**Gotcha.**

Downhill is much faster than on the level,

28:30 so that they had that advantage and they manoeuvred very skilfully to attack me from dead ahead. Whether they thought I was a Beauforts or something else. But from dead ahead they came nicely into my eight guns, and I nearly took up Shinto religion or something.

**That is very funny. What can you actually see from where you are sitting have you got some sort of perspex?**

29:00 Glass on the top. You get, I had hair in those days. But no if you see the model the whole canopy is see through.

**Would you have the best view so to speak?**

Oh yes yes yes. I did have one trip in the Boston before I went solo. That was in the gunner's position

29:30 behind the main plane, behind the engine and it was a bit like an engine driver you are like this. No, theoretically there was a rudder pedal either side and theoretically, I think it was an American idea to psychological deal, no one has ever managed to fly the aeroplane

30:00 partly because you couldn't see anyway. I mean between the cockpit and the gunner's position the bomb bay and it was aeroplane, and you can't see through it, and then the main planes were very wide like the old Douglas aircraft, passenger aircraft and you would be like an engine driver

30:30 with a truck in between you and close in on the left. No they, I was particularly pleased to be a pilot and busy rather than a gunner and hopeful.

**How claustrophobic was it to be in one of these planes?**

I was never claustrophobic. I mean.

**I mean is it really squeezey in the back with the rest of the crew?**

For

31:00 the gunners. No they had the tail end of the aircraft to themselves there was no, we were pampered, we were given an armour plate to protect and the navigator when we had one and the gunners were with respect also rammed and my heart bled for them. It is nice to be pampered but you have to think of the other fellow

31:30 and they had problems.

**Were you always flying with the same fellas?**

Generally, except I was given a crew and my senior gunner was seven or eight years older than me. I was 21, 22.

**Did that cause problems?**

No, no, he was a good bloke. Of course I was tolerant and respectful of age. No

32:00 we are all on the same boat doing the same job. But as my second gunner, I might add my No 1 gunner and my second gunner are still alive. I am in contact with one in Melbourne, the other one in Brisbane. But the second gunner, I have forgotten, for some reason or other he didn't come with me. And a fellow called Arthur

32:30 Taylor whom I hadn't met I don't think. Crazy enough and it was annoying and I didn't like it we didn't have an aircrew mess in New Guinea and the CO was a permanent air force fellow and officers can't talk to sergeants. And sergeants can't talk to airmen and never shall the train meet except when you are up in the air. So we didn't get to

33:00 know our people and I don't believe I knew Arthur Taylor or I had met him even. He was a sergeant gunner. He was with me on a particular job and he copped a big shell about there and killed him immediately.

**So can you step me through what happened in that particular instance now that we have come to it?**

It is a long story.

**Well we have got plenty of tape.**

We had a good

33:30 CO, Keith Hampshire but he was a bit gung ho [quick to take action]. And I respected him but I told him he was wrong two or three times. Apart from, well I did and that was that. He wanted us, go back a bit. The coastal, coast watch New Guinea coast watchers were a marvellous

34:00 bunch of blokes. They were left behind, they not only watched the coast, but they sometimes watched closer in. If we have got time we might tell you of one meeting they arranged. But I think, anyway the coast watcher rang up and said there is a submarine going past with all deck cargo. That is cargo welded or tied to the outside of it

34:30 going past. By this time we had interfered with their supply line. They were getting desperate so they sent a submarine from Rabaul presumably to Lae. At Lae there was wreck, the Malahang wreck. The coast of that area is a bit volcanic and the wreck was on the coast and in deep water because of the

35:00 incline. And in desperation they were using the Malahang wreck as more or less a land-based wharf. And the sub would get in it last light or early in the evening, undo its cargo and put it in the Malahang wreck wharf or what have you and then off again. So they suggested since it was only there in daylight we should go and

35:30 pay it a visit. And the gung ho CO said lets go over and dive bomb and strafe it. And there were murmurings about dive bombing and strafing it at night. Bombing maybe but eight guns in front of you flashing and you are heading for the ground, pitch black night. Any way there were murmurings

36:00 and eventually someone from the back of the briefing area said, "It is alright for you, you are not going on it". Of course that was like a red rag to a bull, the old man. I was listed as No 2 to Charlie Learmonth so old Hampshire said "Charles I'll go". The rest of the briefing he annoyed me too "Don't you worry Harry, don't you worry Harry you just follow me, you tuck close into me and you do what I do".

36:30 So no strafing but we dive bombed the lot at night. No one had ever done it before.

**Why was the choice made to do it at night?**

Well the submarine was only there for a few hours at night.

**Oh I gotcha, I am with you now yep.**

Target gone. So the CO of course was first in and I was supposed to be second and I was tight behind him and

37:00 to cut a long story short, his particular mate in the squadron broke radio silence and after the CO had dropped his bombs he said "You couldn't hit a bull's arse with a banjo". The CO overshot to blazes. I was too close behind I would waste my bombs if I followed him. So I pulled away and instead of going in second I came in last. And by the time you are last everyone

37:30 knows where you are, what you are doing and what you are up to. I got caught in a search light dive bombing.

**This is a land base searchlight?**

Yeah, I don't know if they had any sophisticated equipment but I didn't see the thing until we were in it. So we were sitting ducks they knew



- 38:00 where we were going and what we were doing so they let all hell at us and we got a few shells here and there and including the gunner, both gunners. One was killed and the other was seriously injured and I got a fright. We were in a difficult position. One of the few short comings to the boss their ideal for desert war far, or
- 38:30 in Russia where you could go from 20 miles behind the line to 20 miles behind the enemy lines, there and back but Port Moresby to Lae up and over and back again was a bit near to the end of our tether or end of our range particularly if you had to make more than one run.

**How big was your range, how big was**

- 39:00 **your range, what you were just talking about?**

Well we were on about extreme range. Thank goodness when we were on Goodenough Island we didn't have the range to get to Rabaul. And Rabaul was a nasty target so much the same when the three squadrons of spit fires came from England. They would have been ideal and wonderful if Australia had of been attacked. But once they

- 39:30 got to the island, unless you were on the same island, New Guinea was too big. They weren't much use except up and down at 50 miles and that doesn't happen often, except if Japan has invaded Australia they would have been invaluable. And Britain

- 40:00 with hindsight, glorious hindsight. Britain would have been better off if they hadn't send them out here. But they sacrificed so that we got in the searchlights and they gave us merry hell. I couldn't go flat out back to base because as you would know if you go at 110 you don't get as far as if you go at 50 on the

- 40:30 same litre of fuel. But we got back to base and there is a photograph there somewhere or a painting of lifting the wounded gunner out of the back end.

**At what point did you realise that one of your gunners was dead?**

Almost immediately, the one that was wounded said, "Arthur is dead and I am wounded". I might add he also said "The shell has gone between the

- 41:00 elevator cables and both are frayed, but I can't get near them I can't move". Coming back over the Owen Stanley's you are wondering, so who ever looks after you, if it had been a bit higher or a bit lower, that was that, but such is war such is mugs luck or

- 41:30 **How far into your tour of duty was it that this big accident happened?**

That was about March 43. It was about four months in.

**So probably by this time you felt like you had a bit of experience behind you?**

Oh yes, we

- 42:00 improved with experience of course.

## Tape 6

- 00:31 Where was I? We were attacking the would be submarine alongside the Malahang wreck and we got clobbered. However we got back to Moresby and the gunner got to hospital and they wanted to chop his leg off and he wouldn't have it. And they got a Doctor in and asked him

- 01:00 and tried to persuade him and he wouldn't have it. They got the CO in and eventually they said you go and talk him into it. I tried and he wouldn't have it, so he didn't get his leg chopped off. I might add he went to Heidelberg, where they evacuated to Heidelberg and after four or five months they gave him some

- 01:30 use for his lower leg. So that, I think from the field point of view an amputation might have been the best but for the long term, they couldn't afford five months in casualty for most casualties and he persisted. But one of the problems then eventuated that his father had died the day before

- 02:00 and the padre was an evangelical God botherer who had bible glasses and ranted on about how naughty most aircrew were etc. and he wasn't very popular with my gunner so they asked me to go and tell him that his father had died. I had been up since about 3 in the morning

- 02:30 and I was a bit concerned that the problems that we had had might have kept me awake. And sleep is a wonderful thing and once you have had a good sleep you can face the world. But at the local cinema, which was a couple of logs between a few branches we watched Greer Garson and Mrs Miniver. And a first release I think it was and she kept me awake until

- 03:00 after 10 o'clock. So once I got to bed I put my head on the pillow and went sound asleep and come next

day I was fit again, well. I didn't have any trauma counselling or whatever else they call it these days. On the other hand I must confess I shared a tent with the squadron Doctor and as a direct result of that he

03:30 afforded me house calls and they weren't all recorded for the official record. So I might have had a scratch or a pain that he wouldn't put in. But he would have checked to see that I didn't, I was fit to go flying again, so my normal gunner was a bit shaken but he came back and we went on.

04:00 The number 2 gunner came up to number 1 gunner for me and we got another bloke in.

**Where did you get him from?**

In the squadron there was, as with the pilots there was much, there was an excess of aircrew to aircraft so that there were always excesses although they posted quite a lot out. They still retained

04:30 too many really.

**How was their time spent when they were on the ground? How was their time spent on the ground if they weren't actively flying?**

Good question. There was no infrastructure, no taverns, no shops, no nothing. It wasn't until six months or more after we had left after we arrived in New Guinea that they opened up a

05:00 pack of officers association. A bit of a restaurant deal in Moresby itself. Perhaps more of that later. Some of them played bridge all day, some of them sat on their bunk all day, some of them wandered around the aircraft. Three of us, a fellow called Bob Wines, Harry Craig and myself. How I got into the act I will never know.

05:30 Bob and Harry were Sydneysiders, they trained in Canada and they went to UK and did a full Boston course and they were two of the five that were brought out from England when the Boston's dropped in our lap. And whilst in Sydney they had their homes to go to, once we got to New Guinea I am not quite sure how, whether they got pity on me I am not sure but the three of us

06:00 used to run around the countryside. Initially, somehow or other we got hold of a mismatched motorbike and sidecar, very dangerous weapon. The roads were fairly well cambered and the gravel used was fairly clay and they were often wet and the unbalanced motorcar and sidecar was quite a danger. More dangerous than

06:30 flying I think. But we used to hell wise and crooked as far as we could into the local villages and missions and whatnot. And then we met an army bloke and he had a 4x4 [Four Wheel Drive vehicle]. He had an engine repair spot and he used to join us when we got farther a field. And then somehow or another the yanks were arriving with jeeps by the

07:00 hundred and I vaguely remember, I had nothing to do with it. I don't know quite how it came about. But the word was, if you put five together for them they gave you the sixth one. So somehow or other they put five together and we finished up with quite a nice jeep so we could really get up and down hillindale and as you saw in one of the photographs

07:30 we even went out in dugouts fishing and running around the coral reefs. If you put a plastic bottom in the kerosene tin and sealed it off and viewed some of the coral and anemones and coloured fish at Local Island I think they called it out of Moresby Harbour. We fished quite a bit.

08:00 We didn't have any fishing line and we didn't have any bait, but somewhere along the line very illegally and immorally three sticks of dynamite and fuses and through it in gave you enough fish for dinner and enough fish for the local tribe as well. There is a photograph somewhere of the all of us with not a costume between the lot of us fishing with

08:30 gelignite. We got up to Rona falls, in fact we got quite. We did a lot of bartering. One of the shortcomings of the American rations, the locals didn't like them. They liked bully beef and biscuits and hard tack but they had little time for asparagus, and pineapples, canned pineapple or salmon. So we were very

09:00 generous to the yanks. We gave them some corned beef and hard tack and they gave us asparagus or that sort of stuff. And we did a bartering on our own account for paw paws and bananas and that sort of stuff. We got enough paw paws to use as a vegetable more or less as a pumpkin. Bit of fresh vegetable.

09:30 The rations in New Guinea in the early days were very poor. There was no alcohol at all theoretically, so no space on any ships for spirits or fermented drinks but the COs brother landed us with a nine gallon keg once.

10:00 And that was one of the best things. I had malaria. That is another story one day for the other coast watcher deal. I got malaria when I was stranded at a place called or near Buna, Gona, Sandanana up that way.

**You were stranded there? Did you say you were stranded?**

Yes we kept an appointment, the Japanese, the coast watchers advised us that the

- 10:30 Japanese made an arrangement to meet some local chiefs at 2.30 in the afternoon what south and west of Lae. Normally we didn't make appointments after lunchtime in that the build up over the Stanley ranges was high and we had no hope. There was a what they call the pass and you get through the mountains
- 11:00 if you could see your way. But once it was midday and it was usually choc a block and it wasn't straight through and they will be finding aircraft 100 years from now that tried to get past and found it blocked clouds full of rocks and stuff and they found them. So we didn't go through the pass on the way out, so I thought of no hope in getting through the pass on the way back. And the weather at
- 11:30 Moresby I thought wouldn't be too good and our CO was leading us in and out of cloud formation which I didn't like and that you are flying on instruments and hoping that you are still not hitting him. So I landed at Dobodura. And I only just recently put a few drums of fuel in and I thought I would land at Dobodura and get a bit more fuel because
- 12:00 ward strip was not easy and we had to play around there to find it, we needed a bit extra fuel. So I landed at Dobodura and we filled up and I was about to taxi out to hop across the mountains and back to Moresby and Charlie Learmonth arrived for fuel and he said "I have got a dud engine I will send you a new one. I will take your aeroplane thank
- 12:30 you". So we landed in what we set up in waiting for Charlie to send an engine for his aeroplane. I might add that only one in whole show of maybe six or seven got through to Wards that day. The other four came back to Dobodura and one hasn't been seen or heard of since to this day. So that was my friend Les Kenway
- 13:00 whom the Jenolan Caves people gave us an extra showing. So we were stranded at Dobodura with next to nothing. The accommodation was poor, they had cleaned up all our own people but there were one or two Japanese still about dead in the mud and we got malaria and that was that.
- 13:30 But when I was convalescing we were in Moresby and the fellow yelled out "G'day Bob what are you doing here" and I said "It is not Bob it is Harold". My brother was Bob and he was the agent for Blue Funnel in Derby and it was a Blue Funnel ship in the harbour. Anyway we got to talking and he said "How are you off for beer?" and I said "Not very good, dry area" and he said "Well you can have 70 dozen if you want it" and I said
- 14:00 "Oh yeah" one and tuppence apney each. But he said "The ship is in the middle of the harbour and we are sailing the day after tomorrow". A dry area and you are not allowed to have any beer so we had to muster the air force crash boat and enough money to pay one and tuppence apney for 70 dozen beer
- 14:30 and get out in the gage roads and up into the ship and back again and in and out without the authorities seeing us or knowing. And we gathered the cash and got out. And I was still convalescing and going up the side of the ship and into the hole and at the third or fourth trip I got a bit woozy but managed to jam the bag of beer
- 15:00 against the side of the ship and didn't break a bottle and came too. I might have been excommunicated if I had broken a bottle.

#### **Precious cargo.**

But we did get beer occasionally. On the nine gallon keg we kept it too long but we didn't agree it was flat until it was empty.

#### **How did you make the 70 dozen last?**

Well

- 15:30 it was mine theoretically. I didn't have that sort of money and as far as I could recall I told the old man that the troops should have one bottle each for free and the officers would pay the lot and they might get maybe three or four bottles each. They could pay maybe \$10 for what they got and the troops could pay nothing.
- 16:00 I think that is how it worked out. He was a bit unco-operative at first. One thing I must mention about old Keith Hampshire and the glorious Boston. The manufacturers and the handling notes and everyone else said "Thou shalt not aerobatic them" you know turn them inside out and flip around. And Keith Hampshire took my aircraft Jessica
- 16:30 and did a fantastic job of airmanship in aero bating my aeroplane and his aeroplane was fully serviceable so as junior officer I told him that I didn't appreciate it.

#### **How did you state that?**

In English. I had no risks to take in it that,

- 17:00 I was complaining that he had aero batted my aeroplane. He broke all the laws in the book by doing it and me complaining that he did it, he would have to admit that he did it. You never tackle a CO unless

you are on very firm ground. He didn't enjoy it. But in fairness he did an amazingly good job of airmanship.

17:30 They were marvellous aerobatics.

**What was the display?**

Over the camp he did some rolls and loops and whatnot and I never told him but as far as I could gather he never did any harm to the aircraft. He may have done and he must have thought he may have done and made do it in that he took my aircraft rather than his own.

18:00 The only other thing was that the two gunners that he took up with him lost their parachutes and last heard there was a fight as to who should pay for them. That is about Malahang wreck and gunners and whatnot. What is next? How Jessica came to be demised.

**Sure we can talk about that now.**

18:30 We were, we would lose three or four aircraft and then head off. As I said you don't pilot replacements because if you lose three or four in three weeks you have only got 22 and for a bureaucrat and you wouldn't lose any for a while and they would think of sending some replacement crews. And then we would lose another three or four and they would say "Oh well

19:00 they are at it again they won't need it". So come to July most of the blokes had been there since October. The summoned powers that be said "Thou shalt have seven days short ops leave" seven days in homeport. Seven days for me in Perth was a damn sight better than seven days in Brisbane. The poor blokes in Brisbane got about nine days away

19:30 and I had certain attractions in Sydney that made it impossible to go past Sydney. And then I went down to Heidelberg to see my gunner and couldn't get past there. And I got to Perth and I got genuinely held up by lack of transport in Perth. And then I couldn't get past Sydney, so I was about three or four weeks away.

20:00 However I got back, in the meantime the squadron had shifted from Port Moresby to a place called Goodenough Island. Goodenough is on the northeastern end of New Guinea, not far, just a whisker north of east of Moresby. By the time I got there they had shifted across to Goodenough. And we operated there away from the army on supply lines

20:30 of the Japanese on the south side of New Britain. And we used to run up there every couple of miles of water, get along the coast of New Britain, and if there was any barges or any activity there we would stir them up a bit. You usually come back towards Gasmata, and if we had any bombs or ammunition left we would give Gasmata a serve.

21:00 We did that fairly frequently. Occasionally they objected but not too badly and then one day Charlie Learmonth and I went out together, just the two of us and we paid a bit of attention to Gasmata and they weren't at all upset so we stayed around and sketched some recent developments and

21:30 made notes etc. When we got back Charlie said "Would you like to lead a trip before you go?". We were all supposed to be finished operations by September, September 30th and we were all posted south. This was August, late August. And we had done a bit of work. The replacement crews had arrived, the new CO had arrived,

22:00 but Charlie was still in charge and he asked me if I wanted to lead a trip and I said, "Yes please". We were briefed initially for four of us to go out up to New Britain and Gasmata and I was to lead it but I had already cottoned onto the new CO. I had established myself, with the help of missionaries and the locals into a bit of a

22:30 cottage. I had had enough of tents. And it had a tiny back and front veranda and a wooden floor, grass roof, mountain views at the back and ocean views at the front. And the CO, the new bloke said that "He was taking over" and I said "No. I am posted

23:00 south I will be out of it in three weeks time. You have it then but not before". And he was insistent being a permanent wing commander. And in the end I had to tell him that the grass roof was very dry and unless I was there as a protector to prevent it from getting on fire, heavens knows what would happen. Wing commanders don't

23:30 like that sort of thing and of course it wasn't air force equipment. I built it with the help of my missionary friends and others and however that made it that I wasn't very popular with him. Charlie stopped his command at midnight and the new bloke took over temporarily, we were briefed in Charlie's time the next morning the new CO acting said

24:00 no the replacement crews, one fella was senior to me, he had only been there a few weeks. He said "He shall lead the show" and I should be the leader of the second pair. There were only four of us. So a fellow called Harry Dawkins, was senior to me so he would be No 1. Peter Gunston, a mate of his from Adelaide was No 2 to Harry and a fellow called Eric Riley was

- 24:30 No 2 to me. Eric and I had joined the squadron within days of each other. We had been together right through from May 42 right through to September the 12th 43. He like, me was on his last trip, posted south. But when we got to Gasmata they were very unwelcoming. Harry Dawkins was shot down and landed in the
- 25:00 sea and is buried in Rabaul. Eric Riley my No 2 was shot down and crashed on the site, he is buried in Rabaul and Peter Gunston, he said they ran out of ammunition so he got away. He was last in, but I copped it in the cockpit in two or three places and I was unaware at the
- 25:30 time, but once I got back to Goodenough Island, when I selected the undercarriage down, I only got one main wheel down and all the hydraulic oil had escaped because it had been shot about. So I had one main wheel locked down, one main wheel swinging, nose wheel swinging and I converted and twirled and bunted and
- 26:00 kicked and I couldn't upset the show at all so I told the gunners to bail out. But I was going to finish up in a bit of a heap I thought and they pleaded with me to stay in. And if we had finished up in a heap I probably would have been hung for letting them stay in but they stayed with me and we landed on one wheel. And we selected
- 26:30 that up and it collapsed, so we just skated along the runway and trickled off the end, we had no brakes, no flaps and only one main wheel so we finished up in a heap at the end of the strip. And that was the end of Jessica until they lifted her out 40 odd years later and wasted millions and she is now a prime exhibit in Point Cook.

27:00 Vintage aircraft museum whilst there is not a Boston as I said earlier or a Beaufighter in the National War Museum. There is Avro Ansons and Tiger Moths but no Bostons or Beaufighters.

**It is quite amazing that they could resurrect Jessica after 40 years?**

Quite amazing?

**Yeah.**

Yeah well it was one of those things, there is a thing there, a cutting from

27:30 an American newspaper that was on the couple that I showed you.

**The photo of you climbing out of the cockpit?**

That one. It is just the American type heading that was 'There is the pilot alive'.

**Hold that**

28:00 **up for the camera to notice.**

Charlie Learmonth has got his shirt off. But that was the end of Jessica and we finished up in a bit of a heap. Actually I came close to being clobbered. We bunted and fiddled around trying to get rid of all the

28:30 petrol on board, we didn't have any bombs and very little ammunition and I knew that once we had come to a stop if there were any likelihood of fire it would happen immediately. But it didn't happen. And I had a favourite propelling pencil, red and yellow and black of all things. I wasn't an aboriginal at the time

29:00 and I wasn't a black armed band man.

**Not an activist?**

But in the end of the propelling pencil, lead pencil in those days, there was a rubber, if you pulled the rubber out there were two tiny dice that you could play dice if you wanted to and in the melee over Gasmata they broke the pencil in half and the dice fell

29:30 to the floor. When I got to a standstill back at Goodenough I went down and searched around the floor looking for my dice. The fireman raced all over the place and thought I had collapsed, they were scared that it would be on fire, so they put an axe through the roof of the canopy of the cockpit just as I was sitting

30:00 up and I said a prayer to sist. Then I got out but when I got out I found I had left the cap behind so that picture was getting out for the second time.

**It is always staged for the media? It always needs to be staged for the media?**

Yes that was September 12th 43 and on September the 12th

30:30 97 they wheeled out the Jessica in Point Cook at Amberley and were kind enough to invite me to the wheel out and gave me that control column and a few bits and pieces to remember it by.

**Sorry to interrupt did you find the pair of dice?**

Actually I didn't mention it.

31:00 I didn't find the dice no.

**You didn't roll a pair of sixes or something? You didn't roll a pair of sixes in the crash landing?**

Might have done but I don't know. But I had Polaroid glasses that I used when we were visiting and whatnot on the ground. To my memory and from recollection I used them for the first time on that raid on Gasmata

31:30 and one of the bullets in the cockpits of the shells hit the side of the would be armour plated Perspex, splintered it and broke one lens of the Polaroid when I was heading for the ground. All you had to do was flick your glasses off and that was that. It is one of those odd

32:00 things that happen that you wonder well who told me to put the glasses on. I am grateful if someone did or if I guessed it right. But every bloke that has been on active service has got sort of almost trivial tales to tell if only or...

**Were you superstitious at all?**

Once, there is a photograph somewhere.

32:30 We had, for want of something to do they had a moustache competition. Longest moustache, you could see them from dead astern. Old fighter pilot sort of stuff. I was No 5 and No 1 got shot down, so I was No 4 and No 4 got shot down, so I was No 3. I am not sure if I did it then or when I was No 2 but

33:00 I chopped it off and went back to No 5. But no I was born on the 13th and married on the 13th and I walk under ladders and try not to get the wrong feeling when I go past a lottery ticket place. No I am not superstitious but I have seen a few

33:30 coincidences. I might add that my wife or girlfriend had a photograph of that and her long time friend and minister who married us when she told him she was going to get married. "Is that uncle of yours from the Boar war that you showed me a photograph of". There is a photograph somewhere of it.

**Is that with the moustache?**

There it is on the bottom there with a clip back.

34:00 **Looking like a man from the early era.**

Yes well it is a long time ago.

**The Boar war yeah it is yeah.**

We had to fiddle around somewhere up at Moresby. I think we did very well in getting up and about even in Goodenough Island there was a 7000 foot hill on it and it rained on the hill every day. There was a

34:30 mountain stream that we would take a tin of peaches or take a tin of spam, and put it under a rock and do our washing, and put it on the rocks and have a swim on the ice cold water that had come from 7000 feet up and the best thing for tinea and skin complaints and it kept us out of mischief. Has the war ended

35:00 yet?

**Oh sorry, I was going to say apart from the fighting you were seeing it sounds like quite a romantic time or idyllic existence.**

Yeah I don't know, my wife would object to the fact that I was ever romantic but, there is certain, I enjoyed flying but I never went overboard with it.

35:30 It was always fascinating. But a lot of people in the racehorse industry, they know the pedigree and record of every horse in the area, yachtsmen know who built what and how and how many races they have won. I wouldn't know much about anything other than the aircraft that I had to fly.

36:00 And my view the art of the time was to forget everything that was not necessary for the job that you had to do. That was the limit of what my brain could hold. And I had no time for all sorts of other things and I have never at the risk of being misunderstood, here is a couple of things in this life that I thoroughly enjoyed and never paid for.

36:30 And flying is one of them and I never paid for it and it is too late now. Well I paid to be a passenger to go around the world etc. but I learnt to fly at the expense of the taxpayer and I continue to fly commercially at the expense of the air traveller

37:00 and I am not going to start flying now. In other words, in any case I finished up in a F28 pure jet for 12 years. If I wanted to hire one of them to fly around I would be broke in no time.

**I just wanted to ask you Goodenough Island sounds like it was quite a remote outpost compared to Moresby?**

- 37:30 Yes well it was an island obviously. But Moresby was limited, we called it along the coast mainly to the west and we got out to Local Island and a few dugout canoes etc. And Rona Falls was about 15 miles inland. And we did get a, that is one thing that may be of interest. Harry Craig,
- 38:00 Bob Wines [Robert Wines] and I got into our jeep and went as far as we could past Rona Falls up to a place, I think it was Arabara. Anyway it was past where the Japanese got and being young and curious we decided we would walk the Kokoda track having had a dry bed and a reasonable breakfast and we walked too far. We thought we would walk
- 38:30 for half an hour endurance and but the going was very tough and whilst the preliminary or the lower slopes that we encountered were trivial compared with the stuff that they endured it was still much for us almost and we were sitting down exhausted near a local Papuan garden that the war
- 39:00 had gone to and fro and the sun was low and just more or less half dozing I saw a tinge of orange in the debris. It was a paw paw that had been knocked over by the war and the paw paw had developed and I clambered down into the scrub and what not and pulled it out. And I think Harry asked for a lime to go with it.
- 39:30 He had his share without lime. We were rejuvenated and we got back to our vehicle and back to Moresby but it compounded our degree of admiration of the army boys that fought and died and put up with all sorts of problems 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. While we were in it for a few minutes
- 40:00 now and in the interim it was quite cosy back home comparatively.

**Just getting back to Goodenough Island I was wondering how many personnel were on the island?**

Well the American something army or other had arrived on Goodenough just before I got into strife and because I converted and twirled and fiddled about they had nothing to do but to come and watch the show.

- 40:30 It was a sad disappointment for the most part but according to the controller the next day he was an excited part Frenchmen and he said "Harry did you see the ambulance I had here did you see the fire truck I had there?". And I had all the American fire brigade or trucks and ambulances spread about and it
- 41:00 would appear to have been quite a show in that at least a part of the airstrip was perforated metal. They put down perforated steel rather, they put down some sort of base, maybe course metal and put the perforated steel locked together for the rest. Once we got down on our belly skating along the steel apparently it was quite a fireworks display. But I was way out
- 41:30 front and didn't know about the fireworks.

**I think we are getting the wind up so I will avoid asking you another.....**

## **Tape 7**

- 00:33 Point Cook, the RAF PR [Public Relations] people rang me up and said, "Would you speak to the press would you answer questions?" I said, "Yes alright" but I said "You have got a bloke in Melbourne who was wounded" I gave them the phone and address. I said "Bill Newton was Melbourne Grammar" and that was that and my
- 01:00 gunner who was with me when I pranged it, gave him his phone number and address and some weeks later I got two or three cuttings from the press saying that I had landed in a swamp in mainland New Guinea and not in Goodenough Island, that I was wounded and I wasn't and it took me three days to walk
- 01:30 out from where I crashed to civilisation. They drove a jeep within 10metres of where I was and drove me away. The final thing was and they said there was a thermos of coffee in the cockpit still when they found it. So being me I got a bit. I told a bloke it was frightening, I was frightened by their lack of
- 02:00 truth in the deal. And then I carried on and they said "You know you missed a golden opportunity on your language, your values, public relations". I said, "That you should have said that the coffee in the thermos was still hot". And he slammed the phone down. I didn't blame him but there you are. And they published the same thing in the air force news
- 02:30 so I wrote to them and said I wondered if I could apply for a purple heart [medal] seeing as though I

was wounded. I could apply for trauma counselling since I was wounded and had to walk through the jungle and could I apply for a pension because I must have been inconvenienced but I didn't get any answers.

**You like to give it a bit of a stir don't you? It doesn't sound like you like reporters**

03:00 **particularly?**

I nearly came close to punching a reporter in New Guinea.

**What happened there?**

When my bloke was killed a little reporter hounded me for a statement and a story. And he approached me three or four days in a row. In the end he came to my tent, which was on top of a rise, and he finished up saying "You owe it to your dead crewmen

03:30 to tell the whole story". So I told him if he was within arms length within five seconds, his mother wouldn't recognise him and I chased him down the hill, he never came back. The only other time I came close to it I got tied up a bit with an F27 with a state rugby team on board etc.

04:00 **When was this?**

Unforecast fog up in Kimberly.

**Ok so we are going forwards. By the way do your button up, you have come a bit apart. That is better. Sorry we just have to**

It is the only hair I have got I wanted to show it off. I have got some on my shoulders.

**You**

04:30 **were going to talk to me about Fitzroy crossing.**

31st December, sorry 31st July 1971. I was captain of an F28 leaving Perth at midnight. And Perth weather was bad and getting worse and Meekatharra weather was bad and getting worse. Port Hedland had fog forecast, Broome had fog. Derby was fine and

05:00 dandy never better, 10pm to 10am no problem. So we had to take Derby fuel out of Perth. And we got to Hedland landed alright but there had been a delay over some time with freight building up and passengers building up to go north and Hedland had fog previously. So we were over, at least not overloaded, there was

05:30 at least double the load available and so we had to take minium fuel headland to Derby. I had read in the paper about six months before why in my opinion with a pure jet aircraft you should have more fuel between midnight and 7am in the wintertime for various reasons. I gave the paper to the company

06:00 for their consideration and three months later I enquired as to what they thought about it and they said "Oh they are still considering it would I give them an extra fortnight?". I gave them another month and there was nothing forthcoming so I gave them the same identical paper without any changes. The Pilots' Federation of Australia and they adopted my recommendations

06:30 and instructed all pilots to abide by them. So out of Port Hedland we had more fuel than the Department of Civil Aviation required, more than what the company required but enough according to the Pilots Federation. For no reason at all I did one of the crazy things that I don't think I have ever done before.

07:00 I instructed the first officer to put on extra 800 pound of fuel. It wasn't at all dangerous out of Port Hedland because in the jargon of the time we would burn up our limited. Our limited weight was landing in Derby. Most modern jets you can land with a ton or two more than you can take off. So away we went. There was fog at Port Hedland inside

07:30 the aerodrome when we were leaving. Got to Derby, we were almost at Derby we rang them up and said "We are descending into Derby present weather". They said, "Visibility was 7 miles but it was hazy". So I worked out what fuel I had onboard and worked out if I could get to Kununurra. So I rang up and asked for Kununurra

08:00 weather at the time Kununurra didn't have an air radio and they worked Wyndham. They said "Wyndham awake yet the weather forecast is not available". However I worked out the fuel to get to Wyndham, Kununurra from 27,000 feet but once we were down at circuit level we didn't have the fuel to climb up.

08:30 The weather didn't deteriorate at all and because there was no problem what so ever and I normally gave every second landing to the first officer. I told him to put it down in Derby. Downwind watching the aerodrome, fog rolled in and covered the place like pea soup

09:00 and we were in trouble so I thought initially, well if the fog rolls in it might just be a patch and if I try hard enough I might find the aerodrome. And Derby township never went under the fog. They had a non



direction beacon and

09:30 distant measuring equipment and a non direction beacon was at miles ball which is a couple of miles from the aerodrome. Anyway we tried to find this strip because at night there is nowhere else to go, Broome was out, Hedland was out, Kununurra was too far away. And so we tried very hard to find the strip at Derby and broke a few rules in doing it.

**Like what, like what?**

10:00 Well gravity was going to take over shortly so rather than just go plonk, I decided we would go lower than was recommended. I am here so it wasn't, I might add in one of the enquiries they said it was dangerous. It was dangerous, it was frightening I was sweating in my palms,

10:30 dangerous certainly I knew it was ruddy dangerous but what is the alternative? In the end it transpired normally. The telephone line between Fitzroy Crossing and Derby is closed, between Friday 5pm and Monday morning, this was Saturday morning.

**You have got to love those country towns.**

But the Australian Inland Mission had a patient

11:00 who wasn't very well and at the sisters request they asked for the line to be remained open between AIM [Australian Inland Mission] hospital at Fitzroy Crossing the Derby Hospital for the patients benefit. Someone found out that that was open so they got the Derby Hospital to tell the AAM sister that we were in trouble and

11:30 they only had one telephone station and the sister was walking from the sisters quarters to see how the patient was getting on, heard the telephone and rang up. Fitzroy Crossing AAM Hospital which is about 2 miles from the pub, which is about 2 miles from the new town and police station which is about

12:00 2 miles from the aerodrome, 4 o'clock in the morning. So the sister did a wonderful job in getting people about. I might add we had the state rugby team on board and 56 passengers total. And we discussed landing on the Marsh at Derby but that wasn't very good. Fitzroy Crossing aerodrome was not licensed for the F28

12:30 any time, day or night. It had been US the day before for light aircraft because it was overgrown. When they got to the aerodrome eventually they found the contractor who had the contract supplied fares for the flying doctor service in an emergency, he wasn't available. All the flares were empty and there was no kerosene at the

13:00 aerodrome.

**That is unbelievable.**

And we had no contact directly from the aircraft to Fitzroy. So it all had to go from the aircraft to Derby to Fitzroy. They said they would have a flare pile out within 20 minutes, well all the flares were empty, there is no kerosene and there are no spanners to open the flares to put the kerosene in, they had to run back into town to fetch them.

13:30 They had told me that they, I said, "What end of the flare of the runway when you start laying the flares", they said "Which end do you want?" I said "You tell me where you will put them so there will be no misunderstanding", "Which end can they get to first?" they said the "Southern land". "Thank you very much". We were 27,000 feet up fiddling around. Eventually

14:00 there is a glimmer of light and I thought oh yeah. But you are running around at 120 mile and hour and you got your back to the, and they disappeared and then eventually six kerosene flares were lit. I was getting very very short of fuel so I dived in and it transpired that they were on the northern end of the strip.

14:30 It transpired that they had put two or three vehicles on the other end, pointing out. Then they said the glare might upset the pilot so they turned the vehicles around so they had the back to where we were 20,000 feet, 8 miles away going around and around. So they didn't look very bright from where we were so we had to go around again. My first

15:00 officer said we didn't have enough fuel to make it and I said we might and we did. But we ran out of fuel completely after taxing about 100 metres on after landing, both engines and the auxiliary power unit has got air in fuel in the airlines etc. So we had a bit of fun. Once they had to send an engineer up from Perth

15:30 to bleed the air out of the fuel line. They put me room 13 actually at the pub. And I rang, by this time they had opened the airwaves and I spoke to our operations people and told them that I hadn't scratched anything. And then I rang the Department of Civil Aviation and I knew both of the blokes quite well I had been to

16:00 high school with one and I knew the other bloke from Sunday school days. They said, "Well if you are happy to take off do so". So I ran up and down the airstrip in a land rover etc. and decided to take off.

And once the engineer got up from Perth we took off with everyone except three oil workers, they were hoping to get off in Derby and

- 16:30 wait in Derby and get a light aircraft to take them to Fitzroy Crossing. So they liked the early arrival in saving the expense. But it would appear that, once I had spoken to everyone and gotten permission the phones went dead again. But the newspaper, no the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] representative at Fitzroy got a message through that we had arrived
- 17:00 there and that went through to Melbourne. Melbourne ABC rang the director general of Civil Aviation and said "Hey.....at Fitzroy Crossing", "No, No I would be the first one to know". I should have indisposed. The Regional Director in Perth was
- 17:30 ill. The acting Regional Director was my mate and he said "Oh Charlie is ill I won't wake him to tell him, Harold says everything is alright I will leave it till 7 o'clock". The Director General rings the Regional Director here, the Victorian bloke didn't know that he was ill. Rang him at his home. "Hey.....ABC said ....F28 at Fitzroy Crossing", "No I don't know nothing
- 18:00 about it I would be the....." and the Regional Director rang the acting Regional Director "Oh sorry Charlie no I meant to....I was going to ring you at 7 o'clock and tell you all about it". So nobody knew and everyone started off half cocked. Reggie Ansett was in Perth staying in the hotel. Saturday, they had a special edition of the daily news on race day Saturday. Delivered
- 18:30 to Reggie in his room, the front page and nobody had told poor Reggie. So everyone started off half cocked and then I left Fitzroy and Melbourne had said naughty you. You are not allowed to leave Fitzroy we must do some work. It is a gravel strip and F28s should not work on gravel and not with passengers etc.
- 19:00 So they sent a truck from Derby to stop me but I had got airborne before it arrived. So they were a bit upset one way or another that I had been given permission to and they couldn't hang me for going so they would have to hang one of their own and that wouldn't be good. So the game began. I went back to Derby and onto Darwin. Did a trip out of Darwin then it was convenient to replace

- 19:30 me and take me back for questioning.

#### **Did you get grilled?**

Well a fellow rang up my wife and said "They are bringing Harold down a day earlier, they want to ask some questions and just between you and me Mrs Rowell he must be just the boy to answer them." So the game went on and I admitted immediately that I

- 20:00 put the extra 800 pound but it wasn't dangerous for take off as long as you knew it was there. And they said "Well don't tell the Department, don't tell them no". So in the Department enquiry when they asked me how much fuel I had left when I had landed the senior man in
- 20:30 the company answered the question without taking off the 800. So well if they will take that that is alright, no place to argue. So that went down, we had a company, a little company enquiry. The chief of flying in Ansett had recently been changed. A bloke had had it for about 20 years and was pushed into accident
- 21:00 investigation and the new fellow introduced the F28 and he trained me as captain on them. But the accident investigator didn't like not having the No 1 job still so he got anti me and applied to the Department to cancel my licence because I put the extra 800 pounds on and broken a few other rules in the book.

#### **Well if you didn't have the extra 800 pounds you would be dead.**

- 21:30 Yeah. But I wasn't so that. It was a pantomime but very stressing at the time. I don't know the department and the company seemed to be fearful. For arguments sake the contractor that should have had the flares ready
- 22:00 when they called for tenders the OIC of Derby airport said the bloke wasn't reliable and to accept other than the lowest tender. Perth put on the bloke that was unreliable. Derby recommended that he be sacked. Perth said "If you sack him it would seems that we might be unreliable of some sort. His contract ends in September we won't renew it, so don't sack him"

#### **That is ridiculous.**

That

- 22:30 is sort of the bureaucratic deal. And on the black box read out they never ever discussed it with me. They discussed it with my first officer, and tried to encourage him to agree that I had done the wrong thing. It wasn't until months later that I asked the Department to let me have a look
- 23:00 at the read out. And it was labelled inaccurate, not to be used for any enquiry. And they used it to talk to my first officer to try and damn me. They said that I got too low, too far away from Derby airport. The night of the occasion I came back and the same fellow was on duty when

23:30 I got back later that day. I said "Charlie earlier this morning I tried bloody hard to find this airport, was I anywhere near it?" he said "Jesus Christ I thought you were coming through the bloody door". The evidence was I wasn't far away so the read out in the flight recorder was faulty but they tried to use it to damn

24:00 me and when it was labelled not to be used and on the say so of the air radio operator he thought I was coming through the door so I couldn't have been that far away. But they applied to the Department to cancel my licence.

**What did your first officer have to say with the investigation?**

Well he was with me all the way. He was very staunch. Actually he was, I have got a lot of sympathy

24:30 because of his reputation within the company on some matters and they wouldn't believe that I was happy with his performance, more than happy in that circumstances like that you don't want a rogue scholar who is going to lecture you on his opinions. You want a bloke who will accept your

25:00 instructions, but he did object, he did object to us going around again at Fitzroy and he could have been right. But when I said "No, we are going to have a go" it was a split second objection and he accepted me overruling it.

**You are very lucky.**

I have no complaint of the bloke and he was damn well very close to being right. So

25:30 in the end I continued to fly for another 10 years and didn't lose my licence.

**Just when you were under that sort of extreme pressure and you could be hitting the earth at a very quick speed what do you tell the passengers?**

When Fitzroy was muted I had no doubt whatsoever that if they gave me half

26:00 a dozen lights at the end of this trip we would go down. Through my wife we owned 12.5 percent of the Fitzroy Crossing hotel. As I upset the enquiry I said I didn't go there to drum up business. So I knew the area fairly well.

26:30 We might get round to it, but I had been a director of three or four or five pastoral companies with a couple of million acres in Kimberley with cattle and sheep and I spent a bit of time there one way or another. A lot of people and so I knew the area fairly well and as such was confident that if they gave me an aiming point I would get down alright.

27:00 And since they said that they would have a full flare path in 20 minutes I just told them we were going to Fitzroy Crossing. It is a gravel strip, there might be a bit of stone coming up but otherwise no troubles, but as time went by we gave up the thought of going back to Derby Marsh and there was a bit of confusion on the ground,

27:30 pitch black everyone trying to do their damndest quickly. We didn't know about it but we could see them, there wasn't a great deal of time when certainly we were going around again. I briefed the hostesses in detail and told them to clear the cabin and brace for impact and all that sort of trash. But I never

28:00 until the last, well if we had got in the first time there would be no trouble, we would have taxied up to the refuelling point and put in some fuel. At first light taken off and there wouldn't have been the brouhaha. But once you get engineers coming up from Perth there are all sorts of enquires and on thing or another.

**Sure.**

But it was, again I think I said

28:30 earlier I am more efficient when I am frightened. And one aspect of it that I always found amusing. The flight plan out of Perth with weather problems, Perth, Meekatharra, Hedland, Broome and night time no one else was available it was a complex flight plan and in the end I needed

29:00 full tanks plus 37 pounds. That was 6,000, about 3 tonnes plus 37 pound. And it was midnight and I thought "Oh bugger it" and I made a mistake in additions to 37 pound, full tanks, at the enquiry of senior pilot in the company, you made a mistake in the flight plan.

29:30 I said "Oh yes 37 pound". He said "What, he said what do you mean?" I said "You overlooked the fact that full tanks is what I put down I needed full tanks plus 37 pound should I have rung you up and asked you for permission?" Theoretically we needed to work out the fuel we required and then in case the weather forecast was wrong, we needed plus 10 per cent.

30:00 And once I had used 370 pounds and didn't need the extra 10 per cent error I could have done what they say, re flight plan after take off you use much more than that. I could have guessed that I had the 10 per cent up my sleeve that I hadn't used. But that would have been a waste of time. So we had some

30:30 enquiries. Oh they, a lovely fellow who had been chief pilot and was now accident investigator he said at one stage at the hearing that I should thank my lucky stars that there wasn't a public enquiry. And I said "I was considering demanding one" and he said, "You won't and you can't" and banged the desk and said

31:00 "I will and I can". And I excused myself and stormed off to the toilet. He chased after me and I said, "I am going to the toilet I will be back shortly". I think we got round to upsetting people. The newspaper bloke I was going to hit on the nose. There was a subsequent

31:30 pilots' gathering at the old Swan Brewery, the Chief Accident Investigator of the Department of Civil Aviation came to me and he said, "Harold now tell me the truth about Fitzroy Crossing". He had made some ridiculous comments and answers to parliament on the deal and I am afraid I said if he was within two metres of me

32:00 within three seconds his mother wouldn't recognise him and he scampered off. But

**So Fitzroy Crossing got quite a reputation.**

Well actually you know the Weekend Australian, West Australian, they featured it twice on the front page. The only thing they featured two weeks running.

32:30 And ironically I was president of Legacy at the time and we were down at the children's camp at Busselton in between the editions. And one woman widow came up to my wife and said, "I am pleased I am so pleased to see you, last weeks episode I didn't think you would live". It did get a bit, well a bit of newspaper talk and my first officer

33:00 took a course in authorship and tried to get a book published on the event and he got a tiny bit colourful but mainly it was, well he emphasised the positive to a point. But so I got a bit of publicity.

**Yes you have a bit of notoriety behind you with that one. Just going to Port Moresby,**

33:30 **how difficult was it to find a target?**

Very difficult when I say that when I say that it's very difficult for the army to define a bomb line in the jungle. It wasn't so hard on top of the escarpment or the ridge but down in the river valley you might have trees 150 metres high, you might

34:00 have wind drafts etc. and more particularly we like to have 200 metres of bomb line. And they found on occasions that if they went through the Japanese would follow them. The 200 metres it had taken them two or three days hard fighting to push the little buggers back. And

34:30 it is the truth so I don't suppose it matters that much. We went over one day and it is supposed to be fine and dandy but the target was at the bottom of the valley, sunshine on top but there is a layer of thin cloud halfway down. So it went from bright sunshine into cloud looking for a coloured flare or feature of bomb line. Everyone brought their bombs back except one.

35:00 And in the middle of debriefing the CO was reprimanded us for being lily livered loons [cowards] for not finding the target and not bombing. And when he was at the crescendo of his comments the army liaison officer came in and said we bombed our own. Since he was the only one that didn't bring their bombs back.

35:30 I heard him bragging that we always got to our target and always dropped our bombs. A little bit extra on one occasion they dropped on their own.

**How much of that happened?**

I don't believe very much but commanding officers and senior officers, their egos are sometimes conveniently

36:00 adjusted. And seldom if ever recorded if they are in doubt whatsoever of the culprit. So that I think the official history would say, would not record it. I don't know about the army whether they recorded it but certainly they advised us. Whether there were casualties I don't know I wasn't told but

36:30 that sort of thing did, well boys will be boys and commanding officers will be and very few senior blokes even in business are happy to admit failure on their own part. They would rather blame someone else.

**Sure. What**

37:00 **was the most common target that you had there?**

Japanese. It was army close support work so that for the most part they would ring up and say. Well occasionally the coast watchers would say there would be a barge coming around or a load. Between Salamaua and Lae there were occasionally convoys that went round. So they were actual army targets that they were up

37:30 against or supply lines or even sometimes the army scouts would find a store of ammunition and

supplies of petrol and stuff. They would just ring up and say go to so and so and light them up and we would do our best to oblige. It was one the earlier days

- 38:00 that the army for a change did get some support from the air. They expressed their appreciation more than once. And even in a book on the quite wrongly so I might add, a school friend of mine actually gives advice that I saved his life but
- 38:30 he was in an advanced scout area sensing out the Japanese position between Wau and Salamaua and he tripped on a booby trap and stirred up everyone, there was only six of eight of them in the party. He was severely wounded and stirred up the camp of the Japanese and they would have had no help of getting away with the wounded people
- 39:00 but at the critical moment we arrived in our Bostons and bombed and strafed the area by appointment. Whether there is an oversight or a mix up that the people had ordered us over there didn't know that the scouts were there. The Japanese, according to the book thought it was a combined effort, an attack from the ground and the air and they went back into defensive positions
- 39:30 and in the meantime they were able to get sufficient blokes in with stretchers to take out my mate and school friend and his other people in his party and all survived.

**How incredibly lucky was that?**

And in the book they give me the credit but I have no claim to it.

**You were just following orders?**

- 40:00 Well I didn't know he was there and he didn't know I was coming, it was pure coincidence. One of the lucks of the game, he was lucky and I may have been in the right time at the right place. I haven't been able to verify the dates with my log book but
- 40:30 well according to Damien Parer he saw ourselves and the Americans with Boston's in action and he was very complimentary. So by the time the yanks got there we were more experienced than they were, so it goes to show that if they had been there longer they would have been the better of the two. But we started a few months earlier.

**Did you**

- 41:00 **get to hook up with the Americans on any occasion?**

They were very generous to us since we didn't have spares or access to spares. And while the war was on and close by they were very generous and very good and indispensable. But when the bureaucrats caught up and said "Thou shalt not give the allies anything they must apply through headquarters". And

- 41:30 headquarters must apply and the by the time it got to Melbourne and they applied to American headquarters. They got the request for some 22 Boston parts in New Guinea and if they weren't careful they would go from 20 miles away or 10 miles away down to Moresby and perhaps to Melbourne and back etc. So being, god knows how I got these jobs but
- 42:00 I took a couple of engines...

## **Tape 8**

- 00:32 They were generous and very helpful and we couldn't have done without them early on. Since our supply line for spare parts etc was minimal and our hope to get additional aircraft and supplies of our own weren't working out. But then the bureaucrats got up and we had to go through the proper channel they
- 01:00 couldn't just give us the stuff out of the store. There was a war on but the paper war had caught up with us. So theoretically we had to apply for any bits and pieces we wanted at the local headquarters, and they would apply to the headquarters in Melbourne, and Melbourne would go through the same channels. And eventually after travelling to Melbourne and back it would get to the place
- 01:30 that was 10 miles away and if you weren't careful it would come back the same way via Melbourne. But I took two or three engineers around to the place and conned the man in the store to let the blokes have a look around. In the end I was talking to the fellow and I said "What time do the guards go off?" he said "Midnight" so I
- 02:00 told their blokes to find their way and find their bits and pieces and put them in a heap and we came back after midnight and broke in and pinched the stuff and kept aeroplanes in the air which may not have been in the air for much longer until we went through the correct channels to get the bits that we needed.

**I believe that the Aussies were pretty good at acquiring things from the yanks?**

- 02:30 I am not quite sure what the question was but they and other source of stuff we had, the yanks had lots and lots of material as they called it. And if a Boston of theirs crashed they would be inclined to put the bulldozer in and toss it to one side. And our blokes would hear of it and rush over and almost not quite form a human chain
- 03:00 around it but get bits off here there and everywhere and take them to use them, whereas the yanks would give the lot away because they had a warehouse full of stuff. But the yanks, once they got going, once the shock of Pearl Harbour got passed them and Roosevelt [President of United States of America of the time] got his way and they got into gear
- 03:30 but you can't get from, fairly a lot of Americans like a lot of English people were pro Hitler rather than pro Russian communism and also there was a thought that America was, should be superior to Britain and the British empire and until the Brits and ourselves admitted they were the superior they
- 04:00 would help the Russians or whoever else but for the most part Britain and ourselves had to pay for our stuff. And I think they gave the yanks, they gave the Russians nearly 1200 Bostons to live with them and I don't think the Russaians said much for it but "So you should". But America gave
- 04:30 enormous help to the Russians and others free of charge which as long as Britain and Australia and elsewhere could pay for it we had to and did, which was business I suppose.

**How do you think extra aircraft would have served you?**

Well we had the pilots inefficient or untrained as most of us

- 05:00 were. But we had them and we did a reasonable job. I don't believe we ever lost an aircraft due to maintenance problems. So our own ground staff did a wonderful job in shocking conditions. Working inside a metal airframe in the sun in Moresby with the humidity of about 99 per cent was very debilitating.
- 05:30 And they did a marvellous job keeping them airborne. Well we hoped to get the aircraft, we pleaded with them to get them. But I think it was almost as if we had of asked for 200, we might have got them. But we probably only asked for 20 and it was hardly worth doing the way they were getting stirred up. It might
- 06:00 have been easier to send six 200 bunches to 200 lots to Russia than one 20 lot to us or even 10. I wouldn't know.

**How do you think you could have served the infantry with those extra aircraft? How do you think you could have served the infantry with those extra aircraft?**

We would have done, if we had another 20 aircraft we would have been able to double the work and

- 06:30 double the job. And work was there to be done. Certainly in the end we were looking for barges and not finding many. They were travelling at night and going up into the mangroves or into river mouths and hiding during the day. And as I said earlier they even got to putting outside cargo onto submarines.
- 07:00 It was a bit unusual in that the Japanese were still in control of the navy of the sea, but we were in charge of the air for the most part. One of the saddest things in my time was that we had Beaufighters and Beauforts and others had quite a number of crews that crash landed into the sea got into their
- 07:30 dinghies but we didn't have the resources to go and pick them up. And to my knowledge not one of them survived. If they survived and got to prisoner of war camp, they died because of conditions there and the more respected and popular ones were beheaded like Bill Newton and quite a few others.

**What did you**

- 08:00 **fear most Harry?**

What did I fear most? I think fear is a relative thing. And some minds can, particularly young minds, can filter out fear. Older blokes are more realistic but younger fellows I think you didn't forget it and you took notice of it

- 08:30 and you did your damnest to see that it didn't happen to you. But you didn't lose sleep on it because you couldn't do much about it. Either your time was up or it wasn't bit fatalistic. I was very fortunate and lucky but others weren't. I am grateful but I take no credit for it.
- 09:00 An uncontrolled fear is a danger. And while I would never be critical of anyone who was had uncontrolled fear I would be sympathetic. But I am fortunate, lucky for whatever reason and I had controlled fear and in practice both in civil flying
- 09:30 and other flying. I believe I was more efficient when I was frightened.

**That is an interesting comment.**

Well I will put it another way. I spent a short time working out what fuel I needed in July 71 with my Fitzroy incident. It wasn't an easy

- 10:00 straight forward exercise to see how much fuel we needed to go to 25,000 to Kununurra as opposed to ground level to Kununurra. But I did the sums and the Department of Civil Aviation ordered me to go to Kununurra not once, not twice. I instructed my first officer to tell them we couldn't make it and wouldn't
- 10:30 take any notice. They instructed us a third time. I got on the blower [telephone] and persuaded them I was too busy to talk to them and there would be no Kununurra. I was criticised for taking over the first officer's radio job and I should have been too busy doing other things. In the outcome
- 11:00 being the sort of bloke that I am. If we had gone to, taken their advice we would never have got there in fact I took a little bit of sadistic pleasure in telling them that I wanted to finish up in the Pentecost River Valley. I liked the biblical connections and there is a Pentecost River Valley short of
- 11:30 Kununurra which could well have been where we would finish up. We were outside controlled airspace and the Department had no rights to control us. So if we had done what they had instructed us to do I believed we would have finished up in the Pentecost River Valley, they would have said that I should have known that they weren't lawful in giving me the orders so I should have
- 12:00 ignored it. Bureaucratic hindsight is a wonderful thing particularly in aviation. In digressing a bit, the Munich pilot who crashed with the Manchester United soccer team, it took him four years to be exonerated. A viscount bloke, who was cleared to take off and hit a
- 12:30 Canadian Pacific aircraft, it took him two years to get cleared. A bloke who hit Mt Everest for Air Zealand took him more than 20 years to get cleared but eventually he was exonerated. Even if you live it takes time. Like Manchester and the local Sydney Mascot bloke but if you are dead it takes far longer and
- 13:00 a lot of pigheadedness apart from your pilot friends and family that get public recognition in the New Zealand parliament as he did eventually. But that is part of the problem of the litigation and liability and legal wrangles of who is responsible. And frequently the
- 13:30 you can hypothesise even on the Fitzroy deal. The only way you can save fuel of any magnitude in the jet aircraft is to shut down the engine. If you have got two it is not too bad, if you have got four you can shut down an engine. The reason that the engine itself takes perhaps two thirds of a para out for its compressors and heaters
- 14:00 and other stuff so that there is only a small percentage between flat out and, I have forgotten percentages but, we discussed it going to Fitzroy and I decided not to shut down an engine, not for, it was only a 20 minute flight, they promised us a full flare path and reigniting a jet engine
- 14:30 is not easy in daylight in ideal conditions so I decided against it. About three months later a fellow was in Perth. A Boffin from Melbourne performance and he said "Harold it seems you may have been better off if you had stopped an engine going to Fitzroy" and again being me I said "Let me know when you make up your mind".
- 15:00 That is not quite true I said "You have studied the situation" he said "Yes" I said "Have you got computers, staff, nice office, good lighting, no family troubles, morning tea" "Yeah". I said "you have what done three or four days on the subject" "Oh five I think Harold". I said "We had maybe two minutes and you haven't made up your mind yet let me know when you do".
- 15:30 I saw the bloke about three months later. I said, "Oh you decided that I did the right thing" and he said, "Yes who told you?" I said "No one but you would have told me and everyone else if after weeks and weeks of sorting out with your computers that I had been proved wrong when I had two minutes" "Oh" he said "You are unkind". In the end I said "Well promise me if
- 16:00 after that sort of enquiry you qualify your report say however I must point out that I have studied, spent X hours on this trip and the pilot in command would not have had more than a minute to reach the wrong conclusion, so given the same time frame they might not have come back with the same deal". I was happy being an airline pilot but
- 16:30 I also. Well cyclone Tracey was another one that could be recorded. I was up on Cyclone Tracey. I was in Darwin three weeks before, give or take a bit and there was a cyclone red alert on. I was in my 7th floor room listening to the early morning radio. And it was a cyclone alert, fill up your bath put in new radio batteries,
- 17:00 tie down your rubbish and ladi da di dah. Had the same hooters and sirens. Then finished up the school bus will be running on time. Three weeks later or thereabouts I was in Darwin in Boxing Day and like every other airline in Australia that took part in the evacuation I believe they all carried many many more passengers that they should
- 17:30 have done. I had 50 per cent more passengers than I had seat belts. And everyone did it. The weather

wasn't that good, the communications, the control etc etc wasn't that good but we all got away with it by breaking most of the rules in the book. Again perhaps being me, I wrote to the, everyone jumped on the band wagon, evacuation

- 18:00 wonderful marvellous, everyone did a wonderful job, wonderful marvellous. And so I wrote to the Department and said we broke sundry rules in the book. I for one had 50 more passengers than I had seat belts, please give me approval, you said it was wonderfully successful evacuation, please will you confirm that we did the right thing
- 18:30 just in case the next time there is an occasion like this, if we do hit some turbulence, if we do get into a thunderstorm, if we do blow a tyre on take off or landing and the 50 people that haven't got seat belts go helter skelter and sue the pilot for broken arms and what have you. No reply.
- 19:00 But should it happen again at least it is a record that the Department and others will approve of breaking the law if there is a happy ending. And they tend to hang you publicly if there is not. Perhaps one of the best of that nature the company got a light aircraft, it was licensed for
- 19:30 visual flight rules only. That is daylight and I think it is 2000 feet horizontally and 500 feet vertically from any cloud and they had a very tight schedule for the premier to go up top of West Australia and back again for a very tight schedule VFR [visual flight rules] only in winter time. Well he was held up for 24 hours in Perth because of weather.
- 20:00 Couldn't fly visual flight rules only. The aircraft they had was a Piaggio the aircrew called it a pig. The company wrote to the aircrew and said, "We weren't allowed to call it a pig" so we all called it pork because it was gutless. They had troubles with radio and engine and one thing or another and I happened to be flying up and down the coast
- 20:30 in an F27 and overheard the trials and tribulations and just casually I knew the Premier David Brand. And on the last day of his trip Piaggio, the pork staked a tyre at Tom Price airport. Tom Price wasn't opened for other than light aircraft it was just not completed. I was in that area in an
- 21:00 F27 going from Hedland to Marble Bar, Nullagine, Roy Hill, Meekatharra. I heard them in strife so I did some sums and worked out Roy Hill, Tom Price, Meekatharra and checked that I had enough fuel on board to do it. I worked out times etc and sat back. Eventually I got a message.
- 21:30 The Managing Director and the Regional Director approved you proceed to Mount Tom Price to pick up the Premier of Western Australia provided you personally make certain it is safe in all respects. It was licensed for the aircraft, the approaches in the east have never been approved. I remember turning to the first officer, oh they said
- 22:00 "You also must be certain the surface is suitable to the operation". I turned to the first officer and said "Well there is only one way of doing that. As I will fly very low over the strip, you go down the back and poke your finger out the back door and check every five seconds and check that the surface is alright". Being a first officer and being a captain he looked at me as if I had gone round the twist which
- 22:30 is quite logical but I promptly set our ETA [Estimated Time of Arrival] Tom Price, Meekatharra, Perth and our premier will be landing in Perth at 9.15 or whatever. I said to old David "It might be a bit rough taking off and I will be turning soon after lift off, much sooner than normal" etc. But everything, "Oh Harold" you know. So away we went
- 23:00 and got to Meekatharra. But the wife of the air radio operator at Meekatharra was an agent for the West Australian newspaper and they were aware that the Premier had all sorts of strife in amending schedules and amending amended schedules and cancelling meetings and all sorts of things and did their damdest to get David to be critical of the airline. And the
- 23:30 problems he had had. But old David was kind enough to stir the concept, the reporter around to how wonderful the F27 was and how good it was to be rescued and we were into Meekatharra on schedule and into Perth on time. But occasions like that you are almost given an impossible instruction and if you
- 24:00 get away with it everyone forgets but if you don't you are hung publicly for doing a silly thing.

**It is a precarious existence. It is a precarious existence.**

Yes, you have to be a bit pig headed, a bit confident and you have to be right. Fortunately I have crossed fingers

- 24:30 when I have taken a risk or broken a rule. With the Fitzroy deal the company immediately amended their requirements for fuel to take care of what the Pilots Federation had instructed us to take. And the Department changed their rules to add fuel for isolated area
- 25:00 operation, so that was some good that came out of it. But it was a pity, well it is a coincidence that I originated the idea with the company. It is unfortunate the company didn't act on it for three or four months and it took an incident like Fitzroy, a near disaster, to get the company and the Department to accept the problems of pure jet flying at that time



25:30 in that area. Lots of areas were under there in the day time but at night time not many of them and those that were suitable were usually not manned unless you gave notice. So it was a problem at times.

**It sounds something like pioneering really.**

Well I had a bit of fun in Perth here with unforecast fog.

26:00 The official departmental report did my action for shades of the Wright brothers. There again they asked me where I was and what I was doing and I said, "400 feet had been McFoy's [?] over Perth water". They came back "That is unlawful, the lowest safe altitude for that area is so much you are contravening

26:30 air navigations". Aerodromes are closed and fogged out there is no place else to go and they are telling you that you are breaking the law when you are trying to find an aerodrome. And if we hit the chimneys around the racecourse or fallen short onto Mrs Sherene's stable short of the east west runway

27:00 oh naughty naughty breaking the rules. When you have got no place else to go, the alternative is gravity taking over at a limited time but you do your damndest to paddle up the river and find the Casey's bus terminal, orange buses and turn on them and get to land with

27:30 very little fuel on board.

**Do you think there is that margin left in aviation today?**

No I believe that there is too much regulation and too much, don't you do what you are told. Once up in Kimberley I did something that was contrary to what I was instructed to do,

28:00 two or three things actually. I got a full foolscap page, naughty, naughty, naughty. You should have done this, this, this. And I virtually ticked them off, well that was bloody silly, my way was better, and the last lines stunned me. It said however on this occasion the best interest of all concerned were served. In other words you gambled, you were lucky, don't gamble again because you mightn't be as

28:30 lucky next time.

**You are sounding like a bit of a maverick Harry?**

Yes. But I am here. I mean even in Fitzroy in the landing I had the cross feet on. The book says you shouldn't have the cross feet on. I remember telling the bloke involved I said, "Look, I had a very difficult situation. I decided that I would rather have both engines going

29:00 rather than one stopping". They said, "If you had one it might have lasted longer". I said "Well I did it my way and I am here, you should get another chance in similar circumstances before I get a second one. You do it your way and if that is better than mine and yours about I might consider changing". Eventually they changed the rules and said it was a good idea to have the cross feet on.

29:30 It's well. If you break the rules you have got to be right. And if you break the rules you have to have some practical people that know that. One of the airlines, TAA [Trans Australia Airline] in their operations manual and I tried to get our people to copy it. They said the pilot in command must obey, must do this, must

30:00 do the right thing. However if in his judgement he decides to do something different and is proved the company will support him so that they would appoint a captain and trust his judgement not to break the rules unless the alternative was unacceptable. Our company would never

30:30 put it in so I would never sign the operations manual for that and other reasons.

**Have you met a number of other pilots that share your school of thought? Or are you a lone maverick?**

I sometimes think if you told me I was a typical airline pilot I would have to make up my mind whether I would be flattered or I would poke you in the nose.

31:00 They are an odd, there are very many varieties, and I have never picked, I have never, I have been wrong the in judging airline pilots and their reaction to difficult circumstances whether they are fat or thin or tall or short, red haired or blondes. I

31:30 believe that the only test is the real one. And unfortunately no psychologists and no tests can sort them out. We did tests, we did training, we did exhaustive tests twice a year every year. But there is always someone there if you do the wrong thing. Your life is

32:00 not at risk, the bloke there is, he is usually senior to you and he doesn't want to damage the aircraft of the company. He doesn't want to get bent so that if you know that there is no danger involved, but those of us who have been on active service and knew of others, it is nothing to brag about. But it is all, for the

32:30 grace of God or whoever works these things out, active service pilots had their, usually had their life on the line and reacted this way or that way and it is the only real test that you could have. And as far as

airline pilots go they have psychological tests and they have this and they have that. Certainly aircraft are that much more efficient. I think

- 33:00 old DC3 only had 1100 hours between engine overhaul, to where I think we got to 12,000 in the F27 so that engine maintenance when we were in the 10 Avro Anson we were very efficient in engine shut downs and in engine troubles but I seldom had. Oh we had occasion in the DC3 but they did
- 33:30 alright in one. I never had engine trouble in 12 years on pure jets, never once. So it is much safer in that regard so therefore you don't get the occasion to get practice at being frightened or scared or need to break the rules. So that, but even today when British airways bloke went through the
- 34:00 volcanic ash over in Indonesia he did a bloody good job in stopping and starting and getting his aeroplane down. Training is a wonderful thing but you can't get practice in engine failure, engine fires. It is highly desirable, most necessary. But the real thing when you are next on the line
- 34:30 I think only the good lord knows how you are going to get out of it and if it comes your way be grateful and hope that it will be the same next time.

**Just returning to Moresby, you flew a variety of operations there Harry, how did the danger vary between those kinds of operations?**

Oh depends whether they got close to you or whether they were wound up or whether they had their guns loaded, or

- 35:00 whether there were any fighters about. We didn't know.

**Was air attack very common?**

No. The Japanese extended their lines of communication particularly on the ground. Moresby would have been taken had the Japanese not relied on the supplies and stuff left behind

- 35:30 by our blokes, in my view. When I was up there from hearsay or clutter blood or whatever at the time on the retreat or the organised withdrawal south over Kokoda, our fellows left behind stores that they couldn't carry. I was told
- 36:00 at the time and I believe it to be true that bright bunny said well if you can't carry it put a hole in it. So anything they left behind whether it be bully beef or M & V [Meat and Vegetables] or goldfish or whatever they put a hole in it and there is a photograph here somewhere taken by some army scouts of about 30 Japanese in a camp
- 36:30 and there is not a pair of trousers between the lot of them. They relied on the stuff that was left behind and our rations were intently better than what their privates got, so they were counting on living in luxury and having done that for sometime at the last hurdle our people had the good sense
- 37:00 to make stuff go putrid as they left it behind and their lines of communication weren't equal. And I am reliably informed that the Japanese were ordered to retreat from Kokoda. I would never want to denigrate our army's forthrightness and diligence and expertise in the shocking conditions they fought and
- 37:30 died in but I would like to see more recognition given to the Wau, Salamaua things as opposed to the Moresby or Buna or Dobodura deal when one was retreating in order to the other fought every inch of the way and if the
- 38:00 number of stretcher bearers per wounded bloke is any guide there were four or six more per stretcher on parts of the Wau Salamaua track and never required on the Kokoda track. So parts of that Wau Salamaua track were even worse than Kokoda. But even the thing that is shown on most
- 38:30 Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] days of the blind soldier being lead by the fuzzy wuzzy, that is not Kokoda it is Wau Salamaua. But it is implied that it is one, not the other and the recognition that all the army blokes should get is inadequate and the relative recognition that Wau Salamaua blokes got versus the rest, that is army, is
- 39:00 not level pegging.

**Do those historical discrepancies irk you?**

Yes. And historical mistakes in the Gasmata show where Eric Riley was killed, the official record doesn't have Eric Riley taking off on that trip. And I tried to correct it and they said, "Oh we can't alter

- 39:30 official records. We will make a note of it somewhere but we can't alter them". Bureaucrats are not my best comfortable fellows. But bureaucrats in uniform are the least comfortable, there are exceptions of course. And particularly the
- 40:00 peacetime bureaucrats in uniform. I have been plugging to try and get some recognition of Boston beaufighter aircraft in World War II in New Guinea and there is no recognition of any consequence in the National War Museum. And the Chief of Air Staff the current bloke is well aware of it.

- 40:30 All too frequently the chiefs and the ministers aren't perhaps reasonably, they are not in control of things other than what their staff want them to know about. I disagreed with Sir Ronald Wilson's stolen
- 41:00 generation deal. He gives me credit as being a contributor to it but he was a Legacy bloke and I knew him. But until he differentiates between the full blooded aboriginal from south of Falls creek with the blue eyed blond full time commonwealth public service in Hobart, until he admits that they are separate or at
- 41:30 ATSIC aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commission, they admit two different groups, aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander. With the Mabo decision [landmark Native Title Claim decision] quite right, all for it. But the High Court transferred Mabo completely without amendment to the aboriginals and there is a wealth of difference between the full blooded aboriginal from Native Title Claim, certainly there was 30 years ago.....

## Tape 9

- 00:32 **Anyway getting back to rolling again. When you were briefed for different missions how were you briefed?**
- We had the army liaison officer there, he would tell us the army situation and from that we would get what the target is and what the bomb line was and what colour markers they might use. And
- 01:00 we would look at our maps and our army survey maps.
- What were they like the army survey maps?**
- Well eventually they were quite good, some of them, then you would approach, work out which way you were to attack the joint. Invariably we attacked over our own troops. I think I told you earlier about dropping empty cartridges
- 01:30 on fuzzy wuzzy hairdos.
- Sure.**
- But there is a painting somewhere of Jessica attacking Salamaua, we never attacked the way that, that was coming in from the ocean. You were a sitting duck, whereas if you came from the land you could get around sides of hills, and merge with the jungle and whatnot and
- 02:00 get away over the ocean. That was it. And you would decided who would lead and who would, you usually went out in pairs, who would lead each section and who would lead, and which order you would go in, we seldom attacked over than browns cows one at a time.
- 02:30 In that a target was seldom big enough for more than one at a time so you would decide on the order of who would attack when and that was that. You would usually go over together and come back together just in case anyone got into trouble or there is fighters about. But when
- 03:00 weather was bad or you couldn't fly in formation in bad weather you would go it alone. I went it alone whenever I got uncomfortable.
- Does that make you less uncomfortable?**
- Well yes if you got home safely it was a good move. If like, poor old Les Kenway you don't,
- 03:30 it is a bad move. We had one bloke that said he did his cockpit drill three times, well I said it is a drill I do it once, convince myself it has been done and that is the end of it. If you can't convince yourself that you have done it and done it properly and done it well the first time you didn't last too long.
- 04:00 **When you would lose blokes that were really close to you did you have any sort of ceremonies?**
- Ceremonies.
- If you did lose a bloke that was a good mate of yours.**
- Well usually they were the other side of the hill, Bill Newton [William Newton] and his gunner were, got to Salamaua and old Bill was beheaded and his gunner was disembowelled.
- 04:30 Harry Dawkins went in on the Gasmata deal, he got into his dinghy but they got him and that was that. Rocky Mullins was the only bloke, one of the few, if well my Arthur Taylor we brought him back and was buried in Bomana. But generally speaking
- 05:00 there was, unless it was an accident closer to home or a landing accident on the way back they collected most of them. Bill Newton is buried in Lae and Harry Dawkins and Eric Miller are buried in Rabaul. I went up there in 81 and had a look around. But they will be finding bodies and aeroplanes 100 years from now in New Guinea.

05:30 I am a believer in ain't no fun in the cemetery given the flowers now.

**That is quite a nice.**

I tell the mob to call for tenders and take the cheapest but they probably put on a bit of a show. It is, I think it is good for the people.

06:00 I remember my father died.

**Can we just pause for a second?**

Mother with her walking frame. When father died I hadn't seen him for two or three years. It took me a while, and I wasn't home for his funeral. It took me a while to get it through here that he wasn't about. Oh I will tell Dad about that or I will ask, but if you have got a funeral it puts

06:30 an end to it.

**Sure.**

Well done. Mother's walking frame, you didn't crash the car. As I said she has driven twice last year and that is about it, first time this year.

07:00 **Oh gosh. How important was mail to you when you were out there?**

Mail.

**Mail.**

Wonderful. Junior's Popsy was very kind with letters, she used to subscribe to the Bulletin for us and wait for ages and she was only young, she

07:30 knitted socks and pullovers and when I was instructing down in Tasmania she knitted balaclavas and stuff. Yes there wasn't. I hated censoring letters. We were supposed to censor letters and there was some good reason for it.

08:00 But I am all for the degree of probability, many days, many times in this day and age. Oh you know a cancer cure, well it will cure if you are over 45 and under 55 it will cure about 2 per cent more. And the degree of probability is a case of degree of probability of our own troops

08:30 misbehaving is very light. In a very touchy situation I am all for it but bureaucracy sometimes goes over board. But even, with mother being mother she pushed for the Hopman cup and I pushed the wheel chair round and the wheel was over the yellow line and it is a safety issue and I have to take it back

09:00 and stand over. I am afraid I said you know I was an airline pilot I know something about safety but don't worry I will do what I am told.

**Yes it has kind of, it has gone a bit overboard. How were you informed that you were going to go back home to Australia?**

We were all told at the same time. We had the bureaucrats said that

09:30 no pilot should have more than six months in New Guinea. So after six months we sort of got lost in the heads. They didn't know well, the Boston was an orphan to a point, unexpected and to a degree almost an unwanted orphan. We didn't think to order it we didn't think we would need it,

10:00 we have got it, it is a wonderful thing but we don't admit it because it is so good we should have ordered it. If that is not too Irish. So in the end as I think I told you earlier, they insisted that we have seven short days ops leave and those of us in Perth did much better than those in Brisbane in the travel time etc

10:30 wasn't counted. And then they, I think the Doctor said we had to be out of the place by 30th of September and replacements arrived in the August and Peter Gunston from Adelaide came out with me as No 2, he was a newcomer for two or three trips.

**Were you expected to pass on your wisdom?**

Well

11:00 certainly if they asked questions we told them. But we tended to show them how and Peter is not too well at the moment, I am still in touch with him, he was the only bloke that didn't get his aeroplane knocked off at Gasmata on the last trip that we did. But

11:30 I don't, you can learn the fundamentals, but you can't, there is no substitute for experience,

**Sure.**

Even though a lot of young people don't think it is necessary. Even making the wrong decisions is a valuable experience.

### **So what were your feelings towards coming back to Australia?**

I

- 12:00 always liked home comforts, whilst certainly when they posted me to Tiger Moth instruction I jumped and screamed and shouted and roared and said "I am an experienced active service pilot you don't need me as a Tiger Moth instructor. The war is coming to an end". And the bloke said "Starting now won't be doing much. I am a bottled scarred veteran
- 12:30 my experience would be worth while". And I took a liking to the mosquito aircraft they had and said I would be ideal for the mosquito squadron. They said "No Tiger Moth instruction". But bureaucracy. They sent me down to Tasmania. At least, they were very good and said those blokes that had been in active service could nominate where they wanted to
- 13:00 go and perhaps selfishly I said "Well Tasmania is the most unlikely place I will get to from Perth". When I go to Tasmania. It transpired that I was a few weeks older than the flight commander so the silly buggers put me in charge. No experience whatsoever in the job that was to be done
- 13:30 but you are senior. Of course he had a bee in his bonnet he had been at the job for 12 or 18 months. And I, he was not happy, but your flight commander, you are in charge so you had to do your best, work hard and long and hope you get away with it. But that was
- 14:00 the RAF in Australia from my knowledge of it early on didn't get to admitting reasonable, the rational ignoring of seniority. Even in the commercial airline business they after.
- 14:30 I was very very lucky, I was a major crash that they had out here, I was rostered on, and an aircraft accident in Kimberly. I was going up to Perth to do the Kimberly service. And the aircraft you were going in you needed two of us were going up, both of us were going to do the Kimberly deal. The aircraft in Kimberly got into strife
- 15:00 the replacement aircraft only needed one pilot. But they rang me up and said, "You are still on the aircraft but you are coming back in three days time not a month". I said "Thanks very much that is very good". Then they rang me up and said "Oh Joe Blow is going to Darwin for two years and he is behind in his
- 15:30 tidying up, we are taking you off the flight and putting you on it, you will do a trip out early morning on the Saturday", it happened Friday night, "And you will go up to Derby on the Sunday, six days". I told everyone I was going up for a month, mother we had three kids, and that was that but.

### **How long were you actually in Tasmania for then?**

- 16:00 We had about a six months' honeymoon. From April/May. My father died in August and I asked for a transfer to the elementary flying training school at Cunderdin.

### **Did you enjoy that transfer?**

I loved Tasmania and we fell on our feet.

- 16:30 We got a flat in 10 Frederick Street, Launceston with views down the Tamar and one of the foursome that was at Sale No 1 Beaufort course Dennis Whishaw, he was from Tasmania and lived just out of Launceston and we
- 17:00 kept in touch vaguely and they were quite wealthy farmers and they had a cottage on the Tamar and they had brought his fiancé from Tasmania to spend a weekend at Sale, we met them there etc and when we got to Launceston got in touch and they gave us freedom of their cottage.
- 17:30 And introductions all round and the war seldom touched Tasmania in many respects. I think Silvia made a dressing gown out of a ball gown and had to put it back together again as a ball gown, but they weren't using them in Sydney but they were still using them down there.

### **That is funny.**

But we had a wonderful time there the

- 18:00 people were very generous with fuel or fuel tickets and we were inclined to sign the fuel tickets John Curtain but.

### **At what point did you enter the commercial flying industry?**

As I said earlier I was, my brother went to Derby in about 1937

- 18:30 and undertook to buy the business with effect from I think from December 41 and he got tied up in fact he had an honorary commission in the army to run the port for the facilities for the army and the air force up in that area. 1945 business
- 19:00 began to improve and he wrote to me and asked me if I would agree to being man powered out. And I

had more instructors and pupils and the war was running down so I said "Yes" it was approved. So we went up to Derby about April/May 45 but that didn't work out the way I expected.

- 19:30 I anticipated that I would be offered a partnership, it was never mentioned, never discussed and never was. And there are other problems, my wife was wonderful there but there are forces that were operating. No 1 was born in Derby 1945 which is quite a shock for an only child
- 20:00 from Sydney so we survived. Everyone survived. So I wrote to my old employer the T&G, Old James Edward James Batty and he said "Yes please come anytime you like as soon as possible". He by then had graduated to State Manager and we got on very well. And before very long he made a special position
- 20:30 that hadn't been there a Secretary to the State manager and invited me to take it on. I was much younger than a lot of the other people. He offered it, I accepted it. And he apologised for not paying me more because people was complaining and his best advice to them was that I was getting less than they were.
- 21:00 He took me up to thruppence a week less than them and in due course I had a nice office etc etc and Jimmy and I got on very well. We were both entertained at his home. I got on a qualified and unconditional authority to sign his name whenever I wanted to and I had quite fun in dealing with staff as State Manager
- 21:30 of more than 100 people. I could write a complimentary note or a derogatory note or a criticizing note and whenever there was any complaint he supported me to the hilt.

**Sounds like you had a pretty cushy job there? Pretty cushy job there.**

Well there was mutual respect and authority given I, well I didn't ask

- 22:00 for the authority he gave it to me and it was very rewarding and the entrance was when I was 45 or 50 I might get a good salary, by then the kids would be late teenagers and we would scramble a bit for a second ice cream if they dropped one and during the time I was in Derby we had the,
- 22:30 a lot of agencies including the airline and one of my jobs was to do all the airline work to and from the airport and do the book work and occasionally all the schedules that were on special and one thing or another and got to know all the airline people. But I was sitting happily in the T&G the Managing Director of the airline took me to lunch and said "Come and fly with me".
- 23:00 One of the few wrong judgements of character I made. He made a grouse one in what he thought of me and I made a grouse one in what I thought of him. But he encouraged me, I played hard to get. I was happy in the job I had no thought of moving and my wife said "Oh you know,
- 23:30 the money is good and you enjoy flying". And I had already got a trivial interest in Derby, a long story but I finished up a third interest in a lolly water [soft drink] aerated water factory in Derby. My brother was still up there and he and I got on reasonably well and I used to do a bit of work for him in Perth and we had a couple of mutual adventures
- 24:00 into post war material stuff. I think we bought a couple of thousand empty 44 gallon drums and few other bits and pieces.

**So did you at all regret your decision to go back into flying?**

Yes but no, I benefited from it in that I found out that

- 24:30 the Managing Director wasn't that popular with the aircrews.

**There is a new dog.**

That is my son's dog. Never fear when I have five bloody dogs here on the weekend. Our daughter can't come from Sydney without our dogs mother and brother.

**Great.**

But flying I eventually

- 25:00 agreed and I got a letter from the Managing Director promising me a job should I lose my pilots licence. At that stage the retiring age, compulsory law retiring age for airline pilots was age 45 and we took the decision that we may not get more money overall but we may get it when the kids were younger. So
- 25:30 we would get it when we needed it so the decision was made that we would go flying but the grapevine seemed to have it that I was the Managing Director's boy and I was being groomed for this and that and certainly I had ambitions, well I was lead to believe having being invited, pilots were two a penny at the time. So I joined and
- 26:00 I was invited to work hard and long in various aspects of the airline and I did, but it seemed that they thought I was the Managing Directors boy. And I wasn't very popular and after one or two encounters and one or two disappointments I told him not quite literally I had lost respect for him. I didn't want to be other than an airline pilot

- 26:30 and I didn't want to join in the administration and then I was nominated to be Secretary of the Pilots' Federation and within no time I was President and within no time I on the Federal Executive of the Airline Pilots' Association. And it was that time the MMA [MacRobertson Miller Airlines], the local airline was on Commonwealth Government subsidy plus, costs
- 27:00 plus. They put in a bill this would be our costs for next year and it included 7.5 per cent dividend for the shareholders. The Financial Review at the time said Commonwealth Bonds and securities have fallen 3 ¼ or 4 per cent. And they guarantee 7.5 per cent dividend for even most shareholders. Why buy Commonwealth Bonds when you can buy shares in MMA?
- 27:30 In the end I became an airline, at least an airline pilot and fought long and hard in the arbitration court and elsewhere. Although we were on costs plus the salaries we were getting were in some cases only two thirds of the same pilots flying the same aircraft on the eastern states were getting. And the Minister for Air in charge of the subsidy, he was
- 28:00 a West Australian, I knew him slightly. He said "Tell the to put it on the bill Harold, tell them you are as good as any of those eastern staters, put it on the bill". But he didn't do it with any good grace and in the end his judgement as a likely member of his staff he finished up calling me a communist and worst than the wharfies
- 28:30 and the coal miners and I was a nasty piece of work.

**Did you leave the job after that?**

No I had, because age 45 was there, I couldn't stomach working for the airline other than as a pilot. I developed other interests apart from the war surplus stuff and my lolly water factory. We did anything and

- 29:00 everything that was worth a couple of bob, we worked hard and long. And I finished up, well I was on the Pilots Federation. I had a director of western affairs, there is a letter somewhere or other when Ansett took over ANA [Australian National Airlines], it was invariably, pilot seniority was a great bugbear and Reggie quite
- 29:30 reasonably wanted to promote all his fellows before any Ansett fellows. And there was a bit of friction one way or the other who was senior to who and they gave me the job of chairmaning a pilot integration seniority deal in Melbourne which we set. And apparently I did a reasonable job in that there is a couple of complimentary letters there.
- 30:00 I got tied up perhaps as an aside we graduated from a very, almost amateurish show with volunteers when we wanted a Manager and we got down to two people to be Manager, one was Robert J Hawke and we picked the other one
- 30:30 and he wanted us to join the transport workers union and we didn't want to, and he wanted to get in the arbitration court, which we eventually agreed to and we wasted a lot of money and a lot of time and didn't get anywhere. Like the pilots' dispute they had not long ago, we dissolved the whole show and started up again the next
- 31:00 day with a different name and a different administration. And one or two incidents along the way, he wasn't too pleased about that. So when the pilots dispute was on he declared war publicly. And declared publicly he didn't know, what is his name, the No 1 in Ansett the ex TNT [Thomas National Transport] transport bloke,
- 31:30 Abel, Peter Abel, perhaps it's an aside our daughter was State Group Travel Manager for Ansett in Sydney on about a third of the salary with about three times the staff and three times the equipment, or at least the capital income. There is a fellow in Perth but it was a male in Perth and a female in Sydney.
- 32:00 And she finished up with Abels complaining about it and at a subsequent interview with Abels and his psychologist. They asked about her sex life and she resigned soon afterwards and went elsewhere.

**Goodness. Well you certainly managed to get yourself right in the thick of it.**

So I finished up when we had the pastoral companies and

- 32:30 Fitzroy Crossing and a nursing home and I had a licence to sell half a million cubic metres of sand at one stage. We drilled for oil for a couple of years and pulled up the Marble Bar headland railway line, bought horses, bulls, ladies underwear, ladies jewellery. Anything
- 33:00 and everything, worked very hard and continued flying and past my six monthly checks both physical and mental and medical and practical and kept flying ten years after Fitzroy until it was illegal to fly any longer. But it worked in very well, I worked hard in Perth and I
- 33:30 worked hard in Derby and I got paid for going in between and even then if my brother wanted to take three weeks off or a month off they would transfer me to run the agency and be senior resident pilot in Derby while he had his holiday.

**Well you certainly lived a very diverse life.**

Well I was born lucky and my wife has always supported me. She has been my

34:00 secretary typist and it is not easy bringing up three kids as an airline pilot I was away quite a bit.

**Just changing the subject a bit because we are coming to the end of the tape. What does Anzac Day mean to you?**

Very little until 1981.

**Is this when you went to Rabaul?**

Yes but

34:30 I am a bit confused with the year or so either side. Certainly in 1981 I was in Melbourne.

**Well what changed for you to make you see Anzac Day in a different light?**

Well the captain, the president of the Collingwood football club, the next CO of 22 squadron Bostons, after my time. I have forgotten why I was over there but I was in Melbourne and I would get to see the

35:00 boys and I was invited to join him to lead the squadron unit in the Melbourne Anzac Day parade and he had a black and white suit on, it was Saturday, and the Melbourne Parade was a stop start affair and every time we would stop it was "How did it go? How are the pies [Collingwood Magpies] this afternoon?" And I got to know the blokes there and

35:30 I joined legacy in 67 and did a bit I had 14 kids at one stage on my books to try and keep them on the straight and narrow and it fitted in quite well with flying. But I couldn't do anything of a regular nature. Our daughter said she wasn't going to get married until after I finished flying

36:00 because she wanted to be present. All too frequently they changed the rosters and I was given priority treatment and I wasn't the most popular bloke and at the height of my popularity I was given the midnight departure on Christmas Eve and the midnight departure on New Years Eve to go to Darwin.

**Nice.**

36:30 And when I asked the reason why it was because if they wanted to teach me a lesson I should know what the lesson was. And I had already spoken to the rostering agent bloke and he said, "He was instructed to do it". So I went to the senior bloke and said, "What gives?" he said "Oh it is the rostering bloke". I said "That is a lie". He didn't reply so I said "Oh well if that is the way you want it".

37:00 And away we went. We did Christmas Eve midnight and New Years Eve midnight. But it was, we gambled a lot and he wrote to people asking them to give them evidence that I should be dispensed with. But my memorable bloke complained that I had behaved myself and he couldn't

37:30 reply the way the bloke wanted. And I finished up getting him drunk and he showed me the letter concerned.

**There is always a way around these sorts of things. Do you think Harry that your time in the war changed you in any particular way?**

Oh yes yes. I was, I got my values straightened out. I got my priorities straightened out in Perth

38:00 perhaps because we didn't have the money to gallivant around or do get about that much but we are fairly isolated and insulated. But I was, it was a hell of a price to pay but I was a better individual at the end of it and had values and as I said values priorities

38:30 and well. I wasn't any longer suited to my then girlfriend, however she, the beginning was, the end was nigh before we left Perth. On a particular time we worked Saturday mornings and she came in on the bus and I picked her up to take her out

39:00 somewhere and I scowled a bit and she insisted on knowing why and I said, "Well I thought you would dress a little better" she promptly said "When you have caught your fish you don't have to bait your fish any longer".

**Oh dear.**

I thought she was quoting her mother but there you are.

**You don't need that sort of thing.**

That was the beginning of the end as far as she was concerned.

**Sure, do you have any**

39:30 **thoughts about war as far as it being a positive or a negative phenomenon?**

War is a disgusting awful, terrible, shocking thing to be avoided at almost all costs. But Hitler poked his



thumb and nose up at the treaty of Versailles

- 40:00 he went into, Austria, Czechoslovakia. Joined Mussolini and Mussolini had to go down Eritrea and Abyssinia and the League of Nations did nothing, nothing, were powerless. Hitler thought he would get away with Poland. Thank god Chamberlain [Prime Minister of England] drew the line and we nearly went under.
- 40:30 I think that the reasonable comparison in the current day we had South America, Africa, Middle East etc etc Korea north and south and the United Nations for all practical things can do nothing. And much as I think it was inevitable for
- 41:00 George Bush and America etc and England to do something. The yanks aren't as experienced or as diplomatic as the Brits. I think the Brits did a much better job in Basra than the yanks have done in Baghdad, different area different things but yanks are a bit impatient. None the less we can't do without them. And perhaps
- 41:30 I should quote my wife was in a competition. A debating competition in Sydney, North Sydney Girls High School and the finals of the inter school competition the subject of debate was the League of Nations. And they had to draw for sides and they had anti and I think her closing statement was "The League of Nations the League of Hallucinations". And they won the debate but the United Nations.....

**INTERVIEW ENDS**