Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Crawford (Bob) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Okay Bob so if we could start with just a bit of a summary of your life story until now.**

Yeah, well I was born in 1921 in Dulwich Hill in New South Wales, a suburb of Sydney. I lived there all my life until I went to work, Paper Products in 1940. And

01:00 in 1940 I joined the Royal Australian Air Force. In September 1940 joined the Royal Australian Air Force and started my career in the air force at the beginning of World War II. From then on it was a, I went to Bradfield Park. And from Bradfield Park where I did my initial training service I then graduated

01:30 to Mascot Aerodrome where I did my flying training on Tiger Moths. And that was on Course No. 6 in the Empire Air Training Scheme which was the major air training scheme in World War II and which, a very, most successful one. At Mascot Aerodrome, after leaving from Mascot I went to

02:00 a service flying training school at Wagga. And that, I didn't mention but at Mascot it was two months training there and at Wagga it was four months training. And it was called a service flying school. And when I arrived there the school was divided into two departments, one for bombers and one for fighters. The bombers,

02:30 the lads that went on to bombers were on Ansons and the boys that went on to fighters were on Wirraways. At that time Australia had no real fighters at all. I think the most up to date aircraft they had at that time was Wirraway. Down in Melbourne where they were training, they had Hawker Demons, which was a very antiquated bi-plane. So I completed my training there. And

03:00 after finishing our courses we were all posted away. Being a course early in the piece, half our course was kept back in Australia to train other up and coming pilots. The other course was sent overseas to continue their service flying training.

03:30 I was one of the fortunate ones that with another chap was posted direct to an air force, permanent air force squadron, which was in Darwin, No. 12 Squadron. And the other chap was posted to 24 Squadron which was another Wirraway squadron, which was based in Brisbane. Of that half

04:00 course of No. 6 Course, we were the only two to get posted away to squadrons. After leave I got posted down to Point Cook where I joined the CO [Commanding Officer] of 12 Squadron and he was down there picking up brand new aeroplanes to take back to refurbish the aircraft they had

04:30 up in Darwin. We were there for a week and there was four aircraft, squadron Leader Clarrie Glascock, Flying Officer George Shave, another air force Empire Air [Training] Scheme pilot by the name of Lou Whittenhall and another air force Empire Air [Training] Scheme bloke Allan Tutt and myself, we made up the rest of the air crew. I might

05:00 add that a Wirraway only carries two people, that's a pilot and a navigator. So with the four aircraft we had there was eight people. I omitted to explain two of the navigators was Col Harvey and an Alex Spooner I think. They were navigators in the CO's aircraft and the flight commander's aircraft. It took us

05:30 three days to fly to Darwin. And from then on, it was a learning curve of what to do in squadrons and how to handle the Wirraways and it was most impressive flying in the Northern Territory. Darwin in those days was sort of an outback town. The only notoriety, I think they got was when people were flying back in aeroplanes from England in little bi-

06:00 planes and what-not and making it. But all in all it was a wonderful experience to be in Darwin. In Darwin we did everything and I was in Darwin I think for just on, I arrived there I think was in April and I left in March. April 1941 and I left in March 1942. Do you still want me to

06:30 go on?

Absolutely, you're doing very well.

Yeah. Whilst I was in Darwin we did all exercises of which bringing us up to the fitness of squadron. We were all new to the permanent air force and we were sort of, we were like the underlings being sergeant pilots. And of course everybody else was of permanent air force rank. The navigators were permanent air force but they were

07:00 sergeants like myself. And I never mentioned that I graduated from Wagga as a sergeant. And the other chap that went into 24 Squadron he graduated as a pilot officer. But for all the time in Darwin we did a lot of work in regard to army co-op, naval co-op and doing general flying round the area for familiarise,

07:30 to familiarise ourselves with the area. And we used to fly out to various, they used to call them OABs which stands for Operational Air Base. And these were situated right out in the middle of Arnhem Land, down the centre, down Tennant Creek way, Birdham, Batchelor and as far out as Drysdale River Mission, which is on the Western Australian

08:00 coast and on the northern tip of Western Australia. And also down to Wyndham and various other places that are round about. Had a very funny experience once whilst in Darwin. Four of us, pardon me, three of us were flying down to Drysdale River Mission and which is right on the Western Australian coast.

08:30 And it was at that particular time it was known as part of it was the old mission and the new mission had a sort of a sandy strip or sandy aerodrome there. But in this particular time we flew down, there was three aircraft. Flight Lieutenant George Shave was leading and there was Lou Whittenhall and myself

09:00 with three navigators. And we delivered a thousand pounds of bombs down there. They weren't armed but we just delivered them there. That was four hundred and two fifty, four two hundred and fifty pound bombs under each aircraft. We flew from Darwin to Wyndham where we refuelled and then we had to fly approximately northwest to Drysdale River Mission. I don't know what really happened

09:30 but as being, we were two NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] pilots of the Empire Air Scheme which was just a little bit of a difference. But George Shave was leading but when we hit the coast, Drysdale River Mission wasn't in sight anywhere. For the next hour or so we were flying up and down trying to find Drysdale River Mission, which is not a very good thought when there's nothing out there. Nothing at all.

10:00 And after various turning, flying north and then turning back and flying south, backwards and forwards, George Shave decided to force land at a hut. Which was the only visible signs of inhabitants at all. And he landed there with his bombs and Lou Whittenhall went in to land there but he didn't do the,

10:30 do it the right way but had to jettison his bombs in the water. And I had previously said to my navigator to, "Tell them that I would stop aloft until they found out which direction Drysdale River Mission was." Because I thought, we never went further north than what we had been going. And he let them know that I was flying north

11:00 as far as I could go, and I'd go to a point of no return and if I couldn't find the aerodrome I'd come back and force land with them. But as all went with the two way radio which was a, which was in the back of the Wirraway. They informed us that the Drysdale River Mission was further north than what we had been going. And I got up to a point of no return

11:30 where I either I had to go forward or go back and I just told them to, told him to let them know I was flying on. And that's where I was going. I was very fortunate because having been there before I got there and found the aerodrome and, with no petrol at all I landed the wrong way into the sandy strip at that time and I looked like finishing up in the,

12:00 in a river creek bed, dry of course. But at the end of the run I just had to take a violent manoeuvre and round loop the aircraft and go down in the riverbed. And being a sandy strip we slid sideways for about fifteen yards before we stopped. And didn't do any damage to the aircraft or anything. And we sort of pulled it out of the sort of ditch and that was that.

12:30 The funny thing about that too was that the reason they said that we got lost was that was, we were carrying magnetic bombs which influenced the compass on the aircraft. But I think that's a lot of hogwash, we just got lost. So that was that. But the other two aircraft, they had to send luggers down there to refuel them.

13:00 And they eventually got back about six or seven days later and I got back to Darwin in the one piece and that was it But nothing ever happened about it. So that was one of my greatest experiences of Darwin. We had lots of training exercises in Darwin. We were flying, night flying, searchlight co-p [co-operation] which is a very intrepid sort of a

13:30 exercise because being up in the tropics they're very dark nights. And we used to fly from about seven o'clock night training with the army searchlight crews. And if they picked you up in the searchlight, because they were very tenacious, they wouldn't let you go. And irrespective of what you did, they held on to you until such times as you flew out of the range of them. And I think

14:00 at that stage they had a three pinned effort that you flew along and once the searchlights picked you up,

another two got on to you. So you had three searchlights on you all the time. And as you flew out of range of one searchlight, another searchlight picked you up so until such times as you flew right out of range you were always in the glare of the searchlights which involved you

14:30 sort of flying on instruments all the time. Because a few people had been, had lost their lives by trying to escape the searchlights. And he just got into, in a very awkward position and it proved fatal. But that was very good and we did lots of exercises all over the Territory. We used to go out and drop papers

15:00 to them, to bring them up to date. They were really isolated and what-not and that was that. But all going well my time in Darwin, we used to go round into town, we used to have lots of reciprocal parties for the army, the navy. One, about once a month sort of extending hospitalities,

15:30 one to each service. And it was a good time and very wonderful in the camaraderie-ship between the various services. But the, but we used to do a lot of training. We used to go out, we used to have pushbikes and we used to have a look round about the place. But we did that all the time and we were with the aircraft that we had,

16:00 which was only Wirraways. The only other squadrons on there at Darwin at the time was a Hudson of 13 Squadron and 2 Squadron and they were the bombers. And they were the most advanced aircraft that the air force had in 1940. Then, we used to have a bit of a reciprocal thing with the Dutch Air Force, the Netherlands East Indies Air Force, they used to

16:30 fly into Darwin and we'd have exercises with them. Not so much the Wirraways because their aircraft were far superior to ours. And then, but they used to come down sort of about every three months and the 13 Squadron go away to them. But the most important thing was that on the nine, sorry, pardon me, on the seventh of December, 1942 [actually 1941]

17:00 when Pearl Harbour was bombed the, everything sort of happened. I could use a rude word here. But everything seemed to jump into line in Darwin. And everything was moving at a fast rate. We couldn't do very much except fly around in our Wirraways trying to do some good. But the 13 Squadron and 12 Squadron

17:30 were, seemed to move away over to Indonesia. And do a lot of work there. And we then started to get American Flying Fortresses coming through Darwin and staging their way up to the Philippines. And eventually things started to go very bad in the war, when the Japanese coming down

18:00 going through Hong Kong, the Philippines and Malaysia [Malaya] and Burma. And then they were sort of getting very close to Singapore, Singapore fell. And things were really getting very awkward in Sydney, or in Darwin I should say. But the Americans kept flying backwards and forwards. And their Flying Fortresses were getting less and

18:30 less. They were flying from Darwin and up to bomb the Philippines and then fly back to Australia, to Darwin. And whilst we were there a batch of Kittyhawks came in on the, I think, on the way to Malaysia [Malaya] or to Singapore. And I think they came in on the, about the eighteenth of February. And they were on the civil, pardon me on the permanent aerodrome.

19:00 As a precautionary business, 12 Squadron was broken up, it was in three flights and I was in A Flight. And we were located on the civil aerodrome at Parap. The civil aerodrome from the permanent aerodrome as the crow flies would be no more than about three of four mile. In an aeroplane you wouldn't, if you took off from the civil aerodrome to fly to the permanent you, you wouldn't even

19:30 put your wheels, or pull your wheels up. So we weren't very far from the permanent aerodrome. But we were on the civil aerodrome, our flight. And the B&C flights were down at Batchelor, which was an OFB, an Operational Flying Base. They were down there. But on the nineteenth of February, twe were in, on the

20:00 civil aerodrome and it was known in the air force as a TOC, which stands for a temporary, a THC I should say, a Temporary Hutted Camp. And we were just in little corrugated iron sheds sort of thing. And we had a Belmont hangar there. But the civil aerodrome, Guinea Airways used to fly in about, I'm not too sure whether it was a once a week or two or three times a week and used to land there and turn around and

20:30 fly back to Adelaide. But on the nineteenth of February, oh it must have been about nine o'clock in the morning, I was walking in the THC and George Shave said to me, he said "Oh where's your navigator?" I said "Oh he's doing his washing." And he said "Oh go and get him out, go and get him out." he said the, "We gotta go flying." And I said to him, I said "Oh well." I said

21:00 "What have we gotta do?" He said "Oh well we've gotta protect the ships in the harbour." And so I had to go and find Harry Susans which was my navigator. And he was bitching like billy-oh because he was up to his eyeballs in shorts and washing and he said "Oh what have we gotta do?" I said "Oh we've gotta fly and protect the ships in the harbour." So he got dressed and about twenty to ten that was.

21:30 Then, I was just walking with Harry in between the huts and George Shave came in a canter up to me. And I said to him I said "I'm very sorry Sir, I haven't got the aircraft out yet." He says, "Bugger the aircraft." he says, "Look." And I looked up in the air, in the sky and here was all the bombers, they were

over Darwin. And of course we then just went

22:00 straight into the bush round where we had slit trenches, where we had the aircraft hidden or camouflaged. And they bombed and strafed Darwin, the permanent aerodrome. They bombed and strafed our civil aerodrome and after the raid was over all hell broke loose. We were trying to put out fires

22:30 on, we had ammunition in some of the huts and that was on fire and all things like that. But we then had got orders to go over to the permanent aerodrome to get bombs from the bomb dump over there and bring them back and load the aircraft up with the semi armour piercing bombs. Which was going, we put four on each aircraft, we had three.

23:00 And a remarkable thing was that none of our aircraft were damaged, they had an aircraft in the Belmont hangar which was doing a service. It had all the sides off it; it was standing up on jacks and to the aircraft no damage at all. We went over to the civil aerodrome and I've never seen such an exodus of people in all my life. We had to drive from the civil

23:30 aerodrome across into the main road which goes right through to Birdham and the exodus was absolutely unreal, every sort of vehicle that would move was just leaving Darwin. And fortunately I believe a lot of air force blokes evacuated Darwin because they were sort of told to "Go south." I could not tell you anything about that at all and I won't elaborate on it.

24:00 But we went over to the permanent aerodrome, we got the bombs out came back and put them on the aircraft and that was round about one o'clock in the daytime and we were put on standby to take off and attack the Japanese fleet that was thought might be coming in. I might add at this stage the American Kittyhawks that had taken off

24:30 that morning before, couldn't get through, through bad weather. They came back and in the middle of the raid and there were very high casualties in amongst the Zeros and whatnot. And I couldn't tell you how they finished up in the long run. But in our case the 13 Squadron and 2 Squadron they weren't on the aerodrome at the time. They were out

25:00 in Malaysia, in Malaysia and Indonesia I should say. And I correct that, they weren't in Malaysia or Indonesia, and but I don't know where they were at the time. By about seven o'clock at night when it was dark we were taken off standby or stand down. Which we did. Next day then I had to, I was despatched to go out and fly

25:30 a big course right out to sort of south west from Darwin out as far as go and fly right out to sea. To fly a course right up to Bathurst Island. To see if any warships were coming in at all. And I had the instructions to report the position. And then attack. Fortunately there was no invasion force coming and I finished up,

26:00 up at Bathurst Island then I flew back to Darwin. And from then in Darwin, it was very interesting, they had lots of things to do, looking for ships that were missing and whatnot. They had to go to Bathurst Island. And I found an American ship that had been bombed and caught on fire and it'd drifted onto Bathurst Island and although it was a large ship of

26:30 about four or five thousand tons, it was, I found about four or five bodies on the sand. American bodies. But just came back and reported it again. Another instant and that was from the nineteenth of February. Another job I had to do was fly with my navigator to find a ship that was missing down off the

27:00 Western Australian coast. I flew to Wyndham and they hadn't made contact with the ship, which I think it was the SS Calama it was. And flew to Wyndham and refuelled again there and went out to look for this aircraft. It was, I'm not too sure whether it was going to Wyndham or on the way up to Darwin or was going from Darwin. I

27:30 think it was going from Perth to Darwin. But I went out and had to find it and eventually I did find it almost up in the most western tip of Western Australia and it had been beached. I didn't find any survivors there but I believed later on, I flew round the ship and whatnot and there was nobody there at all but it was beached

28:00 on the land in this bay. And I didn't bother, or didn't even think about looking for survivors anywhere else because I was a bit light on in petrol and I had to fly to Drysdale River Mission to refuel again. That I did, refuelled and then I flew back to Wyndham and then I in turn flew back to Darwin again and informed them where the ship was and told them all about it.

28:30 And that was that. About two or three days later I had to fly back to the Drysdale River Mission with a doctor because the survivors had been picked up by a lugger and I believe that they were only in the bay away from where I found the ship. And they never saw me and I never saw them. But they were picked up and taken back

29:00 to the old Drysdale River Mission. And the injured people, some of the injured people they couldn't transport them from the old mission to the new mission because the roads were impassable through bad weather and whatnot. And they couldn't get the injured people to the new mission. So I took the doctor down to the old mission, we stopped the night there.

29:30 The next morning I flew to the old mission and very luckily I managed to land in a little paddock in front of the old mission and in doing it, I was rather naive and very lucky I think. Because the paddock had a little fence in it and I had to land over the fence

30:00 and pull up before I hit their mission. And the only reason I didn't hit the mission was because I ground looped again. I seemed to be doing a lot of ground looping down there. But the thing was that I landed from the sea to the mission and I must have had a slight tail wind and I couldn't do it. So the doctor attended to the people there.

30:30 And I then had to fly the patients out in the back of the Wirraway which I think there's about four or five people. And I flew them out one at a time. I flew two out I think and flew out and but when I came back to land each time I landed back over the top of the mission which was the exact opposite way and

31:00 I just managed to pull up in time before I sort of finished up in the water. But anyway that went well but I stopped at the mission there one night. But I flew everybody out and got them back there to Drysdale River Mission the new mission and then they had to fly the doctor back, back to Darwin. But then

31:30 I think I was a very lucky person because I flew back to, from the Drysdale River Mission to Wyndham and refuelled. And I had been instructed to before I left to give, get the correct location for the SS Calama. And then, I think I was a flight sergeant at that time. And I thought "Oh bugger it, it's no point flying right out over to that place to go and look because

32:00 I know, already know where it was." And I was just happened to mention to the bloke that was refuelling the aircraft with me that I was supposed to go out and look for this SS Calama and I said, "I know where it is because I was out there and found it when it was bombed." "Oh." he said, "No." he said, "It's tied up at Wyndham wharf." I said "You're gotta be joking." And he said "No, it's in at Wyndham wharf." And I thought "Strike me lucky." if I'd have gone

32:30 back and told them that it was still up there, I'd have been court martialled I think. But anyway I commandeered a truck and we went in there and here it was tied up at the wharf. And it had taken a direct hit in it. And they had a couple of trucks hanging off the rigging. And it had been holed but the only reason I believed talking to the engineer and the captain there that they put the crew back on board

33:00 again and got the pumps going. Pumped it out and they sailed it back to Wyndham and tied it up and had the pumps going and that was that. So I went back and reported that back to Darwin. And and also told them about where the patients were and I believe about a day or two later they flew a DH86,

33:30 or 86 or 84 which was a De Havilland aircraft which was an ambulance aircraft back to Wyndham. And it was going out to pick up the patients and bring them back to Darwin. But it arrived in the morning. I don't know what time in the morning and it was being refuelled and I believed Jap Zeros came in and strafed it

34:00 and burned it. And in the ensuing attack on the harbour and strafing in Wyndham, I'm led to believe, the way I heard the story, was that they took off from the Calama, they got off the Calama but the pumps stopped or something happened and it filled up with water and rolled over and sank at the, and that's was the way I heard the story. But that was what happened.

34:30 And but then from, what happened from then was I got back there and I think I flew from down to, what was it, down to Batchelor. And when I was at Batchelor they said to me, "You've been posted." I said "What do you mean I've been posted?" He said "You and Butler have been posted to 75 Squadron."

35:00 And at that time we'd just changed COs. And it was Squadron Leader Blackjack Walker, Brian Walker who was the CO. And he called us in and he said "Butler, bend over." And he said "What for?" And he said "I'm gonna kick your backside." So we said, "What's that for?" He said "Well you're experienced blokes and I'm losing you and I'm just getting

35:30 new blokes and nobody that knows much around about it, the place." So and I said "Well what's this 75 Squadron?" and he said "I wouldn't have a clue. I don't know what's." he said, "I don't know what aeroplanes they've got." And he said "They're at Townsville, you've gotta go to Townsville." So that was on the Sunday afternoon and at oh about ten o'clock that night we were on a DC3 aircraft of the USAF [United States Air Force] Air Force. And they were

36:00 then at that stage flying, they were flying supplies in from Brisbane into Darwin and we flew out on this DC3 down to Archerfield. And then we got off there and we took a day absent without leave really. And then reported to, got on the train and reported to Townsville. And then, we got to Townsville on the

36:30 Friday and we got out to Garbutt and it was then we found out that 75 Squadron had Kittyhawks. Which the only Kittyhawks we'd ever seen was the ones the Yanks had there in Darwin, which sort of got hammered. And I think it was Wing Commander Peter Jeffreys, was the CO and he said, "Where've you blokes come from?"

37:00 We said "Darwin." And he said "How long you been in Darwin?" And we said "Oh about a year." And he said "Oh, you blokes've gotta have some leave if you've been up there for a year." He said "We're

leaving today to go to Port Moresby." And he said "You haven't even seen the aeroplane and you haven't even flown the aeroplanes." And he said "You can leave tonight and go to, because we're flying out to Moresby."

37:30 I could tell you a story about that after but it's later. Michael Butler and myself went, came back to Dulwich Hill where I lived. We arrived there on, we arrived there on Monday morning. Ten o'clock Monday morning we had an immediate return to 76 Squadron which was being formed at Archerfield. To return immediately to,

38:00 to there. And we caught the Tuesday night's train and got to Archerfield on Wednesday morning. And 76 Squadron was being formed then with Kittyhawks. And we were given, they said "You blokes are to fly the Kittyhawks." And we started to fly them on the Wednesday and just get used to

38:30 them. And we had a chap that had come back from the Middle East, a chap by the name of Flight Lieutenant Alan Boyd. And we just got in and nobody knew much about them. And they just said "Here's the book, read the book and go and fly them." Which we did. And I think on the Saturday or Sunday I think we, I had about six hours on the type and we took off to, took off

39:00 on the Saturday or the Sunday, not quite sure, to fly to Port Moresby. And there was Alan Boyd, Alan Boyd, Mick Butler, myself and I think another chap, I can't remember his name. But we flew, we got to, what do you call it half way between Townsville and Brisbane, where we met a,

39:30 I'll think of it in a moment, where we met a Kittyhawk flying back to have a new wing put on it because it had hit a, flown by Johnny Piper. And he in turn on the first raid on Lae, hit a bomber and pushed the point five ammunition machine gun out the back of his wing and he was flying down the aircraft to get a new wing put on it. And that's where we met

40:00 him and he told us all about it. And then eventually we flew on to, still can't think of that other place where we met him. But the, we flew onto Townsville and refuelled, and went Townsville to Cairns. From Cairns, no Townsville to Cooktown, from Cooktown to Horn Island, from Horn Island to

40:30 Port Moresby and I think we arrived at Port Moresby on the twenty-fourth of March. And on the twenty-fourth of March, we, I did my first well not sortie pardon me, mission in protecting the, the aircraft that are on the ground at Port Moresby. And...

Tape 2

00:31 **Bob, you were telling us about, you'd just arrived in Port Moresby and you were doing your first flight protecting. I was wondering if you could take us from there and...**

Yeah well my first fly, I arrived was what they called aerodrome patrol and it was we were protecting the aircraft on the ground. But I might reiterate I'd arrived but when they first arrived, 75 Squadron they got shot up

01:00 by the, as everybody knows and the CO, he almost got killed. But when I arrived, they had a quick, acquitted themselves very well with the enemy and they destroyed a hell of a lot of fighters and bombers on the ground. Of which, the, Johnny Piper, who I met on my way up to Moresby,

01:30 he was one of the bombers. But he was an above average pilot and was an inspiration to all of the newer blokes there. But from then on the Port Moresby, we had a lot of aeroplanes but we did not have any replacement aeroplanes. We flew in four replacement aeroplanes. I think we might have had 24 all up

02:00 aircraft but each time with unserviceability, bad runways, bad it was bad, it was a real rough runway and was bombed consistently. We were damaging aircraft and the only way we could keep aircraft flying was by cannibalising aircraft that were beyond repair. But all the time there, on the average, you'd be

02:30 some days you wouldn't get a raid but you might have two in the one day. Which entailed having a standing patrol of two aircraft over the aerodrome for oh about two hours or more. And then you'd have to come down and refuel. And there was a standing patrol all the time. The other aircraft would take off

03:00 from the ground and relieve you and then you'd land. But we always had two aircraft in the air over the seven mile strip. What would happen then is, once we got all if there was a raid coming in the, which the, was real rough. They'd have, they used to fire off, I'm not quite sure we used to, they used to fire off a rifle. Which

03:30 was the raid and then in, no, two aircraft, another two shots I think it was they used to take off. But they'd climb up through us and go up to as high as they possibly could. To, say if to attack the bombers that were coming in. The way we got notification of these raids coming in was by the coast watchers. Which was coast watch, couldn't even tell you his name at the moment, I've got a bad

04:00 memory. But he was overlooking Lae airstrip and used to see the bombers come or the fighters take off

and they used to join up with the bombers and they'd come over Moresby and bomb. And I think it was only about from the time they took off about approximately an hour before they got there. But we would be all prepared for them. If we could get up and high enough sufficient. And

04:30 if there was aircraft on the ground we'd maintain our low cover which was for in case they strafed what camp we had there. And but otherwise we'd go up and join the others which was around about twenty odd thousand feet plus. It was usually the higher that we could get the better because it was the only place that we could equip ourselves

05:00 in an attacking formation was diving through the formation and attacking them either head on attack or, but once we sort of got through them we were in amongst the Zeros. And you could not dog fight the Zeros on an equal formation. Once they started to become superior and they had far superiority in numbers to us, we would have to sort of get the hell out of it

05:30 sort of business. Which I believe the people down in Air Board thought that we were yellow or something like that. And because it was proved in Burma that that was the only way that the Americans Chennault Team with their Flying Tigers, that was the only way they used to attack the bombers in Burma. But the, that was our only defence. The aircraft that we

06:00 flew had come straight out of Kittyhawk crates, were assembled. And they were not even trimmed correctly, they flew and the radios didn't work and all in all it was a hard battle. I had trouble flying behind a bomber one day which I wouldn't have been any more than twenty yards from a bomber and I only had one gun fire. The Kittyhawks

06:30 had six point five guns and when they worked they were a lethal fire power. But I had one gun and the reason I presume it wasn't going, they hadn't cleaned the oil out of the others and being up high it was inclined to sort of refrigerate or seize or something. And my gun was just like a little pop gun going off. Pop, pop, pop all the time and very frustrating when you're so close to the enemy. Others had that trouble. The ground staff,

07:00 it wasn't their fault. They in turn weren't used to the Kittyhawks they were learning as they went along. And they did a magnificent job. They worked from daylight to dawn every day. But they eventually were getting on top of all these sort of little problems and the aircraft started to excel in the hands of the pilots.

07:30 And this went on every day for, well for forty five days. But in that ensuing time we were losing pilots approximately, I wouldn't say one every day but we were losing pilots through the superior aircraft or manoeuvrability of the fighters. Our CO, John F. Jackson, he went over on a reconnaissance flight one day

08:00 and got shot down over Lae. And it took him about fourteen days to walk back and he came back again. And well by help with natives, which were friendly to them. And we also had a pilot that was shot down, a bloke by the name of Wilbur Wackett, he was shot down on the first raid on Lae. And it took him over a month to walk back to the squadron and he in turn

08:30 was that sort of, with malnutrition and walking, he never came back to the squadron. John F. Jackson came back to the squadron. He was in a bad way but he wouldn't think of not flying again. And he came back and the morale of the squadron was not very high after losing the CO. Les Jackson was made temporary CO, that's

09:00 his brother who I used to fly, number two-two. But the CO, he eventually came back and started to fly again immediately. But he never mentioned who he's, a fantastic bloke not that I ever met him at all. But on the twenty-fourth of, we were still having our interceptions with

09:30 aircraft but on the twenty-fourth of April then I was flying with Les Jackson doing this patrol and a raid came in and then this raid came in and we stopped and joined in with the aircraft that went up to twenty odd thousand. But we had been up in the air

10:00 for over two hours before the raid came in and we had to go down and land. We didn't land on the seven mile strip because that was the most popular strip of all times there and we landed on a little strip on, beside the water. Kila Kila they called it where they had a squadron of American A24 Dauntless dive bombers. We refuelled there and immediately took off to the west and flying out over Port Moresby

10:30 Harbour. And were only about five hundred feet and coming from west to east was an American Martin Marauder bomber was being pursued by about five or six Zeros. Went over on the same altitude, which was about five hundred feet and we attacked the Zeros. And in the ensuing fight at about five hundred feet which is, nobody in their right mind would fight

11:00 there but I had my share of Zeros which in the ensuing, me trying to out run them. They were all on, well they weren't all, they eventually sort of shot me down into the harbour, well forced me down into the harbour. And I survived the ditching and I thought I was going to be strafed in the water but they finished up going over and strafing a couple of Catalina flying boats and destroyed them.

11:30 Unfortunately and tragically in that same ensuing business Michael Butler was shot down and landed in the kunai grass sort of west of Moresby and another chap Pilot Officer Ozzie Shannon was shot down

and killed. But life still went on. People were very sick in the squadron. The doctor and all the ground staff were all

12:00 suffering with these maladies of tropical illnesses and whatnot. The doctor did a marvellous job trying to keep the squadron together in fitness. We and but like the squadron was formed in a fortnight and sent away. And most of the squadron when it was formed the 75 were ex 24 Squadron air crew that had

12:30 been up in Rabaul and that were almost wiped out up there. So they really had nothing at all and we were just sort of stuck out up there at Port Moresby trying to stop the Japs from getting into Port Moresby. Then and about three days later in another big air battle after, it appears they, the Air Board or I would say Board from a higher authority,

13:00 the, they said "We had to change our tactics to, and become more aggressive and take the fight to the Japanese." And in trying to demonstrate this the CO was last heard saying "You know I'll get you little yellow bastards and I'll shoot you down." And

13:30 tragically he was shot down in a dog fight at that stage. Another pilot in that same thing was Barry Cox, he was shot down and he was killed too. And same business and that was that. So we still we were getting less and less aircraft all the time and we carried on until we were only flying about two or three

14:00 aircraft at all. My last flight, we only had two aircraft, serviceable at the time. I was on standing patrol over Port Moresby. And this young lad, just trying to think of his name at the moment, he'd only just joined the squadron and he was nineteen and he was my number two. And we got jumped by about five or six Zeros in the ensuing milieu

14:30 he got shot down and killed. And I was fortunate enough to escape but he'd only just joined the squadron two days before. But we didn't have many aircraft left and things weren't going too well, an invasion force was coming in and it was round about the middle of the Coral Sea Battle.

15:00 And I think we only had about three or four aircraft left after, we only had two serviceable but we had three aircraft left. That was the two days before we had the very big meeting in a tent where the CO called the squadron together and said "We have been withdrawn from Port Moresby.

15:30 There was, the Coral Sea Battle is now on, the squadron has been withdrawn to the mainland." And at that time two American P39 squadrons had come in to relieve us and they'd only been there a few days. They said, "The three aircraft we've got here, we're going to want three pilots to man the

16:00 aircraft and the rest of the squadron the pilots, will go back and reform again." About eight o'clock that night we were in a tent and the CO said "Right-o." he said, "A number of the ground staff were, had been elected to stop and keep the three aircraft serviceable." And he said "We're going to draw straws to see

16:30 who is going to stop." Well before that happened he said "I would like volunteers to see who will stop and fly the three aircraft." And the CO said "I am going to fly one of them." that was Les Jackson. He said "Johnny Piper, you're not going to volunteer, Jeff Atherton you're not going to volunteer, Jack Pettit, you're not going to volunteer, you've done a magnificent job here." And he said "We'll

17:00 draw, the rest of the squadron will draw straws." Michael Butler he drew a short straw, and then Peter Masters drew a short straw. At about oh midnight or quarter past twelve we got on to the, I think it was the Taroona in Moresby and we just got on board and we left with two corvettes to leave Port

17:30 Moresby and the next morning, the other three aircraft flew across from the seven mile strip to Kila strip that, where I mentioned just before. And they were waiting to find out what was going to happen. And they had the aircraft lined up there and out of nowhere a number of Zeros shot over the hill and strafed the three aircraft,

18:00 wrote off two of them and only left one Kittyhawk. And then word came from headquarters that to say the Coral Sea Battle had been successful and there was no longer for the aircraft to stop there and to come back to Australia. Jeff Atherton, pardon me, Les Jackson he flew one of the aircraft back immediately to

18:30 the mainland. Bill Dean Butcher, the squadron doctor who was there, he, Bill Dean Butcher organised it for him to fly in the back of an American A24 Dauntless dive bomber back to Horn Island and back to Cairns. And he got a quick short course on how to fire a machine gun out of the back of it. Peter Masters who was the other one, he didn't have an aircraft and he said "Oh,

19:00 I'll hitch a hide, a ride back on another aircraft." And Michael Butler was left to fly the other aeroplane back to Australia. So that was the finish of 75 Squadron in Port Moresby. We finished up going back to Cairns. We joined all up, joined together at Cairns. And then from then on 75

19:30 Squadron, we didn't have, we had one aircraft. But we then, all the pilots we were sent down from Townsville to pick up brand new aeroplanes that, which were at Bankstown. And we just, we were a squadron, I think the ground staff were just billeted at Townsville but we flew down to,

20:00 down to Brisbane in a DC3 and went to Bankstown. We got to Bankstown I couldn't tell you what day and what time but I think it was about two o'clock and we checked the aircraft out and they were all lined up for us to go. And Les Jackson said to, at that stage I was a warrant officer and at that stage the, I said to him, I said "Oh, what are we going to do now?" He said "We're going back to Brisbane."

20:30 I said "What do you mean going back to Brisbane?" He said "Yeah we're flying back to Brisbane now." I said "I live in Sydney." I said "I haven't been in Sydney for a year." I said "I only got one day and I got recalled." I said "I live here." He said "We're going back to Brisbane." So we got on the aircraft and went back to Brisbane. So, but til this day he reckons I did the dirty on him because then we flew back to, I got as far as Broken Bay, which is

21:00 the Hawkesbury, entrance to the Hawkesbury River. And my aircraft it was an automatic propeller on it or electric propeller and it kept going into full fine [?] and the only way I could get it out of full fine [?] was by doing it manually and to go with an aircraft all the way it could quit. So it took me two days before they rectified that. And I got up, I had my days in Sydney and he still, then that's fact, that was

21:30 nothing untrue about it. But I flew the aircraft then back to Brisbane and when I got to Brisbane they said to, I went into operations there and they said to me "Oh you're from 75 Squadron. There's a signal here for you." And I read the signal where I was to proceed not to Townsville but to go to Kingaroy. And then so I said "Right-o." I didn't even know where Kingaroy was.

22:00 And it happened to be where Joe Bjelke Peterson grew peanuts so away I went to Kingaroy. Got to Kingaroy and I was the first Kittyhawk there for 75 Squadron. And next day the squadron flew in from Townsville. A lot of the ground staff had already arrived. And it was a, I think I mentioned before, I think we lost about fourteen pilots besides most of the aircraft.

22:30 But we then had to, we were very light on in pilots. But we were replaced with lots of pilots that were all Spitfire pilots that had come back when things got bad in Australia. And they flew them back and we got a lot of Spitfire pilots that'd just come back from England via America and all seasoned, qualified pilots. But they'd

23:00 never flown Kittyhawks. So for the next six weeks or more, they were learning to fly Kittyhawks, which were entirely different to a Spitfire. A Spitfire was a smart little machine, it was like a greyhound in the air and where the Kittyhawk was like a big Matilda tank. It would take a lot of punishment but would save your life. But with the Spitfires they were a real fighter

23:30 and they would have outclassed the Japanese Zeros without any trouble at all. But in that transition of the blokes back from England we lost a number of them in flying accidents. Which was tragically they, the aircraft sort of being cumbersome and not as manoeuvrable, they would get into a spin or get couldn't control them

24:00 and even pulling out of dives, they couldn't pull out as quickly as the others and I think we lost about four or five there on training. But once they got used to it, they mastered the aircraft like all of us had. And eventually we went back to, the big word came we moved from Kingaroy down to Lowood and then from then on we were training all the time. And

24:30 whilst we were at Lowood we were doing city of Brisbane defence, we were operating as the defence of Brisbane in case of air attack. Which was still good training. And then the word came through that we were going back up to New Guinea. But this time we were going back with another squadron, the 76 Squadron. And we joined 76 Squad up at Townsville and as I said before

25:00 when I came back to join 75 we took 76 Squadron aircraft, their first aircraft. And took them to New Guinea when we went to Port Moresby. Well from then on 76 got trained, got all new aircraft and they had been training all that time that we were in New Guinea in doing it the hard way. And, the, so we were very efficient

25:30 when we went back the second time. And 76 Squadron were on the ball, because they'd been training all the time. We flew from up to Townsville and we flew to Cooktown. We stopped the night at Cooktown and with the two squadrons of aircraft which was about twenty-eight aircraft, not twenty odd I'm sorry about oh about thirty aircraft, we stopped at Cooktown and it

26:00 was one of those, oh we're off to war so we into town and we got on the grog. And I've never seen so many pilots all with their revolvers that came out of the woodwork round about six o'clock at night. And I've never seen so many bats in the air flying around. It was literally black with bats. And we were all out on the main street of Cooktown including Blue Truscott who was then, he was in 76 Squadron. And Peter Turnbull

26:30 was the CO of 76 Squadron but all trying to shoot down bats and we never hit one. Next morning we proceeded, took off to Moresby and we went to Horn Island. And we flew from Horn Island with an escort across to New Guinea and we got to Port Moresby that day. And I think that same day we flew down to

27:00 Milne Bay. And we, I think we arrived in early, very early in Milne Bay. I think it was, I can't remember. We arrived in Milne Bay I think about ten days before the Japs arrived in Milne Bay. And we all got

down there and settled in and just back to the mud and slush and tents and whatnot and oh awful conditions

27:30 Milne Bay. It was a muddy, bloody hole, rained and rained and rained all the time. 76 Squadron they settled down, we settled down. We were away out in the bush and that was that. But eventually we did training there and then I think it was about a week and a half till they started to raid Milne Bay.

28:00 And they raided sort of continually. The weather was in our favour but they used to strafe the, strafe the strip, the Japs they used to come from Rabaul and whatnot. We used to have American Liberators come in or a Fortress come in now and again. And I think it was the twenty-sixth of September,

28:30 I think it was the night before they, that's right the day before the Japs landed in Milne Bay, 75 Squadron, our flight was early in the morning. We were despatched to go in the bad weather to fly over sort of north or west by north to Goodenough

29:00 Island. Because the coast watchers had said there was about eight or nine or ten barges were coming down the coast loaded with troops and whatnot. And were sort of going down our way towards Milne Bay. And I think there was eight of us took off from 75 Squadron and like two flights of four. And Jeff Atherton was leading ours, Johnny Piper

29:30 was leading the other one. We flew, the weather wasn't very good but the way we flew from Milne Bay was across in a northwesterly direction. And then we arrived, got on Milne, over to Goodenough Island. And we just got there, just in time to see the barges just getting ready to pull in onto Goodenough Island and we immediately

30:00 four went in and strafed and strafed and strafed. And did untold damage on the barges and we used up all our ammunition on that and the other four that were top cover, they came in after us. And they did the same and the end result from that as we've heard later was that nobody got off the island. They were marooned on

30:30 the island. And we flew back the same way as we went and those barges and troops were supposed to coming from Goodenough Island would have hit the mainland and come in across the back door into Milne Bay and would have met up with the others coming in the front door. So that was that. Next day the Japs landed at Milne Bay and from six o'clock in the morning

31:00 til, for two days we did nothing but strafe and strafe. Ran out of ammunition and barrels and all things like that. Tragically, with the bad weather and whatnot, we lost about three or four pilots in, because there's big mountains on each side of Milne Bay. The CO of 76 Squadron was just strafing, flicked in his Kittyhawk and crashed and got killed. That was Peter Turnbull. And then

31:30 Blue Truscott took over, the squadron there. As I said, I got ahead of myself a little bit. After we got back after strafing the barges 75 Squadron and 76 Squadron took off in the afternoon and appalling weather and went out flying east to meet the oncoming invasion force. And

32:00 in and out of bad weather, they did sight the convoy coming in. And they bombed and damaged a corvette I believe or a, one of their destroyers. But they didn't do much damage. There was some 36 Squadron, 32 Squadron I think it was, Hudsons, they were trying to bomb them and whatnot. But they finished up getting back late, landing in the back of Moresby

32:30 late in the evening when it was dark. And tragically a pilot that shouldn't have been there he'd ferried an aircraft up to replace an aircraft and he talked somebody into saying could he go out on this trip and when he came in to land he landed on the wrong side of the flare path and hit the trees and he got killed. But as I said from then on

33:00 the army did a magnificent job there in fighting the Japanese. And the air force helped them greatly. And I think after about ten days, oh in between that, things got very tough going. And looks like at Milne Bay the Americans were building a second strip. And

33:30 they had that strip built which was only as the crow flies, you'd be lucky if it was two miles from the strip we were operating off. But it was there and that's where the army was. But what was happening, the Japs were coming in and shelling us every night. And they shelled a ship that was in there and sank it this night. And they were shelling us every night. They'd come in and just sort of pump shells into it

34:00 for all hours of the day and night. And what happened then the Japs looked like over running us. And to save the aircraft they decided to, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, to evacuate 76 Squadron aircraft with their pilots and those pilots that weren't on aircraft or had aircraft they flew them out in a

34:30 Hudson. And same with 75 Squadron. Then all the old blokes of 75 Squadron, which was not very happy, they were all given aircraft to fly out. And some of the newer pilots, they had to fly out in Hudsons. They left round about three o'clock in the afternoon, three thirty. But what happened, the

35:00 75 Squadron they had two aircraft that were unserviceable. And Bill Cowie and myself were left there to fly them out when they got them serviceable. I think it was about four o'clock in the afternoon mine became serviceable, the aircraft, and I flew it out, backed up to Moresby and I arrived at Moresby just in as it was getting dusk. And I parked my aircraft and got

35:30 in a truck that was there. And it was just dark then as Bill Cowie flew in in his aircraft. It was the only aircraft flying and as he came around he had nav lights on and whatnot. And he had the clear path out and we were sitting all the 75 Squadron blokes were sitting. And the seven mile strip it ran from east to west and the eastern end of it was a bootless inlet,

36:00 which was an inlet and on each side of it, it had high hills. On each side of the runway and Bill Cowie came and he flew from the east up along the strip and flew a cross wind leg which took him sort of flying south. And then flew from west to east to come in and land,

36:30 land from the east to the west. But we think he must have put his wheels down in the dark and didn't realise that the nose of the aircraft went down and as he turned to come round he flew into the hill and was immediately killed. Which was a great tragedy and it upset a lot of people. And so that was that. And that same night the, from what I'm told

37:00 they carried, the Japanese carried out Kamikaze attacks across the strip with the wonderful effort of the army. They killed hundreds of Japanese in their Kamikaze and from then on they pushed them back out of a, right back past the KB Mission and eventually they were evacuated the, about three or four days

37:30 later. We flew to Milne Bay again and we took up the usual thing of strafing them all the time. And then they withdrew the, the cruiser came in and withdrew them on a transport and away they went. And I think it was only about a matter of a few weeks after that the 75 Squadron, 76 Squadron were withdrawn back to the mainland again.

38:00 And back to myself, the well that's where I finished approximately with 75 Squadron because I went on leave from there. And every time I came back to join the squadron I got malaria and I finished up in the hospital for the next two and a half months with malaria. And the and from then on I had a short burst with,

38:30 with the aero, the fighter sector up there in Townsville. And I was still warrant officer and when I, when I went to fighter sector they told me more commission had come through and I was made a pilot officer and I'd been a pilot officer for about five months before I knew it. So I only had to do a month before I was got out of my probation.

39:00 And but then I got posted down to Mildura. Down to Mildura as a staff pilot instructing people on the OTU, which is Operational Training Unit. Which they never had when 75 Squadron was formed. And instructing the younger pilots which they were there for two months I think. A month on Wirraways and a month on,

39:30 on Kittyhawks, Spitfires, Boomerangs and the like. So that was it. So I had my next, I was there for a year at down there at Mildura. Which was quite good. I don't think there's much more to tell you about Mildura. It was, you did silly things, got into trouble there, won't elaborate on those.

Tape 3

00:48 **How did you end up in hospital?**

The two of us got posted from, when I got posted from Mildura the

01:00 CFI [Chief Flying Instructor] said "If you're gonna kill yourself, kill yourself up at the war but not down on my station." So I got posted away to the war. And Johnny Griffiths and myself went to, we got to, where was it, Cape Gloucester which is on New Britain and when I got there I was posted to 78 Squadron and Grant Walker said to me, he said "Look Bob I know you're an original 75 Squadron bloke,

01:30 you can go there or stop with me." I said "I'm a fatalist I'll stop with 78." First flight I think a little bit of bad weather came in and Johnny Griffiths and I were just getting area familiarisation. And I landed in bad weather, wet strip and he came in fast and went straight over the top of me. And that's where I got this pushed in. And so then, oh after about a week's time I was back in

02:00 Concord Hospital. So that was that. And then I went back to 78 Squadron, I went straight back and that's when I was just telling Isobel [interviewer]where I picked up the Kittyhawk and flew the Kittyhawk back up to New Guinea. See and left it there and with Fred Cassidy and flew up in a Beaufighter up to Noemfoor.

02:30 See, so and from Noemfoor then I was with 78 Squadron all the time. See so and you want me to go on from there. That's...

Yeah, absolutely up until the end of the war.

Oh well yeah from 70, flew to Noemfoor and we were stopped there with 78 Squadron. Just before I got there to 78 Squadron, they got involved in the last, I think, big aerial combat

03:00 in the McClure Gulf I think it was or Gelby Bay[?] I think it was. They shot down about oh five or six

Japanese aeroplanes for the loss of one. And that was later in the war. See but 78 Squadron I finished up, I became a flight commander in 78 Squadron. The CO was, can't think of his name at the moment,

03:30 but became the flight commander there. And also in 78 Squadron we were just doing watercraft sweeps and dive bombing and strafing and all that business day after day all over the place. But we had came along and joined us in that period of time after I was a flight commander, the only Aborigine fighter pilot in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] came and joined 78 Squadron. And he flew in,

04:00 not my flight, in Dennis Baker's flight and the he saw the war out in 78 Squadron. What was his name, Len Waters, Len Waters his name. A real good bloke and a nice type of bloke. But tragically I attended his funeral about three or four years ago up at St George, he sort of died suddenly. And air force

04:30 put on a Herc [Hercules aircraft] for him and you know we went up there for the funeral. But he was the only aborigine fighter pilot in the RAAF so, which is a one off. But the 78 Squadron it was a, Dick Sudlow was the CO of 78 Squadron at that particular time. And he was a bloke who'd just got out of Singapore when Singapore fell. And

05:00 but it was a different type of war in 78 Squadron. From the intensity of 1942 to 1943 everything changed. In early 1941, '42 it was going their way, the Japs' way. Because they had air superiority and good aeroplanes to fly and it was the way that the Americans came along with their

05:30 aircraft and numbers, it changed dramatically from the end of Milne Bay when they got kicked out of Milne Bay. And from then on it was a slow but tedious procession of just forcing them back and back and back. And then until such stages that when we got up to, right into Dutch New Guinea in 78 Squadron the war was getting away from us and we're just sort of

06:00 doing, mopping up operations right up through there where there's pockets of Japs and very few aircraft. And of course the boot was on the other foot. But the point is that and tragically was they were still losing men there, aircraft. If you put it to the ledger it wasn't very good. It was, what they were doing and losing men it didn't warrant it. But that was the way

06:30 things go. But 78 Squadron I liked very much but they're an entirely different squadron. And a better aircraft, the Kittyhawk was far superior to the ones we first had. Had everything in them and but a very good aeroplane. Don't think there's very much more I could say about 78 yeah.

And that's where you all were when the war ended?

Oh

07:00 when 78 finished I was waiting to go to with them to Tarakan. But Tarakan, the strip kept sinking there and I had to, I'd been posted down to another, to do a pilot gunnery instructors course down at Cressy in Victoria. And the CO just said to me, "Oh I can't keep you back any longer." And of course I went and when I got to Bradfield Park then

07:30 waiting to get posted down to Cressy I was only there about a fortnight, three weeks and the war, I think the war finished. And course at that stage of the game the, a new ball game started. Anybody that was in the embarkation depots, clean them, clear 'em out of it. So I got discharged almost immediately the war finished. So that was it. And then I had to get back into civilian

08:00 life see. And but I put in for the Fleet Air Arm, I put in for the Citizen Air Force, I put in for the Permanent Air Force. And then I missed out on the Permanent Air Force. Almost got in the Fleet Air Arm but I had to withdraw my application from the navy because I finished up I got a taxi plate. I won a taxi plate in a ballot so I thought

08:30 "Oh I might learn to employ myself with that." And I also tried to, almost got into civil flying. Which I decided I'd settle down and raise a family. And then out of the blue I sort of got a guernsey and went into the Assistant Air Force for five years just as a weekend pilot. Which was good and it satisfied everything and then I really settled down.

09:00 See, so, but that's about the history of the whole business.

Fantastic. We can start all over again now.

Yeah oh yeah, bits and pieces.

I'm just curious Bob what life was like for you growing up around the Depression. What your family, what it was like growing up?

09:30 Yep. Well growing up it was real good. I was just sort of a silly, a boy growing up and didn't have any worry. My dad had a good job with the Tramways and the Depression really didn't affect our family. Because he worked for the government and whatnot. And then I went to public schools all the time and I finished up at Canterbury High School And I no sooner finished Canterbury High School

10:00 or got the Intermediate Certificate, tried to get into the air force then but no avail. But they must have remembered my name because when the war started they sent me an application form. And see I had trouble with my family then because I was eighteen and you had to be, they had to sign for you to go in

and I had trouble then. But they eventually signed it and when I was nineteen, I had my nineteenth birthday

10:30 in the air force. That was the nineteenth. And that was it and I had my twentieth when I was in Port Moresby. See, so but no it wasn't greatly affected by the Depression and whatnot. And the oh, I don't only, well I only worked I think for about a year. That was as a junior clerk in a paper and board manufacturing firm.

11:00 And since then I've sort of worked for myself ever since. So that's a history of pre 1939.

What was the trouble that your family had with you wanting to join the air force?

Oh being a young person, wanting to go. See they, you couldn't join the air force without parents' permission. And

11:30 they were agin' [against] it and I was all for it. I was studying at the time, doing accountancy and whatnot and after studying at high school I wasn't particularly interested and the air force always appealed to me so I sort of battled on. But the war sort of started again but the point is it's a, in those days things didn't seem to think about it, people joining the army and whatnot. And the

12:00 and that's really why I'm a believer in National Service. I think it'd be a wonderful thing too but that's the way I feel. The, but all in all the, I couldn't get to the war quick enough.

What was it about the air force that attracted you, why Air Force?

Oh it appealed to me. I went for my first flight in an aeroplane sitting on my sister's lap at Mascot

12:30 Aerodrome in 1927 and I think it cost ten shillings to go for the ride. And it was in a claypan where Kingsford Smith Aerodrome was. And I liked it then and and I used to when I lived at Dulwich Hill, I used to ride over from Dulwich Hill over down through Sydenham onto the train line which used to run around Mascot Aerodrome and right up to the

13:00 hangars then. And I think at that stage of the game it was the Dutch airline used to fly, it was KNILM [Royal Netherlands Indies Airways] and you used to go up there to their hangar. And the captain and the first officer would have the cowls off the engines and would be working on the engines and all that business. And they'd always take time off to you and talk to you, you know about you know these ten year old kids coming out you know, backsides out of their trousers and whatnot. And bare feet

13:30 and they'd talk to you. And that's I think one of the reasons they triggered me off.

Oh that's fantastic. Had you heard much about World War I at all? Or did you know much about it?

My Dad never went to World War I, my uncle did. And he was in the artillery and came back deaf. But I had a lot of rapport with him, I had just as much with my father. But it was

14:00 always interesting to hear what he did in the war. And then like he came back, he went into a government job too I think after the war. But our families were apart, we lived at Dulwich Hill and they lived over at Chatswood way. And transport was not as good as it is now. Or well it's pretty crook now but it was a lot better than what it was then.

14:30 **So what impressions did you have of World War I?**

Oh I think it was a bastard of a war. I think the poor, the people at Gallipoli. I think it was shocking the slaughter that went on there. And but how wonderful it was with the Australians but it was the, it's I admire them for Gallipoli and the tenacity of the

15:00 Australians and whatnot to do well and this is right through the war. But see I was born in '21 and it's only that I realise now how precious these monumental things that they did should be recognised.

Absolutely. Had you, did you know much about Hitler or what was, the trouble

15:30 **that was going on in Europe before the declaration of war for World War II?**

I knew how ill prepared everybody was. And more so I knew how ill prepared Australia was at the time. But I was I think seventeen when I left school. And then I was doing accountancy and

16:00 it didn't look good because at that time Hitler was on a roll, and like every time it came up, the clouds looked blacker all the time. And it was just a matter of time with him getting out and going, he'd walk in to Poland and whatnot and other places. And he had to be stopped. And poor old Chamberlain [Prime Minister Great Britain] he tried to do his best but it was

16:30 not good, they were all laughing at you. See, a little bit like what Hussein was doing, or Saddam I should say. It had to be stopped.

So do you remember where you were and what you were doing when war was declared?

I do exactly. I remember the night. I walked out of, I was in the accountancy college

17:00 in the corner of Castlereagh in King Street. And I walked out of there and when I got down to the corner of Pitt Street and King Street there's the paper boys yelling out, it must have been about half past nine, quarter to ten, "War has been declared" blazing headlines. And I thought "This is it. This is it." And see I went home late and the family didn't know because they go to bed early. And I

17:30 think radio was about the only thing that was on. Whether they'd been watching I don't know. But I woke them and told them that war had been declared. And then to me it was a, I was working at Paper Products. And everything was up in the air and where I lived at Dulwich Hill the main train line went down there and I can remember oh four months later, I can remember

18:00 the army marching from Sydney up to Bathurst. You know it was to make them fit and all that business and how they were coming down from Bathurst the troops. And you'd hear the trains coming down, taking them to put them on the ships to go over the Middle East with their whistles tooting and blowing and all that. And you'd say "Oh there goes another troop train." I was very aware of what was going on. Seemed to make me keener. But

18:30 Mum and Dad weren't very happy to sign the form.

Do you remember what they said to you?

"No, don't be silly, don't be silly." I said "I want to, I want to." I had troubles with them but eventually they signed the form and away it went and but preparatory to doing that, I used to get myself fit. I used to go to, hated dentists in those days, but

19:00 I made sure all my teeth were right in order and whatnot you know. About two years before I tried to join the air force but so what happened, I got accepted. And fortunately in those days they accepted you as I mustn't have had any brains I suppose because they accepted me as a pilot you know there and then, but I didn't have any skills like in Morse or anything like that.

19:30 And the blokes that sort of used to get in Morse code you know, get a hundred percent were wireless operators. Well I was battling through with wireless, my wireless operation and that, but so they made me a pilot. And but that was it. And then I, they were just starting early in the piece there of

20:00 doing lessons to make you academic, more to cope with the things in the air force. And I went and took private lessons with a schoolmaster. You know in trigonometry I used to be up there and try to advance myself in trig and all that business and for navigation etc. And I did all those things and then I went to the Air Force Reserve Schools they started. And which was very good and I was very

20:30 friendly with a friend of my sisters there. And this particular night he wasn't there and I came home and I went into my sisters and said to my sister I said, "Charlie Somerville wasn't there tonight." I said "I think he might have got his call up." And my sister said to me "I didn't want to tell you that, that he got his call up to go into the air force."

21:00 And she said "Don't get upset everything's alright, everything's under control." And I said "Oh yeah" and so I chewed the bullet and I went to work next morning. And I took time off from work and went down to the recruiting centre. Went down the recruiting centre and went in and saw the bloke that was there. I dunno who it was but I said "Oh a mate of mine." I said, "We've been mates for ages." well I only knew him a few months. I said "I want to go in the air force, he got a call up

21:30 last night, I didn't." He looked up the book and he said "Oh a couple of blokes haven't you know notified." then he said "Could you go in tomorrow?" I said "Yes I can." So I went in with Charlie Somerville. So that day but my family weren't happy. The boss at work wasn't happy and you see because I went back and told him I was going in the air force the next day. So that was that. So I went with Charlie Somerville right through

22:00 until we split up. He went to Mallala on Ansons to learn Ansons and I went to Wagga on Wirraways. And that was that. But tragically he got kept back in Australia, he was married and he was kept back oh about eighteen months after he went to Mallala he got killed in an aviation accident. Or a training accident, you know he was teaching people to fly.

22:30 But I was up in Darwin at that stage of the game. So that's how I kicked off.

Were you aware of, I mean by everything I've read everybody who joined the air force wanted to be a pilot, were you aware of the stiff competition?

As I said, I think they wanted people with no brains. Of course they said "You're a pilot and whatnot." And I was lucky

23:00 I just sort of got through, I survived. But the day I learned, went to Mascot to get kitted out, an instructor fell out of the aeroplane, teaching a bloke how to fly and doing an aero liner. And in those days we sat on cushions, we didn't have parachutes. And then he fell out and the chap just came in and said "One of the instructors just fell out" and this was on

23:30 the corner of, just near the Prince of Wales Hospital at Randwick. And that wasn't a real thrilling thought but I survived going through Mascot. I looked like getting scrubbed on service aircraft at

Wagga, but I had an understanding instructor there. And he was very forthright. He said “You’re

24:00 not doing too good.” he said “You’re flying well and doing everything right but you’re not landing the aircraft well.” And he said, he was a real good bloke. Because they didn’t have time to waste time on you. And he said “I think it’s me that can’t put my finger on what you’re doing wrong.” And he said “I want you to go this afternoon with another pilot and see what goes on.” And in the afternoon they called me out and all

24:30 the blokes said “The scrub test, the scrub test.” And I said “Looks like it.” So this chap he said “Get in the aircraft” and I got in the aircraft. And after we taxied out and he sat in the back and away we went. And he said “Right-o do the landing” and he said to me he said “You’re looking straight down over the wing, looking down at the ground straight over the wing.” He said “When you come in to land.” he said

25:00 “Look right out in the distance. Look right out in the distance.” And I came in to land and I looked right out in the distance and he said “Do that again, do that again.” And then on the fourth time he got out of the aircraft and said “Right-o go solo.” So that’s how lucky I was. And I went back and my instructor said “I, never even thought of that, never even thought of that.” But he was manly enough to say that “He couldn’t put the finger on what I was doing wrong.” See and from then on

25:30 I’ve been flying.

So what other things do you think they were looking for in you that would, they would pass you as a pilot?

Well the point is it’s ability to do things, get there and be aggressive. Be aggressive and be positive in everything you did. See and be respectful of your aircraft and whatnot. And don’t get over confident because they always drummed into you that

26:00 one of the worst things in flying is, you get over confident and once, a bit like when you go from P plates onto what is it, black plates or whatever it is there. You get a bit over confident. And they always drummed it into you. And they had an old saying which everybody I think that flew aircrew knew. The old saying was “There’s old pilots and there’s bold

26:30 pilots but there’s very few old bold pilots.” And I think a lot of people kept that in mind.

What was your first solo flight like?

I can’t really remember the one in the Tiger Moth. I really can’t remember. But see it was at Mascot Aerodrome and it was pretty good, a lot of Tiger Moths around. Very few civil aeroplanes because there was only I think the air force

27:00 grabbed all the DC2s and DC3s, yeah they confiscated them. But they weren’t flying around as much but it was like a big aerodrome with Tiger Moths which you just had to watch yourself there. And you sort of got used to it because I used to fly not very far from here along from Mascot, along Brighton, out over to Towra and we also used to out at Pagewood, it was a

27:30 lot of vacant ground out there. And you used to do forced landings out there not that you landed. Which you came down about twenty feet from the ground right over where it’s almost high rise over there now. And that’s what it was all about.

Just with the forced landings, you were like doing a drill for forced landings?

No, you practised forced landings.

Practiced forced landings.

You practiced forced landings. The idea was

28:00 you were either on your own or with an instructor and he’d pull the throttle and you’d proceed to carry out the procedure of forced landings. You had to be very careful in doing it, that coming down with the motor sort of pulled to idle, it didn’t get too cold. And when you open it up again it wouldn’t cut out and then you’d have a real forced landing. But you’d open the throttle every now and again just to give it a swift burst

28:30 to warm it up again. But then you’d only get down to oh say fifty or a hundred feet. Or where in the cases where there’s plenty of open, you could go a little bit lower. But when the instructor would sort of let you go as far and then he’d say “I’m taking over” or climb away again when he could see that you could do it. And sort of point out the errors of your way in executing the exercise.

29:00 **Can you lead me through what you would actually have to do, to do a forced landing once the throttle had been kind of…?**

Well first of all you try to find out what’s the cause of it, whether the fuel blockage or somebody knocked off switches or whatnot. Or whether you could restart it, this is in a Tiger Moth. It varies with different aeroplanes but in a Tiger Moth, you just positioned yourself, you had to find which way the wind direction was blowing and you’d

29:30 position yourself sort of into wind but not getting too far down wind that you couldn't get into the paddock you wanted. And try and make sure a paddock that was free of obstacles because that looks pretty good from up top and when the closer you get the worse it seems when you've gotta make that decision. But with a bigger heavier aircraft, it's, when you've got, that's with a fixed undercarriage. With a retractable undercarriage you've got to make up your, they never said with retractable always land with wheels

30:00 up. But if you landed with wheels down you never damaged the aircraft, you invariably finished up on a charge because you landed with wheels up. But in some cases that you gotta be careful with it. Sometimes the only way to stop is to land wheels up where the friction of you pulling up you don't go too far.

Were the Tiger Moths a good plane to fly?

Very good

30:30 training plane. Very good training plane. Just like all the aeroplanes they train in now they're all built in a sophisticated way where it's easier for you to go from them into almost the same cockpit as what you're going to fly for like the rest of your life sort of thing. But in Tiger Moths they were just a throttle, a petrol cock to turn on the petrol, a stick and a rudder bar and

31:00 a throttle. They did have a mixture control but and that was about it. But then went up to Wirraways was a little bit more sophistication where you got heat controls for flying higher and all that. And then you advance up all the way through. It goes from you know Stage 1 to Stage 2, Stage 3. And then you're on oxygen and different other things. But that's about it.

Do you remember

31:30 **that you mentioned before that when you actually got into the air force you know when you were asked could you come tomorrow. Do you remember going back home and mentioning that to your mum and dad and your sister and what their reactions were?**

They were dismayed. They weren't very happy about it and I think they were very, there might have been the odd tear and thing. But they were worried from the time I joined the air force to the time I got out of the air force. See.

32:00 Always pleased to see when you got home in one piece. Except the, I don't think I ever kept the, I don't they ever, I don't they ever got a when I was shot down, I don't even think they ever got a letter or a cable about that. But I think when I had the accident in New Guinea they were a bit alarmed where I was hospitalised. Had to, but I don't know what went on in their mind. I think

32:30 like all mums and dads I think they were worried for their siblings.

Can you tell me about the, you know like your first experience after enlistment. Actually you know going to report for duty I guess?

What's that?

Your first experience at reporting for duty after you were enlisted?

I can't remember, imagine, just went in and it was a, you know you're a rookie. You're

33:00 a rookie and you get in and you had to got up, put in buses I think. We were taken up to Bradfield Park and then you had to go and get equipped. That was the same procedure - army, navy and air force. Here you are, you go to a clothing store and get something that fits and whatnot, handing them out all fatigue gear and whatnot. Then go in and to the what was oh I forget, the barracks, go in the barracks and you get a, sort of a, a mattress

33:30 made out of, oh what's it made out of set, not canvas but oh made out of sort of a rope material. And then go up and fill it up with straw and sort of try and tie it. And then go and get your blankets and in this big hut. You know I think we had about twenty-two in our hut. And then next thing you go and medicals, you were doing medicals and then you're

34:00 doing, getting injections and then you're getting your messing gear. You know the whole bloody imbroglio you know going one after the other. Then once you got all that done, that would be in the first few days. The, and then after injections people were getting crook, I was a bit fortunate. And they then started studies, which were rather intense. I think I was not too sure, I think it was two months I think the study and whatnot.

34:30 Basic, learning guns and navigation and all that business and wireless and the then Tiger Moths. It was more the elementary stage of Tiger Moths, just flying. Then when you've got to Wagga, service flying was navigation and all the real hard parts of getting yourself up to service quality, you know air force law and that business.

35:00 **Oh, what sort of things would they teach you in air force law?**

Well I say air force law, procedures of the air force. You know what you do, how to look up, how to do

this, how to do that. You know big books and whatnot. Not big books but you know just sort of you, not a précis sort of thing but we had to learn the procedures. You know how to salute, or that goes back in the business. But the, all nitty gritty bits

35:30 sort of again. See, so that was it.

Was any of the initial induction stuff, was that a bit of a shock?

No, no just took it as it came. You did it the hard way or did it the easy way. And the easy was you co-operated and whatnot. They were very strict but the point is that if you,

36:00 like I was never AWOL [Absent Without Leave] or late, I was always on time. But the point is I had been out since the, you know I'd do a thing that I wanted to do without getting caught and that was it.

What sort of things were they.....?

Oh you used to duck out if you wanted to go and do something. You might go up the pub and have a drink or something like that or whatnot. But they were pretty good. But see not as strict now as they are. You've gotta

36:30 do the right thing and that's what I found the easier way to do it. Cause I got leave and whatnot. Oh I got back late once to Mascot you know and I was sort of confined to barracks for a week or something like that. And you know different little things like that.

Did you make many mates through that induction period?

Every person you were with has the same thing they wanted to do. And they helped you and you were

37:00 sort of all in together. I doubt if I had a cross word with any of them out on the training. If anything they tried to help you win it. Back to flying was a bit hard but if you had trouble with doing a lesson, there was always somebody to help you. But when it came back to the actual flying part, it was they tried to help you and if they think they knew what you were doing wrong or whatnot. But that was it.

37:30 **You mentioned that you had leave every now and again through that period. What did you get up to?**

Oh mostly, everybody had to be in uniform. We were always identified the aircrew blokes with the forage cap. We used to have to wear a little white clip, like a bit of material in it

38:00 which indicated you were an air crew trainee. But I used to get a bit of hassle now and again from you know other services like the navy, you know we'll refer to as the Blue Orchids. But that was just chiacking [teasing] and things like that. It all, never got to the fisticuffs stage and whatnot. But never saw anything of you know white feathers or anything around like that at all where I was or anything like that.

38:30 The, no it was quite good. You had to be in uniform because you were owned by the air force then and they wanted to show you off I suppose.

So did that give you a different sense of yourself when you were actually away from the base on leave?

Oh no, no, in fact the at home you were just normal at home. It was only when you went out. See in the first,

39:00 when we're little trainees you had to get back there, you never got much leave. It might have been one day or two days home and back into it again. Because but when you got sort of fully trained, when your squadron, join your squadron so you were there. It was a seven day a week job when you were in the squadron and even when training. But you'd have like three or four days off well you'd go home and sort of

39:30 relax a bit. And then when you were in squadrons like I was away for a year in Darwin but I think I got back for one day and then I was off again. But then after the squadrons see they used to give aircrew blokes short ops leave which was around about a fortnight from the time you left the squadron to the time you got back. And more so to when instructing at Mildura every, at the end of each

40:00 course, which was the end of the month you used to have sort from Friday off til Monday morning. See and that's when a new course used to come in and you used to get yourself away to, up to Sydney the quickest way you could ever get there.

Was it an exciting time for you?

Oh lovely time, lovely time. Yeah, wonderful. It was good, it was good. Everything you did was,

40:30 like flying, it was real good. Anything mundane like sort of having to be sort of orderly sergeant or do something which, out of the mill. You know sort of well orderly sergeant you'd have to do duties like as in air force or go on parades. That was the bug bear but when you, when you, that was when you were on squadrons. In the wartime when squadrons were on operation,

41:00 you don’t have too many parades, but once you get down to bases where they’re training people, it’s parades, parades and all protocol and all that business. And lots of saluting and so on and so forth. But when you’re in a squadron like 75 Squadron. Oh gee, no rank, no nothing, shorts, boots and a hat or something like that. It was and oh and you’d fly with a shirt. But that was it.

41:30 But then we the 75 Squadron as at the moment, they fly their, one of the things they have on their tail plane or used to have or they did have was a top hat with a cane and gloves and whatnot. But it was referred to in World War II days as the Immaculate Squadron. 76 Squadron was always known as the Hydraulic Squadron

42:00 because they’d lift anything. And…

Tape 4

00:33 **When you joined the air force Bob was there a sense of joining for England?**

I think more for Australia, more for Australia. Although we weren’t basically involved in it but when you joined it was for overseas service. So I never thought about it, I considered I was going overseas. But I just was at the,

01:00 when I finished my, Bradfield Park, they were selecting from Bradfield Park, half the course went over to Rhodesia. But I missed out on that. Because when they went to Rhodesia and then up to the Middle East. But I was more likely, I might have been a bit younger than a lot of them there. I don't know I never looked into that but I went to Mascot with the

01:30 business. And it was only, and then as you know the procedure from then on. But I think it was only, I thought yes it would’ve been nice to be overseas and away. But as the clouds with Japan got darker I felt more relieved that I was here. And eventually with me not going overseas,

02:00 I was fighting for Australia from the word go. See a lot of our RAAF blokes went in Hudsons and in Wirraways which were in Rabaul. But the Hudsons were up in Malaysia [Malaya] at Kota Bharu, and they struck, the Australians were struck, were the first blow up there. And as the Japs got more powerful and overwhelming, it got closer and then I felt well at least I am

02:30 fighting to defend my own country. And so were all the other blokes that were kept back here in Australia. This is to the air crew blokes. But the army blokes they were all overseas and this where the militia blokes got pulled in up there. Like as they called them the choccos [chocolate soldiers – militia] and whatnot. They were up defending their country and all like they didn’t have, the training, they needed to go up there and with the air force we didn’t

03:00 have any aircraft worthy of fighting the Japs at all. We were all in training planes or they were supposed to be a Wirraway, a general purpose bomber and all that. We literally couldn’t shoot, although one shot a Zero down up in New Guinea. That was Archer which was very good. But the Wirraways, they were no match for the Japanese because they didn’t have any firepower. They only had two

03:30 .303 gas operated guns out through the propeller in the front. Although in the front, if you had a hang, fire a bullet, it’d go through your propeller. And out the back they only had a scarf ring which they mounted a twin operated gun. So they were no good at all.

Do you remember when you heard Japan had entered the war?

Yes. Mmm yes I was in Darwin then and

04:00 then everything broke loose. Big panic, dispersal of aircraft and then I think it was a Sunday. Sunday or our Sunday or no, must have been late Sunday I think. It was late Sunday because all hell broke loose. We had to disperse aircraft and everything was on the up and up and but that was in Darwin. Yes. Beyond that

04:30 I just can’t remember much more about it.

Was there a sense of a fear of invasion that…?

No, in fact it was treachery. Because all the talk was going on and everybody was listening over the radio. But when, out of the blue this horrific treacherous act. At least, bombing Pearl Harbor and killing thousands of people. That was

05:00 horrifying to us and whatnot. And thought “This is going to be a terrible war.” Cause there’s lots of men that sort of were, lost their lives like in the [USS] Arizona and all that. And then how overwhelming all the way through. They were fighting a battle like at Midway and all that business. And Wake Island, they just had skeleton forces there and they’d coming along with battleships

05:30 and whatnot. Not battleships, but aircraft carriers and just being overwhelmed. And as we saw, as they rolled down through Malaysia and whatnot it was a different ball game and this has happened in

Rabaul. 24 Squadron was ruined you know just in their first battle. And that would've happened to 12 Squadron in Darwin if we'd have got off the ground. We, we would've been the only two squadrons, only two or three aircraft because we were A flight up there and they just beat us to the punch

06:00 which I'm forever grateful.

You were saying that the Japanese planes were just far superior to the Australian ones. When did they, did they ever catch up, did the planes you were flying ever match the Japanese planes?

I never flew a Wirraway in combat against the Japanese at all. Even they were raiding Darwin and I was flying

06:30 almost everyday from the day the Japs bombed Darwin I was flying every day. But I was, I would say I'd be within a hundred miles or maybe two hundred miles of Darwin. Like up round the islands looking for people or down in New Guinea, down in Western Australia or that. But I was away and I was always on my own with a navigator. We weren't together and I think the other aircraft of 12 Squadron were doing much

07:00 the same. That's what my job was in my logbook which I'd have to refer to it. But I was doing something positive all the time. But they were more intent on bombing Darwin. Because when you get back in the afternoon they'd say "Oh there's been a couple of raids in today." And I was out elsewhere sort of flying round in clear air. But not to be, I could have been jumped, they could have, but I don't know whether they had radar at all. We didn't have radar

07:30 in Darwin, it was in its infancy at that particular time.

Was it, how long would the flights be that you were doing from Darwin, doing the patrol?

Oh I think two hours. Two hours, two and a half, two hours I'd say. Might be hour, hour and three quarters like Darwin to Wyndham. I think I'd have to have a look in the log book. But they'd say an hour and three quarters to Drysdale

08:00 River Mission. In fact we'd always have to refuel to go from one to the other. And then either to, if we would fly to Wyndham and refuel and then we'd get to Drysdale, refuel there fly back to Wyndham, refuel again back to Darwin. If we went to Millingimbi, then refuel. If we went to Batchelor we was always refuelling and even if we went down through the centre a bit we'd refuel at spots. And all out of a forty-five gallon drum. No

08:30 tankers to, not like nowadays. But it was very austere all through; it was all bush and virgin country.

What qualities made a good pilot, do you think?

No brains.

09:00 No well the, I think being young, being young. You had to be young and you liked fast cars. You liked fast cars, you got fast aeroplanes. I won't get in the category fast women because it was different when I was in Darwin there were only a few civilians and whatnot. It was all men up there

09:30 and you'd have nurses and whatnot. But fast where you could, if you wanted to put something somewhere, you put it somewhere and you could do it. You were the master of the machine. And you weren't an earthling, you were an airman. See that's what it amounts to. You, it's just exactly the same as these young hoods. With their fast cars now with their wheelies you know. It's an exuberance of youth. But

10:00 everybody used to do it. We did lots of things. If you did them now in the air force, you'd be terrible.

What were some of the things you used to do?

Oh well you'd be up places where you shouldn't. A lot of people got killed being up, it was a no-no and whatnot. And doing silly things. I came in at Mildura once, we were out doing

10:30 squadron formation. And you know you'd have twelve aircraft up with pupils and whatnot and an instructor in the back and the pupils. And invariably the pupils were doing all the flying and you were doing the instructing. And you were just going along for the ride. But in this particular case I was bored to the hilt and we were the last four aircraft to land and

11:00 no, we were somewhere in amongst it. But when we were coming in to land you go through the procedures of you put the squadron in one behind the other in format. But we were coming in to land and I said to the pupil, I said "Look I'll do the landing, you do what I tell you to do." And of which he did and we came down cross wind and down cross wind, down wind and in a cross wind.

11:30 And I said and he said "How about the wheels?" And I said "Don't put the wheels down until I tell you. See." And then we went on and we turned into wind. And then as we're coming in to wind, I said "Don't do anything to, until I tell you to" and I said "Put down the flaps" and he put down the flaps.

12:00 And I came in and I was landing about oh I was just off the ground in the landing position. And

everybody usually comes out to watch them land. And just, sort of just as I landed there I just said to him “Put the wheels down” and as the wheels go down they unlock. And I just pushed the hydraulic power on which forces the rams

12:30 down and I heard the two clicks. And as I did that I pulled the throttle off and I landed. And that’s why I got sent back to the war. Cause everybody was watching it. So that was a silly bloody thing I did. But it was, you got bored and all that business. So I went back to the war in a fortnight. I was back at the war. So that was it. Wasn’t impressed. Or

13:00 the CFI wasn’t impressed.

Did you realise as a pilot that so many of the men around you were jealous of your job?

Of which?

That so many of the other air crew were jealous of your job?

Oh no every pilot was quite happy with their job. Everybody. In fact I feel very sorry for lots and lots of pilots who joined the air force to go to fight in the war. And they

13:30 were kept back and couldn’t go to the war. And lots and lots of ground-staff. The ground-staff were, we wouldn’t have got anywhere without the ground staff and didn’t matter what job they did, it was part of the team. And that’s the most important part in anything with the war. One, it’s not one person, it’s not one person, it’s everybody. It doesn’t matter what he does. You couldn’t operate. See and that’s the thing about the camaraderie-ship all the way through, the,

14:00 your, people on your aircraft, the, they were your mates. They were there because if they did the wrong thing and didn’t put the thing in right, they wanted you back. They wanted you back and they wanted you back in the one piece. And but no, nobody was as jealous of anybody. We all admired the other person and didn’t matter what he did because they were great blokes and the camaraderie-ship were right throughout. Even in, away in New Guinea,

14:30 with the army it was wonderful too. That’s all I could sort of say about them. But we were all doing the same job.

Were relations strong between the ground crews and the aircrews?

It was. We lived in sort of, they had an airmen’s mess and a sergeants’ mess and an officers’ mess. But they all worked because

15:00 the higher the rank, there was the, in the sergeant’s mess there was sergeants, flight sergeants and warrant officers. In the airmen’s mess were people of AC1, AC1, LAC [Aircraftsman 1, Leading Aircraftsman], corporal all up to warrant officers. That was in the airmen’s mess. And then there was the officers’ mess from pilot officers up to air commodores and the like, that sort of business. But

15:30 in New Guinea they’d brought in which I don’t think they had in England. But in New Guinea they brought in an aircrew mess. See over in England I’m lead to believe with the bombers and all that business, if you’re a sergeant you’re in the sergeants’ mess or a warrant officer you’re in the warrant officers’ mess. But in the fighter squadrons and this, all the fighter squadrons I was in, we had an aircrew mess. If

16:00 you’re a pilot and you’re a sergeant, you’re in the aircrew mess. And that was the officers, officers and the sergeants, flight sergeants and warrant officers. And we’re all in together. Yeah and but that didn’t happen when I was in Darwin because we were in, there was the, a permanent air force station. And I think we were the only three Empire Air Scheme sergeant pilots, so we were in the sergeants’ mess all the time.

16:30 **How did promotion work in the air force?**

I think it was a time period. A time period, you were on probation from sergeant to flight sergeant all that. Or the, and in some particular cases if you as happened in the overseas, the loss was so rapid that you could be a flight sergeant one day and you might in three week’s time you could be a squadron

17:00 leader. Because you had the ability to do the things that they needed to and you had that command and you were good at the jobs. But the fact is the mortality rate was so high. And but in the lesser instance the, oh at 12 Squadron, pardon me at 75 Squadron we had a very high, in forty-four days we lost fourteen pilots and whatnot. But they were like we lost a CO

17:30 which was replaced by his brother. And as I say I think Michael Butler and myself, Jack Pettit, oh there was about eight of us were NCOs. And then, I think I was, I got up to warrant officer at that stage. And Michael Butler didn’t get up to, he had been promoted but nobody, didn’t catch up with

18:00 him at all. And he became a pilot officer sort of about eighteen months later and he was wondering why he wasn’t being promoted. But that’s the way it went. I suppose on time and ability. Because I, Les Jackson sort of asked me whether I’d been you know commissioned, this is in 75 at Kingaroy and I said “No nothing’s ever happened and whatnot.” Wasn’t long after that that I, it came through.

18:30 See, but that's sort of what happened.

Were you aware of the casualties, the high casualty rates I guess in England before you trained?

You've gotta be aware of it. I think you've, especially in any aircrew situations the, you're aware of it. And I, more so when I was in Moresby and I think, I'd say for all of us in Moresby at that time.

19:00 , I'd go to bed, we were up to about three thirty of a morning and we used to leave the strip at about, we'd get back to camp about seven o'clock at night. Leave, be there in the morning and there and you're on standby all the time or flying or doing a job. And I think every night I used to think, every night, and I'd think "Well we're all the same

19:30 is ever, that, would I ever see the sunset tomorrow?" That's what went through all our, sorry about this, anyway that's the way it went.

20:00 So luckily I passed so. But I think a lot of blokes do that. I'm really sorry. Yeah because they were always, all your mates there and doing the same job at the time and it was a, besides it affected the pilots a lot, it affected the ground crew too.

20:30 That they always used to like to see their blokes come back and whatnot. And when the aircraft didn't come back, you know it was a blow to them. And you were sort of a bit of a barrier put up. I was a bit emotional then I'm sorry but you sort of lived with it. And that was the hard, it was a

21:00 hard thing to do but you had to be like casual with it I think. It was a real hard thing you had to do. And wasn't until later on, you know when you got to holding your own a bit. But like even thinking as I just said about tomorrow, thinking about making it tomorrow it, you used to say "Oh well bugger the expense sort of business." It's, that's the way it goes. But I'm sorry about that.

Was there ever a time when pilots

21:30 **couldn't cope with that?**

Yes there were occasions it got too much for them and whatnot. But I'd say every pilot flew with a degree of fear. With a degree of fear. And the on standby, speaking for myself, I reckon standby, it was the hardest thing in the world waiting to get the word it's on.

22:00 But the point is with myself once you opened the throttle and got airborne it was a different world. You were relaxed, you were attentive, you were looking, you were working flat out, you never had a worry in the world. Even when I was shot down, my mind was working clearly and the least thing was that I never thought I was gonna get shot down or get killed. Or I did think

22:30 at one stage if I land there I'm gonna get killed. And but that was that. But you're so busy being occupied but when your mind's not full, it's things for these terrible things.

How much time would there be between flights. Would you be flying every day?

I would say I'd be flying, when I was in Moresby I'd say I'd be lucky, I'd have to look at my log book but I would say on the average of,

23:00 well they were there for forty-four days, I arrived about a week later, there's seven out of that. But I'd say I'd be, I might have a day off. It all depends how many pilots you had and how many aircraft you had. If you had the aircraft and the pilots you flew. But if you were, they had too many pilots and you'd say "Well you've got the day off." But I'd say

23:30 I'd fly almost, almost every day but I might have two days off at once. But our establishment of aircraft if it had been maintained say at fourteen serviceable aircraft we'd have been flying everyday. Because we only had about sixteen pilots. But the point is we were dropping from fourteen down to thirteen down to, and as it got as I say outnumbered, and these were a,

24:00 not all been shot down. A lot of them had been shot down, but a lot of them in the bad conditions of landing and whatnot or hitting things. So that's it. But if we'd had aircraft coming up we'd have been flying all the time. See so that's what it is. But as I say we got down and got down to two and three and it was just putting aircraft in the air and we had more pilots they're

24:30 sitting on their backsides. So that was it.

What could you do on your days off?

Well if you're lucky enough you might be able to get on a crash boat or a refuelling barge with the Catalinas. And you go out there or get a boat, go out and fish out Moresby. That's about all you could do. The officers, they had an officers' club I think in Moresby.

25:00 But we'd go out and fish and we'd drop, throw hand grenades in the water to see if we could get fresh fish that's all. Just pull it out and make sure that it was a four second or a two second or whatnot. Or if it was a, almost an instantaneous one you'd throw it away from you. But you'd just drop them in the water and then go and collect the fish if you got any, so give some fresh fish. But we weren't very

successful

25:30 with it though. But you didn't have much to do. In Moresby itself it was just a derelict village and whatnot. And you could walk into any place you liked there. It was a ghost town. Oh like army were in there and army or the militia and all that. But these were still young men that'd just come straight out, they weren't really basically trained. And it was only after we left Moresby, withdrawn back to

26:00 Australia that the Kokoda Trail started. See so 75 was there before the Kokoda Trail was on. Although a lot of the young men had been up that way. And it was when we went back to Milne Bay that the Kokoda Trail was on too.

Why was 75 called the Immaculate Squadron?

Oh well I think they picked that, the top hat and

26:30 a walking or swagger stick and a pair of white gloves I think that was put up on it. That was it. But because we weren't immaculate. Nobody wore rank there, we only had shorts, we only had flying boots. There was nothing for protective clothing at all we had. We had in those days, we didn't have dinghies. We didn't have dinghies.

27:00 And we had an old fashioned Mae West which they call it which would make you big bosomed sort of thing. But nothing at all in the aircraft for safety. We didn't have, we just carried maps, if we got forced down and we might have carried a, it was later on where we carried rations. But we used to have a machete

27:30 tied to our leg. But that more in later on in life when back down in Milne Bay and back in 78 Squadron. Because we had nothing in because if you got shot down or in the jungle you were basically history. Cause even the aircraft it was very hard to find.

Can you,

28:00 **you were flying Kittyhawks. Can you describe I guess stepping into a Kittyhawk and what it's, what you see and…**

Well when you think back, if I was to get into a Kittyhawk now, I'd have to have three or four people to help me up onto the wing and help me up into the cockpit and do that. But in those days

28:30 you always had a parachute. Your parachute was all in the cockpit, your helmet was over the control column, everything was coupled up. And when you're all ready to go and as soon as they gave you, sometimes you were sitting in the aircraft. That's when it was a real, you had to get off quickly. But if you had to go in a hurry you'd just take off. On the first step you're on the wing of

29:00 the Kittyhawk. That's going from the stern or the tail to the, you're there. The second one you're by the cockpit, the third one you're in the seat. And you're sitting down and you're strapping yourself up, the ground crew are there strapping you in. And you're putting your helmet on, you're putting your oxygen mask coupling it up, you're putting that on and you're putting your throat mic [microphone] on which was round your throat and your oxygen mask. And then

29:30 you're doing that, you're getting everything ready to start up and then you start up straight away. And the reason you'd start up and you're almost ready to go because you were always or say every hour I think we'd warm the motors up to, they'd be ready to go straight away. You didn't have to wait to start up the motors. Oh you'd start them up but the oil temperatures were pretty good and

30:00 you wouldn't have a motor stop on you on take off. Hopefully.

And there was just the two of you?

Beg yours?

There was just yourself and a navigator?

No just yourself.

Oh just you.

Single seater fighter. There was also another way which you could get in was there because nothing was working. But you could go up from into the cockpit, up from the engine which is you just stuck underneath a propeller, put your foot

30:30 on the flying wheel or the undercarriage and the next foot on the leading edge. And then the next foot you're really swinging yourself up into the cockpit again. And it all depends which way you came from. But the, it didn't take you long, you got better each time. Case of last out lousy.

And so what would you see sitting in the cockpit? What would you see

31:00 **around you?**

What was that?

What would be in front of you I guess?

Oh you'd have basics see down each side. Oh in front of you, you'd have your instrument panel, which was blind flying instruments. Which they took blind flying instruments out on the later model Kittyhawk and, you had an artificial horizon and a directional gyro and a compass and all pressure gauges and fuel gauges and the thing.

31:30 Then later on to get more weight out, they took the blind flying instruments out and just left you with, also a compass I didn't mention. But they put a smaller compass in it and the directional gyro was what they used to call a bat and a ball and the all the pressure instruments for oil and glycol. And

32:00 then fuel gauges down in the bottom in the wings. And then in those days you used to crank the engine with an inertia starter, you weren't very popular if you didn't start it first up. Because the ground crew used to look up at you and curse you in awful languages. But anyway that was it. And then down each side you had

32:30 an undercarriage lever, a flap lever and they had another lever for cooling the glycol and the oil and other things. And oh, on the joystick. There'd be a hydraulic trigger for your hydraulics, for undercarriage and flaps etc. Also a trigger for firing the machine guns.

33:00 And also used to be in the old Kittyhawks a row of rams, which used to reload your guns in the air. They should always be reloaded but sometimes they jammed. But just basic that plan of two pedals, for flying then and,

33:30 you know sort of and brakes you know for pulling up and guiding the aircraft or steering the aircraft, whichever you liked to do it. Because you used to have to swing the nose as you taxied along. Because you couldn't see what was in front of you. That was about basics of it.

Did you have, use the same aircraft as often as you could or did you just…?

Well it, no, the, no you

34:00 didn't. Later on in the war you basically stuck to your own but in 1942 at Moresby we flew several aeroplanes. The only thing that was consistent with an aeroplane was your parachute and helmet and all your flying gear. But you could be in one aircraft one day and in the afternoon in another aeroplane. It all depends how it was in

34:30 serviceability. But then you got back less and less. And when they got less and less serviceable aircraft it was still different numbers. But that was really bad because there was no supply of new or replacement aircraft to us at all.

When you were in the air, what would you be doing then? What would you have to be taking care of?

Well,

35:00 if you're flying in the air, you're flying at a fixed altitude if you've got, or you'd be climbing for altitude until such times as you got to altitude. On the way up, on the way up you would never be flying, you'd be, you're flying in the most, the quickest way to get from A to B, which is from up to down, from down to up or from going in either direction. But once you got to your height that you couldn't go or that you were sort of

35:30 looking for the enemy aircraft. On the way you're looking for the enemy aircraft and you're making sure that they're not getting behind you. If you don't see them, that's the one that gets you. And that's what you're doing. And you're also flying to format on your number one or your number two or your number three or number four, whatever's there. And you're in a group. But as in some cases, you're not all perfect and there might be a bit of a gap between you and your leader. He might be going fast, might have better aircraft than you've got

36:00 and things like that. But you're flat out from the time you go by looking around. Your head's like a swivel, it's going round and round. You're watching the aeroplanes you're supposed to be and looking for other enemy aircraft. With the early Kittyhawks we had a most frightening thing with them. Used to frighten every pilot that flew them. The first aircraft we got were real

36:30 tail type aircraft but they used to have an aerial that used to go from the wing tip to the top of the tail plane, the rudder. And it was just a wire and that was a radio aerial. And in between it, they had a little white insulator. The air'd come through and it'd go through this white insulator and it'd go through back up to the rudder and it was a radio aerial. But it was the most frightening

37:00 little insulator, your hair would stand on end when you're looking around and you'd keep seeing this insulator, you'd think it was an aircraft. And it used to frighten everybody. Everybody in 75 Squadron all the time. But eventually when we used to dive steeply to avoid or get away from enemy aircraft, the aerials used to break off. Which was good or they'd wrap around.

37:30 But invariably they broke off and eventually when the newer type aircraft came out they took them away altogether and they improved your aerials with fixed crystals and everything like that. But that's

what happened to the early P40s [Kittyhawks].

Would you be in constant radio contact with the rest of your formation?

You had a type of radio contact. It wasn't real good, it wasn't real good in Moresby. The longer it went in the war with them, you had more and more.

38:00 You had ground control, this is later on, but early in, it was our ground control was that there's a raid and approximately from what area. But we never got many final instructions from up in the air because we had trouble even communicating to one another. It was still a few hand signals and whatnot or waggle the wings are getting close. But later on in the war when the radios were came in and you had identify,

38:30 friendly identification, like IFF [Identification – Friend or Foe], it was a lot better . And that was oh from about 1943 onwards. That started to get a lot better and you had better radio control, you could call back to base and give them instructions. But sometimes when you, you know were doing watercraft sweeps, you're just in touch with the four aircraft in your section.

Would it be hard to keep track of where the aircraft in your formation

39:00 **were?**

No, usually you were in a fairly loose formation. When like you're in a flight, four of you would go out. We'd just stop in a flight you might be fifty or a hundred yards apart. All comfortable flying where you got plenty of room, you won't run into one another and you could get plenty of visibility to look around. And they can call you and talk to you about something down there worth looking at or something like that. Everybody saw something different

39:30 and things like that. But we flew at a safe distance. But if you're sort of going into dive bomb you'd tuck in and sort of get into a closer formation. And then go over the target and then just dive sort of one after the other. And that was it. But mostly when you're travelling, you know when you'd be travelling, might be an hour, two hours or an hour sometimes. See it's a loose formation and your watercraft sweeps, you were sort of one behind the

40:00 other. And you'd keep checking you know, are you still there to call in and let you know that they're still there with you. See and then you're giving instructions of what you're gonna do, see.

How good were, would you get intelligence reports about what to expect?

Intelligence reports were quite good. You'd get those from your intelligence officer and they'd let you know all the time what it is. This is before you left

40:30 and what's over the target and you'd get weather reports and whatnot. Whatever they could be in those days. And the weather was always a big problem there because we were losing aircraft through bad weather and whatnot, coming back. And sort of heading sort of down to Moresby and up in Dutch New Guinea. But the weather was, especially with fighter aircraft, we never carried aids

41:00 to get back there. You either went over the top of it, not good going through it with the mountains, or underneath it. But that was the way it went. You were pretty lucky if you, you'd try to go over the top of it all the time if you could.

Tape 5

00:31 **Okay Bob I was just wondering, yesterday you gave us a bit of a description on flying Tiger Moths and things. I'm wondering if you could talk to us today about the Wirraways. I understand they're a bit of a better plane.**

Well going back to Wirraways that was a one step up from initial training and you went into service flying.

01:00 And it was a very interesting business, bigger aeroplane, more powerful aeroplane. And it had a retractable undercarriage and had flaps which were essential for various stages of flying. Like in restricted take offs or in landings. But it was an advancement, different instruments. Instruments of a more refined character doing a bigger job. And

01:30 they had various other things in them. It was a larger aeroplane, an all-metal aeroplane. And that was made by C.A. Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Melbourne at Fishermen's Bend. It was I think one of their first, I wouldn't say one of their first but it was a big wartime project down there in Melbourne. But the Wirraway was a very, as a training plane was ideal.

02:00 And like all aeroplanes they looked pretty easy to handle and whatnot. But they all have their vices. And even Tiger Moths had vices in its own way. But as you went up to the more sophisticated aeroplanes, as a Wirraway was in those days, it had its vices. And if you didn't treat it respectfully it could bite you.

02:30 And which in lots of cases was fatal. But when we went on to Wirraways which was early in 1941, they were just sort of coming off the production line and they had a few little things. They used to ground loop badly, and as early in the piece in 1941 they got a bit of a reputation of being a vicious aeroplane. And which

03:00 warranted the CO at the SFTS [Service Flying Training School] speaking severely to us that "It's an aeroplane treated with respect and you won't get hurt." Because everybody was sort of thinking "Oh you know one crash yesterday and one bloke was killed." and all this jazz. But when it was all, got down to the four, they put various little items on it. They put a fixed tail lock on the back

03:30 of the tail wheel which stopped a lot of Wirraways when they landed, you know taking off into the scrub, ground looping as they call it. And which required a lot of damage to the aircraft that used to, they used to turn around very sharply on one wheel and the undercarriages would collapse. But eventually once we got used to the aeroplane it was a lovely aeroplane. I enjoyed it, in fact I

04:00 said before I didn't have much trouble going through flying the Tiger Moths. Everything was in those early days of the war if you didn't get solo in a certain time, which was about four or say five hours or six hours, obviously you'd look like being scrubbed. Well I had no trouble there on Tiger Moths. But on Wirraways I looked like going up for a scrub test because as my

04:30 instructor said to me and he said, he said "You fly the aeroplane alright." but he said "You're doing something wrong which I can't put my finger on." And he said "I can't send you solo." And suggested that he'd organise with another instructor to fly with me to see if he could put his finger on it. And to cut a long story short, I went with this instructor this afternoon and everybody, we were doing lessons at the time and I got called out from

05:00 lessons to go and everybody wished me good luck because it looked like being a scrub test. And I went out and flew with this instructor and he asked me to take off and I took off. And asked me to land and when I landed he said "Oh, that was terrible." He said "What you're doing wrong." he says, "You're landing the aircraft looking straight down at the ground when you're coming in to land." He said "I want you to instead of looking down over the leading edge of the aircraft, look out into the distance and carry out your landing

05:30 from there." So, which I took off and I landed. And I landed alright and he said "No, do it again" and I did it again and on the third time I did it again and when we taxied back to our take off position, he said "Just a moment" and he took the stick out of the back and stowed it where it should have been stowed. Got out with his parachute and said "Okay, go solo." So that was an experience but kept me in the air force as a

06:00 pilot until I graduated and went to a squadron.

What were the other particular vices of the Wirraways that you were talking about?

Oh well they, if you got pretty near stall in a turn, they'd flick and would go into a spin. It's just inexperience of doing it and just knowing when, how far you could take the aircraft in a turn or how to get out of a spin. You practised getting out of spins and all various

06:30 things like that. I never spun an aircraft inverted in my life. But sometimes you could spin it inverted. And sometimes with the Wirraway you could get into a flat spin which one of our pilots, Johnny Piper, got into a flat spin off Townsville in a Wirraway. And he couldn't get out of the flat spin, which he eventually had to jump out of the aircraft and landed in the sea

07:00 down at oh just outside Townsville. But things like that you had to know when you had to get out of the aeroplane before it was too late. But little vices like that, they weren't, they seemed to with practise of the aircraft and the instructors getting more and more practise. Because they were flying them all the times, they sort of helped to get rid of those dangers. They were still about but you just had to

07:30 be careful of them.

Can you describe to me exactly what a flat spin is and how you would inadvertently get into it?

A flat spin is where the aircraft basically is flat and it's going round in a circle maybe with a slight nose down. An ordinary spin is when it stalls with the nose up like that and the nose goes down and its corkscrews down like that. That's an ordinary spin. An inverted spin, in a

08:00 normal spin you are on the inside of the spin but if you got into an inverted spin the aircraft's turned around on you and you're on the outside of the spin. And that's rather awkward, you've got to do everything in reverse to get out of that spin. You've gotta use rudder, throttles and the stick to get out. But at some stage the motor stops and that makes it a little bit harder again. But they were all the

08:30 sort of things that happened. And I think they happened in lots of other aeroplanes too. But that was in Wirraways. The Kittyhawks they were fairly conventional in a spin and whatnot. And that was everything. And sometimes I followed the possibility of being on the back in an aeroplane and it's just sort of hanging there and you don't know which way it's going to spin. Used to take my foot off the rudder and hand off the stick and

09:00 just sit there and wait until it got into some positive position before I could recover without letting it get into the spin. You know sort of which used to happen in line of stern chases sometimes. You'd stall the aircraft in an awkward position and you'd just be hanging there and it seemed like quite a while before it got into a conventional spin or some awkward position you just have to get out of. So I just let the aircraft get into where it wanted to go without me trying to put it into somewhere it

09:30 shouldn't be going. That's sounds a bit of Dutch but that's what happens.

And is that what you'd do to help get out of it?

Well that's what I used to do sometimes but other times I'd just get into a spin and get out the normal procedure.

Was the training that you got through the ITS and the Empire Training Scheme, was that, do you feel that was actually very good preparation?

Well it was the only preparation and it was excellent

10:00 because it was a new initiative that was started and it was implemented very quickly from within a year I think it was going. And that involved Australia, Canada, Rhodesia and where a lot of our blokes went to Rhodesia, a lot went to Canada and vice versa, people from like England went to, sent to these places because they were

10:30 away from the war and they were training people too. But as for myself I did all my training on the Empire Air Scheme was done in Australia. And it was as the months went on everybody was getting more and more efficient at it. They were getting more and more instructors into it and I'd say within eighteen months of it going, it was really organised. They had to get Tiger Moths made, they didn't have any aero-

11:00 planes. De Havillands were making, Tiger Moths I don't know how many of those they were putting out a day. And you had to have the aircraft to fly like as in Tiger Moths. You had to have your Wirraways and they were all in the production line and eventually they had plenty of aircraft to train and that was it. And in the training field but unfortunately with the war being over in Europe the, I

11:30 think the air force only acquired here in Australia I think about twelve, fifteen Lockheed Hudson Bombers. And they were our most advanced aircraft in World War II at that particular time. And it wasn't until Japan came into the war that the politicians and whatnot really realised how vulnerable Australia was in regard to fighter

12:00 aircraft. All we had to protect our shores was Airspeed Oxfords which is a twin engine trainer, Ansons, they had a few Gannets which were sort of a twin engine aeroplane, were not very reliable, more communication and Wirraways. And we never had fighters at all. Of anything to, like a Hurricane or a Spitfire or anything like that, we had nothing. And that's when there was the big shock

12:30 when Japan bombed Darwin and we were literally caught with our pants down I would say. And it was in that particular time and that there were crates of Kittyhawks were on their way I believe to Indonesia and Singapore to help the war there which the war

13:00 got there before the crates of the aeroplanes got there and the Kittyhawks were diverted to Australia. And I think that was where 75 Squadron they, as they built them they decided to form three RAAF fighter squadrons. Which was 75, 76 and 77 Squadron with the Kittyhawks that were destined for Singapore but they finished up back in Australia.

13:30 They were just hurriedly assembled and that's basically what happened with 75 Squadron being the first Kittyhawk squadron to be formed. And they were only formed with one or two, three or four, five and six, a couple at a time. And blokes had to learn to fly them. And that's where Michael Butler and myself first learned to fly them, was we had to come

14:00 back and learn to fly them by taking 76 Squadron four aircraft they had, taking their aircraft and flying them with other blokes that had just joined 75 Squadron. Our priority was on them. They weren't flying them at the time because our priority was flying them and when we'd did our six hours on them sort of thing, as much as they could allow us, we then took those four aircraft and flew to New Guinea with

14:30 them. And then they had to wait for aircraft being assembled at Amberley and they used to go up bring them back to 76. And that was that. And I think we only got a few replacement aircraft after that, up in New Guinea. We got very few replacement aircraft because they were going to the other squadrons. And was 75s without replacement aircraft, you just sort of

15:00 went from about our fourteen aircraft down to as we finished up with one at the end of forty-five days.

Just going back to Darwin for a second, you were there when the Japanese bombed. What was the mood like of the crews considering the craft that you had were quite out of date?

Well we couldn't do much

15:30 about it. But we were there with Wirraways and the most fortunate thing about it on our behalf the, in

12 Squadron, we only had our four or five aircraft there. As I said the Chanay flight being C flight were down at Batchelor, which was about sixty miles south of Darwin. But the, the most fortunate thing about it was they got there before we got off the ground. Otherwise

16:00 we'd have been history, we'd have been the same as 24 Squadron. Our flight would have been the same as 24 Squadron in Rabaul when the Japs came there. But the point is that things are happening so quickly at that stage being bombed and strafed and having things to do after the raid passed over. There was fires everywhere. We, as I said we're only about three, two or three mile from the permanent aerodrome which was sort of smoking and burning

16:30 and all that. And even our place was burning. But there was a job to be done and when I say that, our immediate information from headquarters which was over at the RAAF base was to go over there and get the bombs. Which everybody was sort of, we're all doing our jobs. The aircrew blokes went over to get the bombs in trucks and the ground crew were sort of trying to put out fires

17:00 and get everything sensible and prepared for us to come back with the bombs. And that was when we had to go out of the civil aerodrome, which you drove out from the civil aerodrome onto the main road which went from Darwin, right down to Alice Springs and on to there. And we got into a terrific traffic jam of exodus of people leaving Darwin. But we just had to drive along that road for about a

17:30 couple of miles then we came into the permanent aerodrome which was the hangars, a lot of the hangars were damaged. And and it was in sort of chaotic conditions. And we had to drive across the aerodrome into the scrub over side into where the bomb dump was. And got our bombs out of there and we had to go back through the traffic which was better going back and we

18:00 loaded up our aircraft . See it was around about ten o'clock when they bombed Darwin, oh I think about ten to ten and by the time we got back it'd be midday. Everybody was working, I can't even remember whether we had lunch or anything like that. But we bombed up our aircraft and had them still in the camouflage in the scrub there. And we, they were all warmed up ready to go and we were ready to go too on standby.

18:30 Until they could, had some definition of where the Zeros came from or where the bombers came from or whether there was an invasion force on the way. I can't say much about what happened about 12 or 13 Squadron. I don't think they were around at the time. They might have been away. But then I think what the air force was getting, where they got their information from I couldn't tell you. But they couldn't

19:00 locate the alleged invasion forces coming. And by the time we were standing by all day until it got dark at night which would have been impossible for us to find an invasion force because it was that dark in Darwin. But we were stood down and next day it was a sort of a different kettle of fish. We, as I say myself, I had a lot of with my flight commander, he was sort of

19:30 saying "I want you to do this, I want you to do that." which would involve me flying, I think, that's right oh that particular day, even with a four, four two fifty's slung underneath the aircraft , Harry Susans and myself did the big watercraft sweep out from south of Darwin right round up to, from south to west to north and finished up in Bathurst Island. Then we flew back to Darwin. And that took us quite a number of hours to do that and I think everybody else was doing

20:00 much the same job. But that was the day after and then from then on I had a couple of trips down to Wyndham and out to the Drysdale River Mission and but we were pretty, we were flat out all the time. I think I only had one day off in that time. And then the next time we moved down to Batchelor. And that was when I was at Batchelor that I found that the Michael Butler and myself had been

20:30 posted to Darwin. I think it was round about the fourteenth of March I think. We were told on the fourteenth of March and we were down in Brisbane on the fifteenth of March.

You mentioned a traffic jam that you came across with the exodus leaving Darwin after the raid. Did you witness, I mean did, what was, was there a lot of anxiety on the streets in people. Did they, did you talk to anyone at all?

21:00 I think there was, not from our point of view like our air force at 12 Squadron or our flight up there. There was no panic or anything like that with our mob. But to me the exodus I saw, I looked, I think there was apprehension on people's faces. But before that, for a year before that with the Blitzkrieg that went on in England, there was cameras there showing the people going from one country to the

21:30 other and the refugees with their wheelbarrows and carts and trying to get away from the Blitzkrieg of the German invasion. I saw that and here in Darwin it was much the same, but motor vehicles and whatnot. But they were evacuating Darwin. They'd been bombed, there was a lot of people killed at the Post Office.

22:00 And Darwin had been bombed and the carnage of sinking of ships in Darwin was absolutely amazing. Because I was walking across the aerodrome or running across the aerodrome when I thought that the oil tanks at Darwin which as the crow flies from the civil aerodrome which would be about three mile. Then, I thought it was the oil tanks that had blown up. But later, people told me it was the USS

22:30 Peary that got a direct hit and it blew up and with a loss of life. But I think oh there was, I couldn't tell

you off hand the number of ships and the number of casualties of, I think it was about five hundred-odd people were killed [actually was two hundred and forty-three killed, three to four hundred wounded] on the waterfront and mainly on ships. I think there was a hospital ship in there. I think it might have been the Manunda, I could be entirely wrong there. But it, it never got

23:00 touched. But a lot of ships were in Darwin Harbour, which had been used, evacuating people out from Java. And they'd come there and that's where they, whether they didn't know where to go or weren't told where to go to. Because I think an invasion force of the army had been on the ships and they got halfway towards Indonesia and then they were recalled back to Darwin. And I think they'd just

23:30 got into the harbour the day the Japs arrived. But that's only on hearsay that I hear because my whole concern and information at that stage was coming from the air force and it was just air force operations of what we had to do with the bombing of Darwin. And it wasn't very effective in the defence of Darwin because Wirraways couldn't have defended Darwin against the Zeros. And let alone,

24:00 we would never have got anywhere near the bombers. Because maximum range of oh height a Wirraway could have got to, more like might have run out of petrol first, was about eighteen thousand feet and we didn't have oxygen, we didn't have anything at all.

You got to do a few observational or rescue flights at that time and you talked about seeing the carnage and the

24:30 **broken ships and people, bodies on the beach and in the water and so on. What was that like?**

In fact I did a thing at one stage, went flying, finding the ship and then searching for people. The ship was aground, sort of broadside onto the beach. The, I never saw really rough seas in Darwin at all.

25:00 And it was just on the, broadside onto the beach and burnt out from stem to stern. And on the beach there was a, these bodies, not many. I'd say, no more than about five, six, maybe eight. But they seemed to be right up on the high water mark just near where to the bushes and I was almost tempted to land there to see if they were alive but there was no semblance

25:30 of movement from them at all and I just presumed they were dead. Now where the other, and they were Americans sailors on that, so whether they were crew. But as for any survivors off the ship, I wouldn't know, because doing the search and whatnot, fuel was a great concern to us that we just had sufficient to get back to Darwin. And normally we used to

26:00 fly from Darwin to Bathurst Island and refuel and do whatever we had to do. But at that stage of the game we just did what we had to do and get back and report to what was going on or what we'd found and seen.

When you got the Kittyhawks out of the crate and you had like six hours to train on them and then you were, you embarked for New Guinea. Was there a feeling that

26:30 **amongst the crew that you hadn't had anywhere near enough training? Or did you feel confident?**

The fact is I don't think any of us had thought about it, we were just going from one squadron to another. And we were going into combat. I had seen the Zeros, not that I'd had anything to do with them, they had seen the bombers. Sort of I knew

27:00 sort of basically although it was in the I'd say the fortnight or so from the bombing of Darwin until the time I left. I wouldn't say I felt experienced in it but the point is I just into, upgraded myself from Wirraways up to Kittyhawks to another job with an aircraft that had six .5 guns in it and was a massive fire platform. And

27:30 but unfortunately it was found out early in the piece, that the whole aircraft was ill prepared through lack of inexperience of people to assemble them, to clean them up and they never had time to do any cleaning up or getting, they'd get grease out of them and whatnot. Because all the aircraft that were in crates were all inhibited put grease on so as they,

28:00 they had to be sort of steam cleaned down and get the inhibitors off them. And everything was go, go, go, go, go. And if you had three days to do something they'd say "We wanted it in a day." So that was basically what was going, they were working flat out to get the aircraft going. And basically I think back to the pilots that joined the 75 Squadron there and then and even 76 Squadron later on, it was, we were

28:30 getting into what we were, had been trained to do. To go away and sort of protect our country.

Were you eager to get started with the Kittyhawks?

I would liked to have more time on the aircraft. But the fact we didn't have time and we, there was the eagerness didn't come from us. It was the fact that once we, they knew we could fly the aircraft and land them safely and go from A to B which

29:00 proved fatal when they first, 75 Squadron first started because they flew the aircraft and then they had to fly from Bankstown aerodrome to Brisbane. They struck bad weather, out of six aircraft they lost

three. Two being killed. In our case it was much the same, we had ours on type. We had ours on Wirraways, lots of ours on

29:30 Wirraways. Where some of these chaps, the basics of what I understood was that the CO thought he, the pilots he was getting to fly his Kittyhawks were experienced pilots, ex instructors and squadron blokes and whatnot. And they'd be able to fly the aeroplane the Kittyhawks quite well. But as it was lots of people came straight off Wirraways on course and went on to Kittyhawks.

30:00 And where Michael and myself and a few others had lots of hours on Wirraways, which made it good for us on handling the Kittyhawks. And as I just go back to when we had hours on and we could fly them and land them and handle them and off we went. And then I think it took us about three days, two days to three days I think to get to Moresby. And

30:30 the day we arrived in Moresby, in the morning I think it was, I was on standby that day, was just flying standing patrols over to protect what aircraft that were on the ground.

How did losing the pilots from Bankstown to Brisbane affect the morale of the squadron?

Well I cannot quote there because the, I got the posting to 75 Squadron in

31:00 March the fourteenth. And I didn't know that 75 existed. And then, we were taken up in the war in Darwin. But as for the other people how they formed I could not tell you because there was a Kittyhawk squadron of Americans at Bankstown. And some pilots were sent there. Alan Whetters who had been instructing on

31:30 how to fly a Kittyhawk, he helped to train the blokes, tell him where all the bits and pieces were and tell them what to do. And he was only instructed on how to fly them by the Yanks that he used to say, "You come in and you don't three point or you wheel them in" and all this business. Now how they were told I don't know. What happened, they flew

32:00 from Bankstown to Brisbane and then eventually up to Townsville and Michael Butler and myself never got to 75 Squadron until they were in Townsville. That's when they got to Townsville and that's when the CO said "You'll have to go on leave because you've been in Darwin for a year" and sent us south for, which was useless because we got south and were immediately re-

32:30 called to Brisbane again. I'm repeating myself here to Brisbane again. And then in three days we were flying north to Port Moresby.

What was morale like of the crew once arriving into Port Moresby.?

Well the point is we arrived and we just had a bit of a talk and they said "This is what you had to do." And and I for familiarisation went first

33:00 into Moresby, which flying into Moresby there was a safety precaution of how you used to fly from Horn Island across and you used to have to fly round a entrance, a marker beacon, a marker, a channel marker on the reef into Moresby. And to, one of the things we had to do was when we came in to show that we're friendly we used to have to do a three hundred and

33:30 sixty degree turn round the, this marker beacon on the reef and then fly in and we're supposed to be safe. That didn't prove so in when the first aircraft arrived because nobody knew they were coming in and they thought they were Zeros and three aircraft got shot up badly. And that was that. But our particular time we arrived was, which we were the first of the replacement aeroplanes which was only

34:00 oh a matter of about nine or ten days after they were there. And we were put immediately on standby, which was protecting the aircraft down there. And we were to having a look round at our location of where Moresby was and what the terrain was and besides trying to keep our eye open for Japanese aeroplanes. It was all rush, rush, rush, rush, all the time. And sort of learning as you went.

Can you describe what

34:30 **Port Moresby was like back then when you were around?**

Oh I think basically you could say it was like an oasis in the desert. It was all jungle around. The roads were there and Moresby I can really say, I never got into Moresby only about maybe twice or three times. Because landed on the seven mile strip and the only time that for the whole time that I was in

35:00 Moresby was from seven mile strip into our camp which was, what would it be, north of the strip. Had to go to the camp, get there in the night time, eat, go to sleep, get woken up in the morning and go back from there in the morning to get there about half past four, maybe four o'clock, half past four in the morning, warm the aircraft and just wait for dawn and be on standby

35:30 for to do what we had to do. In fact one morning we were going to go to Lae. This was after another trip to Lae and I was on that trip and I think we had about six or seven aircraft and we were leaving at about sun up to go to Lae and we were all ready to go and the next thing it was cancelled. And don't ask me why but that was. Everything was going from day to day and I think they only did

36:00 two trips to Lae. One of the trips that they did to Lae the CO of 76 Squadron came up for experience

and he went on a trip to Lae and tragically he got shot down and killed on his first trip and that was the Squadron Leader Barney Creswell. And I don't know I think we, I'm not sure if we lost any pilots on that particular trip but he came up for experience.

36:30 And then 76 Squadron was taken over by Peter Turnbull, an ex Middle East pilot and who in turn he got killed down in Milne Bay.

I'm just wondering Bob when was, I mean you'd signed up into the air force for your love of planes and flying and became a pilot that way. But what was the moment for you,

37:00 **if there was one where the war, where you actually felt where the war was very real and perhaps a very dangerous thing to be in.**

Well the first was the bombing of Darwin. The bombing of Darwin. I knew it, the phraseology that everybody used in the thing, "It's on. That's it, the war's on." You know that was the phraseology that everybody used. And that's when my war started at the bombing of Darwin. And from

37:30 then on it was, like before that been the war was way over in Europe and Japan wasn't in the war. It was like being on a permanent air force station and training all the time with the war in mind and not ever thinking it would ever come to Australia. But then out of the blue it did and from then as I said it was on and that's when my war really started on the

38:00 nineteenth of February 1942.

When you arrived in New Guinea and you were waiting for ops and things, were you keen to start engaging with the enemy at that stage?

I think within a day or two days we were engaging with the enemy and whatnot. Sometimes you'd be top cover down below and then you'd go up high and then you

38:30 were engaging with the enemy sort of not every time like if you were low you weren't in it. But if you were up high, you were in amongst bombers sort of trying to get there and the next thing you know you're in amongst the Zeros and then at that stage of the game and they were mostly chasing you or you were getting a shot at them. And same with the bombers. Bombers was easy,

39:00 they were flying straight and level. You either did a head on attack on them or wherever your position was, which was at the most advantaged position. But you had to be above them to, so as you could get the speed to catch up except on a head on attack. And that was it. But if you were astern you'd have to be up high and try to get down on to them.

What was the best position to be in to attack a bomber?

As close as you could. As close as you could. And that goes to

39:30 even with the Zeros. As close as you could. I never had much to do with the Zeros. The most I had to do with them they were always behind me and I a few times, well not a few times but times where you were chasing a Zero who was in turn chasing your friend and my, I was never close enough to them to sort of get damaged but the

40:00 fact is trying to get them off the tail of your mates I've got to be at least four, five hundred yards away from them. But I'd have, I used to sort of pull the nose of the aircraft up and just fire a big burst where we had tracer, ammunition going. Which hopefully it would tend to make the blokes think "Gee there's somebody chasing me." And things like

40:30 that, see. But it was very hard to get, I found it very hard to get close to them because I was never in a position to getting close to Zeros although they were around about. Except when I was in the unenviable position of being at five hundred feet and attacking Zeros at sea level literally and which is, resulted with me finishing up in the water.

Tape 6

00:32 **Bob, just before you were telling us, you mentioned when you ended up in the water. I'm wondering if you could tell me how that happened? Walk me through the flight and how it ended up like that?**

Well this particular stage I was flying number two to the CO. And we were doing standing patrol over Moresby. And the word came through that there was a raid coming in.

01:00 And we'd been up about an hour and a half. And we were just about due to be relieved. And they scrambled what aircraft we had on the ground. And they you know sort of wave as they went past us at ten thousand feet. And they went up and they got up to twenty odd thousand feet. And they had aircraft on the ground but trying to repair them. But we stopped at ten thousand feet

01:30 to try to prevent Zeros coming in that would strafe the camps and all that business. And we were there but eventually after about two hours and whatnot we were light on fuel and we were forced to have to land to refuel which you don't do in the middle of a raid or when there's a raid allegedly coming in. And we couldn't land on the seven mile strip. And the CO and I

02:00 landed on this three mile strip which was, seven mile strip indicated seven miles from Moresby, three miles indicated three miles from Moresby at a place called Kila Kila, where the American squadron of A24 dive bombers were. We landed there and refuelled as quick as we possibly could and then took off straight away. This strip was right on the mainland on the water. And as

02:30 we took off we only got to about five hundred feet, as I said going in a westerly direction. And this American B26 Martin Marauder Bomber went, was going flat chat east-wise with a number of Zeros on his tail. The CO and I we were just coming out of a sort of a turn off the deck and we flew straight into the Zeros and fired at them. And

03:00 literally we'd just put our wheels up and whatnot. And we were still in a climbing configuration which would be no more than about a hundred and forty mile an hour with your nose up. And very vulnerable and not very manoeuvrable. You needed speed to pull a Kittyhawk around. You can pull it around but you'd finish up at five hundred feet you wouldn't have enough time if you got into difficulties to recover.

03:30 And in trying to do that and shoot at Zeros and get away from Zeros, I finished up where I had a couple of Zeros on my tail with me trying to outrun them. And I couldn't manoeuvre to out turn them because it was impossible for me to out turn them. And eventually I was just being peppered right and left with

04:00 the machine gun, fortunately I don't think they had cannon. But the aircraft was continuously being hit with their machine gun fire. And there was petrol on the floor and the rudder bar sort of got struck, got struck by machine guns. And then eventually I thought, had to do something and I was going to ditch, land on the

04:30 land and at first I was going to jump out. But I couldn't because I was at less than five hundred feet. And I couldn't land because I was going too fast. And eventually I thought "Well I'll have to ditch in the water just to escape." And the only thing that saved myself I think was they had great armour plate at the back for the pilot protection. And I kept pressing myself back up against this as far as I could to

05:00 keep away from the bullets that were entering the cockpit. And I successfully ditched in the aircraft. And then it sank almost immediately. When I went to get out of the aircraft, I still had my parachute on and so I had to put that back. And when I disconnected the parachute and got out, the aircraft had sunk completely out of the way. And I

05:30 was in the water and I think it sank into I don't know what depth of water. But about six inches of the top of the tail stuck out of the water. So I sort of scrambled along the fuselage and sort of got on the tail and sort of ducked in the water. I thought I was going to be strafed and whatnot in the water. But the Zeroes went and strafed a couple of Catalinas which were mooring in the water.

06:00 How lucky I was I found later. That when they pulled me out of the water, the ambulance, I was bleeding a bit from shrapnel that entered the cockpit. But then they discovered that my oxygen mask which was around my neck and whatnot. And my throat mic had been, the oxygen mask had been shattered whilst it was round my

06:30 neck. Which I still have the buckle of it and there, which I'll show you later. The, was around my neck, and then my throat mic had been dented where a bullet had gone past it and grazed my neck. So I was a very lucky pilot. So I lived to fight another day. So that was it. It was just , my time wasn't up.

07:00 The thing was in those days, the ambulance people, once the medics get their hand on you they grabbed me and I said "I want to go back to the squadron." You see and they said "No you're not going back, you've got to go into hospital." They put me into hospital for observations that night and I was back at the squadron next morning. And I think I was flying that afternoon. But then they just patched up the few scratches that I got. And

07:30 then that was it. And strange as it might seem at that particular time, you realised how lucky you were, but you didn't think that you were almost killed. That's the funny thing about it. You just never gave it a thought. So I think that's about that on that subject.

It's an amazing story Bob. It's unbelievable.

08:00 I was lucky.

When you were in a dog, I guess a dogfight with the Japanese Zeros. Were there particular set manoeuvres that you had in mind?

Basically the dogfight as in World War I, there was not much sort of particular dog fighting with us in Moresby in that you got into a position

08:30 if you were lucky enough to get behind a Zero or he did something silly. Which I was always as I said, I wasn't very close to Zeros. They were always a long way, when I say a long way, not that far away but where you couldn't accurately to, best way to shoot an aeroplane down is to be right up its backside and

then that's the best way to go. If you were a good shot you were always, were trained with deflection and shooting. But things

09:00 were happening so quickly that it was a, you'd get in and by the time you got into position, you couldn't out turn them. And when they were starting to get the better hand that you would have to sort of get out of that situation that you were getting into. Because otherwise they'd be on your tail in no time at all. And that's then, they were the tactics we employed. Soon as you started to lose the upper hand with the Zeros,

09:30 you just got out of the road.

In the army you hear a lot about quite a hatred for the Japanese. What was the feeling in the air force toward the Japanese?

The old saying then was "The only good Jap was a dead Jap." In those days and because at that stage of the game they were doing what they thought right and we were protecting our country.

10:00 And I think it might have been a more hateful thing towards them if we'd have known what atrocities were going on in our POW [Prisoner of War], in their POW camps. And how everybody was being so ill treated and tragically so. But when sort of in the air, it's not the army, the army was experienced. And

10:30 at that stage in Moresby it wasn't a very bad but there was no infantry conflict with the Japanese, it was only when we got to Milne Bay that we found first hand when the Japs landed at Milne Bay. They were killing people straight away from the word go. Even the army chaps, they over ran them, they were bayoneted and shot to

11:00 death straight away. No prisoners were taken at all I don't think any Australian prisoners were taken at all and they lost lots of good, wonderful young men. So that was when the hatred used to start to, well started and never diminished from then on. See in the air, it was

11:30 at that stage that the air superiority of the Japanese started to diminish. And with the Americans coming in with more and more aircraft, better aircraft in the Lockheed Lightning. There weren't many Mustangs out here in the war then but Lockheed Lightning came in and I don't think they had Thunderbolts but it was Lockheed Lightnings and P40s. The Americans had P39s which were not a

12:00 real good aeroplane for them to fight in and they got rid of those very smartly. And brought in other up to date fighters. And that was from then on from Milne Bay that a lot of the fighting was done by the army which was at Buna/Popondetta. And that was very severe fighting there, and then and all the way up the coast right up through into Indonesia. And that

12:30 was, the army were doing that. And like the air force was sort of, for a better word it was like a clean war for us. Because we were flying, we had all battery wound going through jungle like that unless something happened and you were forced down in the jungle and you were usually a write off then. But the fear, fear was then, you didn't notice it, but we were losing aircraft and pilots,

13:00 you know with weather and ground fire etc.

Was there a respect for the Japanese pilots and their skill?

I think you respected them yes I think you did. In fact you'd say "Oh I got the bastard" and all that business. And I'm sure they said the same thing about us. It was sort of even steven and they were out to sort of kill you and you were out to kill them. And you were out to win.

13:30 As proves in the Bismarck Sea Battle where they were starting to lose the war there. And our intelligence was getting better and better and the Bismarck Sea Battle was a real, they lost a whole convoy there. And that was Beaufighters and American Air Force and 75 Squadron was there. Well not to the extent that it should have been I don't think.

14:00 But it was mostly Beaufighters and American Air Force people were in the Bismarck. 30 Squadron was one of the paramount squadrons in the RAAF unit. And I think 22 Squadron Bostons were in it too. But I was way, way, I was down south when that happened and I only just sort of heard on hearsay.

Did you have much interaction with the American Air Force?

Oh, only in

14:30 training. You know they had all the gear and we had nothing. And we used to swap revolvers with them. And we used to go and get their flying gear. They had better flying gear. Like boots and all flying equipment. And eventually it was like flying Kittyhawks, see it was all American gear we needed for them. We never used their parachutes or dinghies. It was only I think when

15:00 after Milne Bay, well it was when I went back to 78 Squadron which was about in 1943 that we started to have dinghies to fly with. Normally we just flew with parachutes, we didn't have dinghies. But we had a lot more survival gear to help us if we did get forced down behind enemy lines. But in 1942 to the end of the start of '43 we didn't have much survival gear at all.

15:30 But the Yanks, they were good traders. We used to trade grog with them to get fresh frozen food and whatnot. But we did a lot of trading with them.

Did the Australians get on well with them generally?

They were good, yes. Great, great people to deal with. Away in the war and even socially, you know sort of down on leave and all that business. I never had any trouble with the Yanks, nice blokes and whatnot. And

16:00 bloody lot of line shooting with them. God, in fact they talked too much really. In the air they were always chattering over the radio. And which our blokes did, we did a little bit but nothing like the Yanks. You know it was like a telephone conversation with them sometimes. But they did a wonderful job. They had the numbers and they lost a lot of good men too.

16:30 **I was wondering, I noticed that you had had malaria. How much of a problem was disease in the air force?**

Well from the time the RAAF Fighter squadrons went to New Guinea which was from Moresby. Their medical history was not very good. Our squadron doctor he had nothing at all in regard to tropical medicines, in regard to,

17:00 I can't talk on his behalf except what he told us. Everything was inadequate. Even the gear to wear mosquito nets and things like that. They were all in a minority. Our clothing was terrible. And it was rough, we were just in tents and nothing at all. And the food was very Spartan. And

17:30 illnesses as I say I don't think Michael Butler and I ever got crook in Moresby. Because I think we were acclimatised to the tropics. We had been in Darwin a year and we had all our ailments like dengue fever in Darwin and all that and we survived. We didn't get dysentery in New Guinea which lots of the ground staff did and lots of the pilots that were there who

18:00 had come straight from bases in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. And they were a little bit susceptible to these little bugs that were going around. But I think the medical people didn't have the equipment and the tablets to give them. Bill Dean-Butcher our squadron doctor couldn't do a lot about that. But then when we went to Milne Bay

18:30 nobody knew that they had this terrible, well I think they knew, we didn't know. But we were getting round with not very good clothing. We were just wearing shorts and sleeves and flying boots and that's all we had. And at night we just sort of slept sort of either in the nude or on a thing and it wasn't until after leaving, after

19:00 we got withdrawn from Milne Bay that I got malaria. Lots of people went down there. In fact a number of our pilots started to go down with malaria then. And it wasn't as noticeable then because at that stage we had plenty of pilots to replace the pilots that were sick. Not like in Milne, in Moresby. If somebody got sick it was less pilots and actually we just had sufficient pilots to fly

19:30 the four or five aeroplanes we had. But there we always had plenty of pilots. So they were in hospital, and once again Michael, oh Michael Butler wasn't down at Milne Bay with us. But I was never sick at Milne Bay. And it was only when I went back to joint the squadron in Townsville after leave coming back from Moresby, that I went down with malaria. And every time I got

20:00 back to join the squadron I came down with malaria again. And I was in hospital for about, on and off for two months and whatnot. Until such times the squadron moved to Cairns and they posted me from the squadron to a fighter sector for a short period of time. Then back to, got posted down to No. 2 OTU at Mildura. But even down there I,

20:30 I believe that I used to be report to the medical, oh to the hospital down there because I still had lots of anti-bodies I believe of the malaria in me. Yet I was fit enough to instruct down there. And at that stage when I first got malaria they didn't have any good medicines. When I say good, they had Atebrin, liquid Atebrin that was, pardon me, liquid quinine,

21:00 I stand corrected, liquid quinine. And it was the most vile medicine I've ever taken in my life. And I couldn't, I'd get it down and I was lucky to keep it down for about fifteen seconds before I used to bring it up again. And the recovery period in hospital was just on a month. And it was then that they brought in the tablet called Atebrin which made you look like

21:30 yellow, you went yellow. It was then with me with Atebrin that I started to get on top of the malaria. And I took Atebrin for months after that. I carried the yellow looking appearance for quite a period of time until it wore out of my system. And fortunately I haven't been bothered with it since. Because they must have done a good job and being away from the tropics down in Mildura, I got rid of it. Because when I went back

22:00 to New Guinea again I wasn't troubled at all with it.

I'd like to talk about Milne Bay. When you arrived there, the Japanese hadn't invaded yet, had they?

No. We arrived at Milne Bay and I think we were at Milne Bay and I think we were there approximately a week, just a week before they had the first raid on it.

22:30 On Milne Bay which was a, as I said, at that stage of the game we had lots of aeroplanes. When I say that we had two squadrons down there, lots of aeroplanes and lots of pilots in both squadrons. And well you'd sort of fly day on, day off sort of business. And then it was very good. And if you weren't flying, you were back at the camp. And you never

23:00 went near it because you'd had enough of flying and being on strips and all that. And then each day you'd be rostered on to do your job for the next day which was sort of standbys, scrambles if there was a raid coming in and whatnot. The weather was very adverse factor there. It used to come in and rained a lot whilst we were there and it was a bad time of the year I believe. And

23:30 Milne Bay was always known for rainy weather. But that was it. But I think then the word came through at Milne Bay that there was a Jap force coming in to Milne Bay and also from intelligence

24:00 they found out that there was barges coming down from Lae. So with troops and whatnot to join up with the force that was coming from Rabaul. Then and I think as I said before the day before the Japs arrived, two flights of 75 Squadron took off to intercept the Japs over at Goodenough

24:30 Island, which we destroyed them and we got back about one o'clock and in that same afternoon the two squadrons of 75 and 76 went out in the afternoon to try and locate the convoy that was coming down to land in Milne Bay. They did contact it but with the bad weather and flying low, they'd be lucky to be more than

25:00 five hundred or a thousand feet. And they got back with one fatality which was on landing. And the next morning the Japs had landed in Milne Bay. Do you want me to carry on with that?

I was gonna say, can you tell me about the flight where you intercepted the barges?

Oh well that was very interesting. Because we got there, we flew out

25:30 in bad weather and just got out there and it cleared up a bit for us to get up to about oh about four thousand feet which we flew across the water. And as we literally got there, the direction we came from the Japs were landing on the southern shore of Goodenough Island. And our flight was the first flight to go in and the other flight stopped as top cover to protect us. And we went in sort of

26:00 one after the other, the four just sort of line astern. And attacked the Japs as they were just de-barging on the shore and as we were doing our strafing runs they were getting off the barges and going for shelter. There was no return fire or anything like that because they were caught red-handed. And we continued that, it was like target practise, we just sort of

26:30 dived down strafe, go back in a circle and go back and do the same again until such times as we were out of ammunition. In fact I say we were out of ammunition, we did keep sufficient ammunition because we had to then return to be top cover for the other four that went in. And they continued doing the same there and I think we might have had about fifty rounds for

27:00 each gun that if anything happened. But we were uninterrupted by air attacks or anything. And except getting back into Milne Bay which we flew back in. We got back through the way we came out. As we went back the weather wasn't real good then. But got back, landed and seeing we had flown and I said at that stage of the game, we had plenty of pilots and plenty of aircraft because we never lost any aircraft.

27:30 So it was then that we'd done our job for the day. The others took over and they went out and did the rest. And then until they arrived, they landed next morning. Do you want me to tell you a little about Milne Bay from then on or?

Oh I was just gonna go back to the strafing. You were strafing the barges as well as the Japanese invasion force?

The barges carried troops,

28:00 troops and equipment that they needed. Their idea was they were to land there and then leave at a certain time. And go across the water and arrive at literally the back door into Milne Bay. Instead of coming from the bay entrance in they were going to come, force march overland and come down via like the aerodromes that there, one strip I should say,

28:30 and just near the strip that was being built, they would have come in round there, which would have been rather nasty. Because the army, they had troops down where they expected a force might come in. So that would have been a two pronged attack on Milne Bay. But with us attacking the barges, they were marooned. The barges weren't serviceable

29:00 and they were put out of action. Which they were, I don't know how they got out of there in the long run. Nobody was concerned. In fact what I did know after the victory at Milne Bay they sent a military force that were in the battle of Milne Bay over to Goodenough Island to try and get the remnants of

what was left over there.

29:30 I think they tried to get out of there from stories I heard in sort of makeshift boats or something. But whether they were successful I wouldn't know. But what our two flights did in that day, was I consider or believe was crucial in reinforcements. They didn't

30:00 get the reinforcements they expected to. And they were only on one front when they landed, just near KB Mission, which they did land at the wrong spot. They should have been closer in but they landed at the wrong spot which is in the middle of the night as you know the navigation's. But they were escorted by a cruiser too. And next morning from about six o'clock onwards with the air force or the army.

30:30 I believe a few boats of the army were coming back and they had been out on reconnaissance up near the end of the, or the entrance to Milne Bay. But they came, I'm lead to believe they came back and got in the middle of, on little yacht type or yawls. And they came in amongst them whilst they were landing and they were just shot to ribbons. And they were killed. And I don't think

31:00 they took any prisoners at all there. But that was the army and then the army they made contact with them and it was a very severe battle with them and in shocking conditions. Yeah and it wasn't until daylight when the air force could get going, we helped the army to a wonderful extent you know

31:30 and it was something the army hadn't had for a while was air support and the air support was on their side. It wasn't against them.

How important I guess as someone from the air force do you consider that air support to be?

Well the fact is that it's the first time all of us had been so close to action in,

32:00 in the war. It was on our doorstep, an invasion which literally we were taking off the strip, we were taking off from west to east which was right down Milne Bay. We'd just get airborne, we'd put our wheels up and at this stage we were strafing, we'd be lucky to get to five hundred feet which would be underneath the cloud. And from then on you'd just take off, you'd kick in a little bit of left rudder.

32:30 And you'd just sort of level out and then there in front of you were all barges. Barges, fuel all pushed overboard, all on the waterfront and all round about the mission there and whatnot. And we would just start strafing. Strafing the barges, strafing their fuel and strafing where we were told was their bomb line sort of business. Anything from here

33:00 down was safe, anything above that was and we were strafing. And we did that all day, all day. And then eventually it got to the stage where we were putting a bomb underneath the fuselage and just flying along at about five hundred feet and just with an instantaneous fuse on the bomb and just fly straight and level and drop it and just wait for the concussion you know

33:30 on the tail plane that it didn't flip you over. We don't know whether that was one of the reasons how Peter Turnbull got killed or whether he just flicked or something. But he hit the trees and was just killed instantly. But that's what we did for days on end. Until then it got very critical when we had to fly back to Port Moresby when they looked like over running the,

34:00 the army there at one stage. It was very critical.

Did you realise at the time how crucial the Milne Bay campaign was?

Air force-wise no, we didn't know how the army, we knew they were up against a strong force. And then it was touch and go all the way through. They were fighting in atrocious conditions.

34:30 kamikaze type enemy, regardless of loss of life. And it was terrible. And being on the flying side we were only getting these things back from the army about how it was going and how they were so grateful for our support. But at night, we couldn't fly at night because it was too

35:00 dark to do anything, we couldn't see a thing. But each night, the cruiser used to come back soon as it got dark. And the army they had anti aircraft, anti aircraft guns there. And they used to fly at the cruiser, and the cruiser used to return with their ammunition. And is that too...?

We'll just stop. Sorry, we were talking about, you were just

35:30 **saying how you were flying every day at Milne Bay.**

Yes. Oh well sort of when we'd get, at night we couldn't sort of fly at all. But every night a cruiser used to come in and attack, attack us, shell everything that they could but the ack-ack used to open up on them. But they found out that the ack-ack with the flash of their guns in the dark night they were pin pointed and the cruiser just sort of let them have it so they didn't do that very often. Whether

36:00 they did it fatally I don't know. But we were shelled every night. They'd come in and we used to, where we were in the tent. There was three of us, Keith Gamble, Nat Gill who became a lieutenant commander on the Fleet Air Arm later on in the war, then and a couple of ground staff, not ground staff, administrative people that came to us. They were in our tent but,

36:30 what we used to do was, you'd get this flash of light which used to reverberate through Milne Bay with the low cloud and whatnot. And which was from the guns and from then on we used to count fifteen seconds. We got used to this way because if we could hear the twirling or whirling of the shell coming over,

37:00 if we got, counted fifteen seconds and we could hear it, we were happy. Because it used to go right over the top of us. But if at fifteen seconds, or if, we'd know before hand, but at fifteen seconds we reckoned we were safe but if we didn't hear anything after the flash of the guns we were a bit wary. But we were trying to sleep with the administrative blokes were a bit nervous.

37:30 And in fact they used to get out of the tent and go and have a look around to see what was going on. And I think it was Nat Gill said "For Christ's sake, if you don't get back and try and get to sleep, I'll shoot you myself." So, that's how perturbed we were. We wanted our night's sleep if we could possibly get it. So that was it. But that went on every night until such time as they withdrew.

38:00 One instance in Milne Bay, one of our chaps got back late at night and had to ditch on a reef. That was Alan Whetters. And he finished up with help of natives of getting his boat off the reef and with forty-four gallon drums and was towing it back to the wharf at Gili Gili and then so as they could get the spare parts off the aircraft.

38:30 But with the launch that was towing the Kittyhawk back, floating on the drums. The outgoing tide was so great that they weren't getting anywhere and then it started to get dark. And so they cut the Kittyhawk adrift and let it sink and Alan got back to the squadron that night. He'd been missing about three days.

39:00 But they eventually found the Kittyhawk I think about thirty odd years later, I think there was a documentary made on it of Winged Ghosts of the Pacific, something like that. But that was another interesting thing, that went on there. As I said we always had plenty of supplies of everything. And the

39:30 the ground staff were amazing again. The army were terrific, the ground staff were great. And then one of the things that wasn't very good was when we got evacuated out back to Moresby that we had to leave the ground staff behind. But as it turned out successfully. They were all armed up with rifles and whatnot to take to the bush or defend themselves. But that was not to be. But we had to fly out to protect the squadron,

40:00 the aircraft and the squadron which could come back and fly another day.

Did you have, you mentioned that your colleague that was stuck on the reef was rescued by some natives. Did you have any other contact, much contact?

No I never had, we never had any. We had more contact with natives in Port Moresby they used to come along. But never much contacts in with them down there. Once they

40:30 landed they were in villages and whatnot. But they took off, got away from the Japs as far as they could. Because the Japs were merciful, not merciful but they were terrible, they'd kill them. And if they at all assisted the allies, they didn't make any bones and they set examples to them. And they just took into the hills of which Milne Bay was there, I never heard about what happened to some

41:00 of them but I think a lot of them were killed because in my last visit to up there to Milne Bay there was a lot of them that had been decorated by the allies.

Tape 7

00:31 **Okay Bob, I was just wondering if we can continue on with Milne Bay for a moment. You evacuated out of there to go down to Port Moresby. And your main, if you can just take us through the reasons?**

Yes well, at a critical stage with the Japs landing at Milne Bay, the word came through to the squadrons that the defence

01:00 was rather fragile with the way the Japs were attacking the AIF people there. And they didn't know what the outcome might be. And the higher authorities in their wisdom thought it would be a good idea where they'd evacuate all the aircraft from Milne Bay back to Port Moresby

01:30 and all the pilots. All the ground staff could not be evacuated, but this was, they did not want to lose the aircraft and the pilots because they were critical for the operations up there. And being in so, seeing it was so sudden they didn't have the aircraft to evacuate the ground staff. So that sort of came through round about two o'clock

02:00 in the afternoon. And everybody was allocated an aircraft. Which a, all the chaps that were at Milne Bay in 75 Squadron were out, the pilots were given an aircraft. And the greater number of the blokes that came back from England there wasn't sufficient aircraft for them.

02:30 So some got aircraft and some didn't but those that didn't get aircraft flew back to Moresby in a Hudson. Not many ground staff went back there. Then but I was fortunate enough to be given an aircraft to fly back. But, but the squadron left before I did. Because one of the aircraft, oh there was two aircraft left by 75 and they were both unserviceable at the time and had to be brought up to

03:00 flying condition. So whether they were up to combat condition I wouldn't know. But I had to wait behind. And it wasn't until about oh half past three, four o'clock that my aircraft became serviceable. And I immediately took her down, flew from Milne Bay up to Port Moresby. All the ground staff were going to stop there. And sort of protect what they could. If they, the Japs did over run

03:30 Milne Bay. The other pilot that was left was Bill Cowie. His aircraft wasn't serviceable. And I arrived at Port Moresby oh I think it was just on the beginning of dusk, Port Moresby where I parked the aircraft and we were picked up by trucks, etc. And it was rather dark at the time when this Kittyhawk flew

04:00 in. Which was Bill Cowie from Milne Bay. And he made a circuit of the aerodrome to come in to land. And he had his navigation lights on and he flew down on the downward leg of coming in to land. Into the seven mile strip. And he turned on the cross wind leg but he must, we presume, he must have been

04:30 not used to flying at night. This is our presumption that he must have put the undercarriage down and in doing so the nose of the aircraft tends to dip a bit. You have to trim the aircraft back a bit to take the pressure off the stick. And we think that he didn't realise that the nose was going down. And in the ensuing turn cross wind and with the undercarriage going down he clipped the top of a high ridge and the aircraft

05:00 exploded and he was killed instantly. Which was a tragedy to a career of a young man. He was a, I think he was a flight sergeant at the time. But then nobody sort of, we didn't go over there or whatnot because it was obvious what the end result was. But all in all the evacuation in hindsight was necessary. Because they didn't know what the outcome was going to be down there at Milne Bay. But as I said

05:30 in hindsight the Japanese made a kamikaze attack on this strip that was not operating at the time. It was still being built. But they were overwhelmed by the militia and they were forced back. And from then on it was a backwards step for the Japs all the way through until they were eventually evacuated out at night, back to Rabaul. Which ended

06:00 their occupation of Milne Bay and the first time that the Japs were defeated on land, in 1942.

How close were the Japanese forces to you and the squadron at Milne Bay before you were evacuated?

The Japanese forces were, I think that the strip that was being constructed when they landed,

06:30 I think their forces weren't very far from that strip that night. And the AIF chaps had set up their perimeter along that strip. And it wasn't until it got dark and sometime during the night they start to do their advance or make their advance on the strip with all their calling outs and just kept marching. And the Australians from

07:00 what I gather just kept firing. And kept firing, kept firing. And they were just mowing them down in waves. All the time. Until eventually in the dawn they found untold dead there. Then they started to advance I believe to just follow up with the remainder that were evacuating all the time. Which still took time. But I think it, I dunno whether it was that night or the night after, but then

07:30 they evacuated the Japs out of there. Next afternoon of that previous night we were evacuated, we flew back from Moresby to Milne Bay. The aircraft I flew up must have been still unserviceable cause I didn't have an aircraft to fly back. And I finished up flying back in a Lockheed Hudson. And

08:00 to make matters worse, just as we were flying in, coming in the short cut area from Moresby I'm sitting there in the Hudson and the skipper yelled out to the rest of the crew, "There's a red alert in Milne Bay. There's a raid coming in." And I thought "God, what am I doing sitting here in a Hudson with only a revolver and I can't do anything about it." And I thought "Oh God, what's gonna happen

08:30 now." And we went in and eventually I was only about five or six minutes later that he came back and said "Oh it was a false alarm." And he landed and I got out and went and joined the squadron. And continued with what we had to do for the rest of the period of time there.

Was it frustrating at the time being pulled out of the action to go to Port Moresby?

I, well no, see

09:00 I wouldn't say frustrating. To my way of thinking with the way things were going, it was a movement, they had to do it, they had to do it. Rather than lose say 24 aircraft, rather than sort of blow them up and things like that. It was the only ideal move to take them back to where they could operate out of Moresby and attack Milne Bay. And the unfortunate thing was that

09:30 they had to leave the ground staff there at the time. But as it turned out there was no great risk in the long term to the ground staff. But they would be protected as much as possible by themselves and by

the army. Another thing in relation to what happened down at Milne Bay, I think it was just after we were evacuated. I'm not quite sure or whether before.

10:00 But with the weather being so bad, the Japs had sent in a number of Jake, I think they were, dive bombers to dive bomb Milne Bay. And it wasn't until a time later that somebody was flying down from Moresby and they found all these five dive-bombers on the southern part of New Guinea

10:30 and slightly west of Milne Bay, where they'd all force landed on the beach. And they'd all been destroyed by fire. They started a fire in the cockpit or over the fuel tank. And they'd all been damaged and it appears they got lost in the bad weather. And ran out of fuel. And and they never made it to Milne Bay. But that shows you the type of weather that we

11:00 encountered around about Milne Bay. And from what I can gather from the story, they tried to walk back overland, over there I understand, at least back to the north shore and up the north shore up to, back up to Lae. I believe a few made it but a lot I believe of the, if there was five, there might have been ten people were there. But I think quite a number were killed by the natives as the way we heard the story and only about one or two got back there

11:30 intact. But that's, I wouldn't take that for real truth or fact but that's the way we heard the story.

Was there a particular moment in the whole Milne Bay campaign where you felt that you were, you know victory was actually close?

No, not at all. I didn't think anything was on until,

12:00 until we got word that they'd evacuated out. Then, it came from like headquarters through the CO of the squadron and then it got very quiet. It got very quiet there. The cruiser wasn't shelling us or anything like that. And they just, they came as they arrived. In the middle of the night and they went in the middle of the night. That was it. But they, we had Hudsons down

12:30 there throughout the, that period of time. And they were doing sort of reconnaissance out to sea all the way round. Trying to find out what was going on. And they in turn did a good job. In fact, there was one particular Hudson got caught back in bad weather, coming back into Milne Bay. And of all things when I was at Milne

13:00 Bay, one of the crew on this particular Hudson came and looked me up and he said to me, "How are you Bob?" And I said "What are you doing here John?" Oh I called him Clicker. Because I went to school with him at Canterbury High School. And he was a wireless operator, wireless air gunner on the Hudson. And that's the first time I'd seen him since I left school.

13:30 And the thing was too, that they, coming back on reconnaissance one day in the appalling weather, that shrouded up Milne Bay which had mountains. You could get up the bay but you couldn't see like your hand in front of you with the weather. They had to ditch in Milne Bay and he was the only one injured. But the Hudson sank and they were picked up by a boat in Milne Bay and they got through.

14:00 So. It was a small world.

Incredible. When you returned to Milne Bay from Port Moresby, what did you see of the previous night's battle?

Well actually when you came in you didn't fly around having a look-see, you just went straight into the strip and the only thing that was when

14:30 you flew next day or when it was right, you had a bit of a look around but it still looked the same as when you left. The actual ground battle you can't see much. You can see debris and whatnot, you can't see trees chopped around or where we'd dropped bombs. You see them mangled and whatnot but when you're flying along at about oh a hundred and eighty, two hundred mile an hour, you're looking everywhere and you're not on a Cook's tour, you've got a job to do. But it was

15:00 much the same.

And it the airstrips and the airfield itself were pretty much intact?

We had lots of Milne Bay airstrip. We had lots of aeroplanes flying in. In one particular, early in the piece, oh two instances, in the 'bout eight o'clock at night, seven o'clock, eight o'clock at night a lone

15:30 single engine aeroplane arrived and a big panic. We all went down to the strip and this aeroplane arrived and it was an American Dauntless dive-bomber, an A24, a Marine aeroplane. Which had been on a dive-bombing mission and escorted I think by Americans. But a lot of their aircraft in the dive-bombing mission over at Buna had been shot down. And he flew down on the

16:00 north coast right down into Milne Bay and got in there in the night and landed. The pilot was alright, the air gunner at the back was mortally wounded and he died a short time after they got him out of the back of the cockpit. But he was of Indian descent from America and it was tragically he,

16:30 the aircraft was shot up badly. But they couldn't get back over the mountains at that particular time of the day. And he got down there. That was one instant we witnessed in the night. And the aircraft was I

think it flew back up to Moresby up to Kila strip where they operate out of. Another time we had they flew a Hudson, pardon me, a Liberator in bad weather loaded up with ammunition

17:00 for the Kittyhawks because we were running out of ammunition. And all the barrels of the guns were really oval, they didn't have rifling in them. And it flew in and dropped off all the ammunition for us. And it went unserviceable and one of the engines wasn't working properly. And that afternoon the Zero came in and strafed it and burned it to

17:30 the ground so they didn't have to worry about that. That was one instance down there. And another instance they had a Beaufort bomber, a torpedo bomber there, pardon me, which they were doing a pre-flight check on it for next day. And one of the armours or electricians there

18:00 was doing the switches and just pressed the switch which allowed the torpedo to fall off the aircraft which it flew, fell straight down. But doing so it sort of started the propeller going which was compressed air I think, it got going and the whirl of the propeller going which would have been driving it through the water was sufficient to see,

18:30 everybody looked at this Beaufort. And all you saw was people jumping out of the aeroplane going in all directions with this noise and this torpedo sitting down, down underneath it. But when the compressed air ran out of it, it woke up, it was quite safe because it in turn propels it through the water, which in turn propels and arms the torpedo up the front

19:00 until it hits an object then it explodes. But that was another interesting experience down there. And another one was where as I say we had aircraft flying and the Zeros used to come in and strafe us. But this one, couple got through one day and were strafing. And one of our pilots was sitting up on a slit trench with his revolver firing at them at will sort of business.

19:30 And the next thing he disappeared. And by the time we got him out of the trench, he had a bullet go right through his shoulder and came out the back of him. And that was the last we saw of him until at the end of war. But he got shot with a stray bullet from them strafing. And that was John Olivier. And he's still alive, lives up at Foster at the moment. And that's it.

20:00 But they're a few of the instances that happened. Besides lots of damage done to the aircraft by Milne Bay as I've said. It was always raining there. And it was a very, very muddy strip of which they had this, the strip was reinforced by this Marsden matting, which was steel matting. Which was joined together like as in jigsaw.

20:30 And it used to sink into the mud but wouldn't let you get bogged on it. But it used to have a lot of mud and water over it. And so much so that with you landing and even taking off, the mud and water, especially on landing, used to damage the flaps. You'd no sooner land and you'd get the flaps up straight away because the water, forced the water on the flaps, was damaging the flaps. And mud was getting

21:00 into spots that it was never meant to get into with the aircraft landing. And that was a great trouble or extra work for the ground staff. But they were some of the small instances that come to my knowledge that was happening whilst we were down at Milne Bay. But, and that's the last I saw of Milne Bay until, what,

21:30 about the first of November I think. First of November 19, pardon me first of November 2002 that I went back to Milne Bay after sixty years. And it was a very lot different from 1942 to sixty, to 2002 on the sixtieth anniversary.

22:00 **I bet it was. I just wondered Bob if we could take you, you were posted to Mildura because of malaria and that. And you were teaching at the OTU there. Now I know the OTUs came in after your training as a way to kind of give cadets experienced pilots etc. What sort of things were you actually teaching that you didn't get taught yourself?**

Well we weren't taught anything. We just,

22:30 the only thing we were taught was what we were doing, squadron formation, individual combat up in Darwin. And aerobatics, spins, and you know, recovering from awkward positions all that. That's what we did in Darwin. That was basically it, was squadron training. But we never, there was no OTU going when we went from Darwin to Milne Bay. And as far as I, to Moresby, and as far as I

23:00 know any of the pilots, we, they just learned to fly the type. And when I came back after the Milne Bay and got sick with malaria that they had the Number Two OTU. Which was a Fighter OTU which, where they taught all tactics before you got to a squadron. And the squadron that had been formed you went to the squadron with all this training which was an advanced training. And then you

23:30 sort of took all the rough edges off it back in the squadron. But in, when we went to the squadron there was no OTUs operating in Australia to my knowledge at all, Fighter OTUs because we never had any fighter aircraft.

So what sort of advice, do you remember any particular advice you'd give to new fighter pilots at the OTU where you were teaching?

Look around, look around, and be careful. And you had to be alert all the time. You know

24:00 because you're in close proximity to other aircraft in formation flying. Had to be careful, you know various things. All little pitfalls like changing from one side of a flight from going underneath them. You just used to slide underneath the two or three aircraft or get underneath them. You wanted to make sure you didn't pull up too soon. Be careful, don't pull up too

24:30 soon. Don't forget your wings are that wide and you don't collide. And yeah it was all those little tricks that are new to them. The aircraft were very sensitive. And whether they heeded it or, you know, but it was advice that needed to be taken. And lots of other things, which I can't think about at the moment.

Yeah, no, that's alright. From there you were posted to Gloucester,

25:00 **in 78 Squadron. And you had, there was a, you were only there for a couple of weeks and you had, there was a bit of an accident, and somebody rammed you. Can you tell us about that incident?**

Oh yes, after leaving Mildura another chap and myself, John Griffiths, was posted as replacement pilots to join number 78 Squadron which was stationed at Cape Gloucester which was on the western tip of

25:30 New Britain Island. The eastern tip was Rabaul which was oh I couldn't tell you how far away it was. But the other, western end was where 78 Squadron was based. Johnny Griffith and I were posted there. And we flew up on a sort of a courier by various ways and eventually arrived at there in a DC-3. And we joined 78 Squadron.

26:00 The CO at the time was Squadron Leader Grant Walker who said, greeted us as you know as replacement pilots. We're replacing pilots that'd left. And he said to me, he said "Oh I know Bob that you're an original member of 75 Squadron. And if you'd like to go and join 75 which is just the other side of the strip." he said, "I can organise joining you." And I said "Oh I'm a bit of a fatalist

26:30 boss." I said "I'm posted here, I'll take my medicine as it comes." And he said "Right-o, well that's that." Bad decision on his behalf I think and was a lucky decision on mine. I don't know one way or the other. But Johnny Griffith and I we were given an exercise of going to take off and do Ack-Ack Co-Op. Which allowed us to sort of fly around and get

27:00 used to the aeroplanes all around and then get used to the area that we were going to fly in. It was, the exercise involved about an hour, hour and a half. But what happened was that in doing that, a rain squall came in over the area which we had to land on a wet strip. Our first landing on the Cape Gloucester

27:30 strip. And it was very wet and greasy from this Marsden matting which was treacherous if you weren't very careful. And I landed and being the first landing I was very wary of the length of the strip. And I landed and it was sort of just finished my sort of run and just proceeding forward. And I just happened to look out of the back of me and Johnny Griffith landed. And all I saw of

28:00 him he was going twice the speed that I was going. And all the brakes on the two wheels were locked. And he just came along and collided right into me. And sort of went over the top of me. And from then I was non compos mentis sort of business. And woke up with somebody trying to put insulin, not insulin, but morphia into me. And

28:30 then I woke up in an ambulance and then I woke up in hospital. And eventually I was hospitalised. I had the side of my face pushed in and depressed myaela bone, etc. etc. So that was my first flight with 78 Squadron. And then I got posted south and in about a fortnight's time they posted me south. Which I was evacuated to an American hospital.

29:00 The doctors up there couldn't fix me up and I finished up at, by working my way down to Sydney and getting out to Concord Hospital where I was there for a few weeks. Until such time as I flew back in about six weeks time to the squadron again. And I joined them there at Noemfoor Island.

So you were well recovered by that stage?

Well, I got posted straight from the hospital

29:30 back to the squadron without flying an aeroplane. So I made the effort to see if I could get an aeroplane to fly back to the squadron. Which I was fortunate enough to get one from Richmond. I had all my flying gear bar a parachute and they said "Well, oh please send out the parachute back to me." And I flew this Kittyhawk back to Townsville. Which had to go to Port Moresby. And when I got to Townsville

30:00 the, they wouldn't let me fly on from Townsville to Moresby because I was going to do it on my own. And they said "Oh no, you can't do that on your own. You've got to have an escort." And at that particular time, a Beaufighter came back, he'd had started from Moresby but he'd had trouble and came back. And I joined the Beaufighter to fly to Moresby.

30:30 From then on I've made a life long friendship with the navigator of that Beaufighter, Fred Cassidy who doesn't live very far from my place. But he was navigator. But I joined them, we flew to Cairns and the way we used to fly in fighters was from Townsville to Cooktown and Cooktown to Horn Island and Horn

Island across to Port Moresby.

31:00 And I spoke to them when we got to Cairns, which was in the afternoon. And I said to him "Oh what time are we going to leave tomorrow to go to Horn Island?" He said "Oh we're not going to Horn Island." he said, "We're flying direct to Cairns to Port Moresby." About two hours or more over water and then I was, so away we went. But fortunately we were over cloud for three quarters of the time.

31:30 Until we just got near the mainland of Moresby and we couldn't see the island or anything at all. And I felt very grateful to be in escort of a Beaufighter because we didn't have radio communication, two different frequencies. And all I just got was a waggle of the wings. And all I could see is on the Beaufighter, when I formatted close to them, was that I could see a little radar,

32:00 radar or radio location finder going around up on top of the aircraft. And I thought "Oh, this is the best place to be." And we went from about oh ten thousand feet down to oh sea level in the cloud and whatnot. And the very straight business of formatting going down through cloud. You lose sight of them in thick cloud but we made it down to the

32:30 sea level. And I was very lucky again because the rule of thumb up there with the fighters is if, flying into Moresby if you hit the isle, hit More, hit New Guinea before you hit the reef you'd turn right. And if you'd hit the reef before you hit the mainland you'd turn left. So with Fred Cassidy's navigation we hit Moresby right on the knocker. So I didn't have to worry about finding

33:00 Moresby. And from then on I left the aircraft there and I flew with Fred and his pilot right back to New, to Noemfoor Island. And that's how I joined 78 Squadron.

You mentioned yesterday that 78 Squadron was very different to 75. Can you talk a bit about that?

Yeah. Well it was, we were sort of 75 was a, I wouldn't say a

33:30 rough and tumble, terrific blokes and whatnot. Our dress was, didn't conform to any regulation. Was just shorts and no rank, no nothing and a hat. And a scruffy mob because we didn't have any facilities for the, this is even in Milne Bay. It was all rough facilities and whatnot. But with 78 Squadron the war was going our way.

34:00 We had showers, we had tents and two to a tent. Or three to, two to a tent, that's right. But I became a flight commander in 78 Squadron. But then you had more amenities and they had good cooking facilities, we had people washing. I doubt if I ever washed in

34:30 Moresby because there's nowhere to wash. You'd just dunk your shorts in it and hoped that it was dry when you got back next day. And it was really rough. And as I said, you looked just like you were humanised when you got to 78 Squadron. And course, the war was going our way. And although we were losing pilots there unfortunately from dive bombing and strafing and,

35:00 and bad weather, the pressure wasn't on as, I didn't feel as much then. It was there but you couldn't see it as much as you could before. And every now and again you were brought to life by somebody sort of missing coming back from an op. It brought you back to reality that don't get too over-confident. It was always there.

How did you, as a pilot yourself, how did you deal with the

35:30 **loss of other pilots?**

Ah it's a bit hard to explain. You're with a bloke one minute and the next minute he's not there. And I think, the morale of the pilots was such that you'd feel greatly sorry in your heart and whatnot. But if you dwelled upon the problem it would get to you.

36:00 A few people sort of it used to get a bit much for them. Very few people. But sometimes it happened and they were sent south for further training. But with the camaraderie-ship with the blokes there, when you weren't flying you were out swimming in the water, which was a wonderful temperature. And the only problem was when

36:30 there was nurses around you had to go back to putting the shorts or underpants on. You never flew with underpants, you never flew, in fact it wasn't until later in the war that I started to fly with socks on. Because one of the chaps said to me that he always flew with black socks on because that if he ever force landed in the water. Swimming in the water, if you didn't have socks on, the sharks would see the whites of your feet or something and

37:00 would attack you. And that was enough for me. And I also never used to fly with gloves on at all. Because somebody said "If you're ever caught on fire in the air and you jumped out, if you got burned your hands, you would never feel the rip cord if you had to use it." So from then on I used to fly with a transport driver's gloves on. And just to protect my hands and my feet. And

37:30 of course your face is covered with your oxygen mask and your goggles which you'd pull down if you ever caught on fire. So basically from 1942 to 1943 it was a real change of dress in aircraft. We weren't in flying suits then, you're in long, long trousers and flying boots or American flying boots or shoes. And

or boots I should say. And you were covered up from

38:00 head to toe. But early in the place it was just shorts and I think if, in fact back to Johnny Piper. Early in 1942 when he, I think he flew over Lae in his pyjama coat. Because they got out and he just wore his pyjama coat over his shorts and whatnot. And he did the whole operation flying his pyjama top. So that was

38:30 what it was like. And he mightn't have had a clean shirt to wear but they're the things they did in those days.

I've heard a few stories of, you know people who had personal items or lucky charms or things that they'd take with them on planes, on their flights. Did you have anything like that?

No, I was superstitious, I never carried a camera with me. The

39:00 and I don't say I did anything out of the ordinary as in superstition but I didn't like ever having my photo taken before I took off. I sort of avoided that as much as possible I didn't mind having a photo taken after the op was over if anybody was around. But we had squadron photos, which were there.

39:30 There was a few, the Department of Information photographers out there. Which was taking Department of Information work. But we were always around for that which it was a detailed thing to do. But as for sort of superstitions, I suppose a bit of superstition about it by not carrying a camera and documenting things and whatnot. But I tried not to worry about superstitions, it was bad enough sort of flying without sort of

40:00 doing things like that.

Reflecting back on it why do you think it was that you avoided having your photograph taken before you'd take off on an op?

Oh just that I, oh I don't know just, just was in my curriculum of that one of the things not to do not to, see. But that was that. Then I don't know if you've got time at the moment but when I joined 78 Squadron I did a stupid thing.

40:30 In 78 Squadron than on the first flight...

Tape 8

00:36 **Bob, I was wondering if you could repeat for the camera what we were talking about in the break?**

Oh I hope I don't blush. I'm referring to when I first joined 78 Squadron after returning, after my accident. Then, I joined them at Noemfoor Island. And being a rookie again in 78 Squadron you go to the

01:00 end of the line and you become a rookie in 78 Squadron. And the squadrons and flights are made up with the most experienced blokes and the Number Ones, the next Number Two and the next Number Three, Number Four until you're flying Number Four all the time. And then I joined this flight to go out, up to Sansapor this time where the Americans had just landed at Sansapor. And my flight

01:30 commander was Harry Kerr and who I knew from down at Milne Bay when he was in 76. And then I was going to a squadron which was quite experienced. Because I had an experience down at Cape Gloucester where I had the accident, but they were more experienced in operations up there. And Harry said to me, he said "Oh Bob you can fly Number Two to me today." Which sort of promoted me as his Number Two. And

02:00 Number Three was the other leader and the Number Four was his Number Two. But anyway to cut a long story short, we got over Sansapor protecting there from the ground forces that were at Sansapor. Which were American Forces. And 78 was doing the air cover. And we'd been there oh, oh I suppose an hour or so and then all of a sudden

02:30 my motor stopped. When your motor stops and you're flying in formation everybody goes forward and you're there, pardon me, left behind like a shag on a rock. I got the motor started again and then I called up Harry Kerr and I said. I called him up and I said, "Oh." I said, "Harry." I said "Look, I've just run out of fuel

03:00 on my belly tank." We all flew with belly tanks and what you did is when you took off you had your wing tanks and your fuselage tanks. And then your belly tank and whatnot. And you used to change over to your belly tank and use that first up and then if per chance you got into operation, you got rid of that tank and you still had plenty of fuel. And I just said, "I've just run out of

03:30 fuel on my belly tank." and I said "You know that was that." And Harry said "Oh we'll stop a little bit longer" and he said "But we'll have to cut short the mission because you haven't got enough fuel." And

the rest of us have got a ton. And then we only did that for about ten minutes. And he said “Oh you might as well get rid of your belly tank because it’s no bloody good to you now, it’s just going along for the ride.” So I dropped the belly

04:00 tank and as I dropped my belly tank my aircraft went from the straight and level position up high. And I though “Ye Gods.” and I pulled away from them and Harry said to me “What’s happened?” And I got down and looked in the cockpit of where the selectors was for where you select your various tanks and whatnot. And I said to Harry Kerr, I said “Harry,

04:30 I have finger trouble.” And he said “What’s happened?” And the aircraft I was flying was different to the Kittyhawks that I was flying in Mildura. And the fuel quadrant where you selected your tanks were entirely different to the aircraft I was flying. So what I had done, I had flown on my fuselage tank all the time and I ran out of

05:00 fuel on the fuselage tank. And inadvertently when I was told to get rid of my belly tank I got rid of a full tank of fuel. Which left me to fly back to our base on Noemfoor Island on two wing tanks. Finger trouble was referred to when you do a dastardly act which is your own responsibility and you seemed to have the finger on your hand in the wrong place on your body.

05:30 And it was a common phrase that, with the blokes you’d say “What have you done wrong?” And you’d say “Oh it’s finger trouble.” And you’d done the entire wrong thing on your own behalf. Another phraseology they had. Which was referred to in American Search and Rescue Squadron that used to rescue a lot of allied pilots from the water or if

06:00 they were in a spot where they could be retracted from where they’d force landed was American PBY Squadron. And they were called Snafu Snatchers. And their and they got this nickname of Snafu Snatching from an abbreviation of the spelling which was S-N-A-F-U. And they

06:30 were known right throughout the south west Pacific I believe as Snafu Snatchers. And Snafu stood for, with a slight variation of what the air force blokes used to put, was: Situation Normal, All Fowled Up. So you can substitute any word you liked for the word that was done. But all in all from then in 78

07:00 Squadron I must say 78 Squadron before I joined it, only a matter of about a month or six weeks before hand, was we got involved between Noemfoor Island and Manokwari Island in a force of Japanese aeroplanes. Of about six or eight aircraft which they shot down the whole lot in the ensuing battle which was over the water. And for the loss of one,

07:30 one aeroplane. But from then on it was 78 Squadron was just sort of mopping up all the way round the Dutch New Guinea and the like. They moved from Noemfoor Island up to Manokwari, up to Manokwari, which was further up towards the Celebes, and that’s where I left the island there and returned home.

08:00 **Can you tell me about when you heard the war had ended?**

Beg yours?

Can you tell me when you heard the war had ended? Where you were and what happened?

I happened to be on leave from Bradfield Park. And I had to go in and meet my sister in town. And we were going to lunch. And she was working in town. And I just arrived in town. And the blazing

08:30 headlines, everybody went mad and I said “What’s wrong?” And they said “The war’s over.” And quite ironical that where I was when this happened. I was on the corner of Pitt Street and Bridge Street in Sydney when it happened. And I was sort of stunned. And my first thought was “I’m out of a job. What have I got to do?” I was

09:00 inexperienced in everything. I was nineteen when I left work. I had to go and find a job or something like that. I didn’t know what was happening in the air force at that stage of the game. I was just sort of had my fingers crossed. But when the war finished I was on King and Pitt Street. And when the war started I was three blocks away from King Street and Pitt Street, when I heard the war

09:30 had started. And it was quite ironical that happened. Went back to Bradfield Park and they said nobody knew what was going on. And everybody there said “Go on leave.” So we all went and bought as much grog as we could. And a batch of us went up to the Hydro Majestic [Hotel] at Katoomba and had a couple of big wild nights and whatnot. And after our leave was

10:00 over they went back to Bradfield Park and they said we were being discharged. And I left the Royal Australian Air Force almost five years after I joined it.

Was the mood everywhere one of elation? Was everyone celebrating?

I think more worried, I think I worried more what I was going to do after the war. I didn’t know what to do. Because the law was that you went back to

10:30 where you worked before where I was the office boy. And I was a lot more mature then, I think I was, I think I was twenty-two, twenty-three then. And I had my own ideas on things and what I wanted to do. And that was it. But I never went back to Paper Products again. I went to a wholesale grocery place

there which

looked like opportunities for me. I stopped for a period of time, time there. And there was various things going on for rehabilitation for ex-servicemen. And they opened up, the Transport Department in Sydney opened up a ballot of, for ex-servicemen for fifty taxi plates in Sydney. And open to all ex-servicemen. And

I was like a ship without a rudder so I thought "Well if you don't put an application in you don't win." And I was fortunate enough to win what they call a ballot plate in the fifty taxi plates that were in Sydney. That's where I finished up after I got a car and whatnot. I started in the taxi industry. Which I was in for thirty odd years or more.

I was very fortunate, whilst I was in the taxi business or just after the war I applied for everything. Applied for the Citizen Air Force, I think I might have told you this before, Citizen Air Force. I finished up in the Citizen Air Force for five years after the war even, which I could have the taxi, drive the taxi and fly Mustangs. So that was the way it happened.

What was the role of the Citizen Air

Force?

Mmm?

What did the Citizen Air Force do?

The Citizen Air Force was when most of the blokes you joined the Royal Australian Air Force for the duration of the war and a year after. And in that year after, everything settled down and they sort of got the good blokes that they wanted. And the blokes that sort of wanted to get back to civilian life and all of that. But then to sort of keep the air force sort of going, they

started, as they were disbanding the air force, they decided, about two years after that to start up the Citizen Air Force. With a squadron in Perth, ah Perth, Victoria, Sydney and Brisbane, and then because they had lots of blokes that were on the reserve. And then they

didn't need much training and they went back where they left off. You had to apply for it and be interviewed again. And I was fortunate enough to be interviewed and accepted. And I went back into 22 Squadron who then were just, had Kittyhawks were a thing of the past and they had Mustangs. And we went to Schofields, or we went to Bankstown Aerodrome where the CO that we had flight commander and a

CO there and a Wirraway. And I came into the Citizen Air Force there to see them and they said they'd come back from England. They'd been in England all the time and they'd come back from England. And they said "What were you flying?" and I said "Kittyhawks and Wirraways." And I said "I just came up to sign up to join the Citizen Air Force" and said "What to do?" And they said "Oh, if you want to sign up anything, go and

sign your clothing card." And they said "What did you do? Oh, you've flown Wirraways." They said "We've got a Wirraway here." And the CO said and he said "I've never flown a Wirraway." he said. And he said "Oh, have you got many hours?" And I said "Oh, I've flown in the back seat of a Wirraway for a year." So he said "Oh well, you can check me out in a Wirraway." So I checked him out in the Wirraway and I'm in civvies [civilian clothes] and he's in uniform. And I checked him out and that was that. And

whilst we, we finished up at, there was four of us went in. There was Jim Somerton, Don Smith, what's his name, Jeff Cole and Johnny Piper, ah Johnny Parker. And Johnny Parker and Don Smith were then trainee, doing medicine.

And they were in the Citizen Air Force for five years and they did medicine whilst they were in the Citizen Air Force. But five of us went across to Schofields. Which we were there, learned to fly Mustangs. And tragically just before we got over there, the CO and flight commander got killed in a Tiger Moth. Doing something that they knew better.

Low aerobatics and whatnot and they hit the ground. Which I said, all aircraft had their, had their little black things about them. And they didn't obey the rules and they both got killed and we got another CO then and then we started to fly Mustangs. And then we sort of flew as a, as just a squadron, 22 Squadron and we only had

four or five aircraft. But we just flew. Every now and again we had an episode of where 22 Squadron got involved in a, Auster aeroplane out of Bankstown Aerodrome. The pilot was taxiing in it and it stalled, the motor stalled. And he got out and started the prop up. And the aircraft took off and it flew, it was flying round Sydney. And

22 Squadron got involved in it. This was during the week, because we only flew every second weekend. A fortnight, a clear fortnight, a year. But the permanent air force got involved with 22 Squadron there. They were trying to shoot the Auster down. It was doing circles over Sydney. But it got so high that the bloke in the back who was the adjutant with a rifle was trying to shoot it

17:30 down. He couldn't do it. And the navy were called in. And I think the navy eventually despatched an aircraft and it got knocked down into the sea from what I can gather. But it was still flying. Little things like that. We did a little bit of search and rescue of people were missing or something like that. But mainly that happened when an aircraft were overdue. But mainly we got involved in that when we were doing the fortnight's

18:00 camp. But everyone in the fortnight's camp usually was involved in air force week and whatnot. And we used to fly the flag, round the country towns like Bathurst and all that business. Or go and do aerobatic displays and or go up to Brisbane you know make up the number of aircraft. And just things like that was flying the flat for all those times that we, we lost a couple of aeroplanes with the pilots through

18:30 anoxia. You know in battle climbs. But all in all it was like a club really for us there. And eventually I grew up and left. And went back and started to raise a family.

Did it make the transition to civilian life after the war easier?

Oh yeah your mind was always on the air force. It was all air force. And then eventually you go that far

19:00 away from it that, you sort of look for other things. And I joined for a while, not for a while, I sort of didn't go to Anzac Days or things like that. And eventually a few people started, the Fighter Squadrons Branch of the Air Force Association. And I became a member of that and I was with them from oh for about thirty years on the committee of the Fighter Squadrons Branch of the Air Force Association. And

19:30 which involved a lot of participation with 75 Squadron and which with the Association we started scholarships for pupil, for people in the Royal Australian Air Force for their siblings and giving trophies and things like that including later

20:00 in life we, there was the scholarships and then to the staff college, I think we were offering a trophy of an award of a book for the best people in regard to air defence of Australia. And that went on and grew and grew and these things are still going on. But as we've handed over our Fighter Squadron Branch now

20:30 to the younger members of the air force. And the Fighters Squadrons Branch of the Air Force Association is operating out of Williamtown Air Force base now. Under new management.

Wonderful. Would you be able to tell me about when you were awarded your DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross]?

Oh well that came out of the blue, the DFC.

21:00 I was in civilian life at the time and somebody rang me up to congratulate me on being awarded the DFC. And that's the first I knew about it until I eventually got a letter from the air force saying I'd been awarded the DFC for oh sort of leadership in Seventy, well it didn't say 78 Squadron. Oh well it came from 78 Squadron. And

21:30 I think from the time I was in the air force from 1940 to that. But the leadership and helping the squadron and things like that. It was not an immediate award, it was after the war. Where an award which I think I was not deserving of, because of knowing of lots of other people that did more, more heroic things than I did. But it,

22:00 it was a surprise to me. And that's the way it went. But I was there at, all the way through sort of business. But there's other people that more deserving than I ever was.

I was wondering if you could tell me about when you returned to New Guinea

22:30 **in last year for the…?**

That was a very emotional tour for me to go back to New Zeal, ah to New Guinea. Just going to one of the reunions that I attend throughout the year. The co-ordinator of our air crew reunion, we had as our guest

23:00 speaker the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and she was saying that Veterans' Affairs were running a memorial or commemorative service for the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Battle of Milne Bay and for Popondetta, Kokoda and Buna. They had already put a monument up in

23:30 Isurava in the highlands there. And they were upgrading a memorial at Popondetta. And they were dedicating a memorial at Milne Bay. Placed or, they changed the name from Milne Bay to ah what was it called, Alotau. That was the strip now, it was Milne Bay when we were there.

24:00 and I put in a, one of the chaps there said from the Air Force Association, you were there. Put in, you gotta have an application in, I put an application. And it turns out there were twenty people was elected to go to on this trip. Which was run by the army. And then it appears though out of the twenty, there was

24:30 three air force people, two war widows and one naval bloke and the rest were army people. The air force chap, one of them came from Victoria was a Bob Bassinger who flew Beaufighters in England and

he flew Beaufighters in 30 Squadron in here over Buna, Popondetta and the like. There was a ground staff man by the name of Bob

25:00 Alward, that was an engineer on 22 Squadron on their Boston, Boston Fitch. They had the only BC reciprocate aircraft in where the pilot, I'm just trying to think of his name at the moment, but he was shot down and killed and beheaded

25:30 in over in Buna I think it was. I can see him now with ammunition around his face. I'll think of it in a moment. And myself who was at Moresby and Milne Bay. It was very emotional scene and very well organised by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. We flew to New Guinea by Air New Guinea and the air force

26:00 had a Hercules up there for us. Which flew us to, down to Milne Bay. And then I made myself known to the crew that were flying it who were all young men. Which I presume they might even be up in Iraq now. But I just said "Oh you know I'm ex air force bloke, from 75 Squadron." Their first remark

26:30 was a Magpie. Which is the bird on the crest of there. But they were wonderful young men, flew us down to Milne Bay and back again. Next day they flew us across to Lae. And then from Lae we had to fly from Lae down to Popondetta in twin engine, two twin engine Otter aeroplanes. Which were the only size aeroplanes that could land at Popondetta.

27:00 And then, that was an hour flight each way. Which was rather amazing you know getting into a piston or turbo prop aircraft, but ah anyway we made it there and back. And we got back there and the hospitality in Port Moresby was amazing. Amazing the transition from my days to there, I could not

27:30 remember very much about it. I never went into Moresby once. But we were entertained right royal by the RSL [Returned and Services League], by the High Commissioner and the most memorial part of Moresby besides returning was going out to Bomana Cemetery, which was...

28:00 ...very sorry about this. But we went out there and it was wonderful. Because it was...

28:30 ...all our pilots were out there that lost their lives in Port Moresby. I took the camera along and I was fortunate the war graves commission were very wonderful. And they went to a lot of trouble where all those who wanted to do something about being up there. They had

29:00 every spot that one of our airmen were buried there. And these were only the airmen that were confirmed dead. I put into them the number of graves I wanted to visit. And they were very wonderful in what they did. They said "When you get to the Bomana Cemetery,

29:30 you'll be given the locations of the grave site." And I had three young ladies there from a private school which escorted me around there where I took the photographs of all the members that lost their lives of 75 Squadron in Milne Bay, Milne Bay and Moresby. They apologised that in some cases some of these airmen that had

30:00 lost their lives were up in Lae. Which was a number of them were shot down over Lae including the CO of 76 Squadron. But it was wonderful to be there and with those twelve hundred odd tombstones and it was a wonderful service. But all Australians that paid the supreme sacrifice.....

30:30 I got very emotional during the war up at, when you get there, it does something, I didn't think I'd be like this... I'm sorry. But that's life.

31:00 The trip back was quite good. Veterans' Affairs are to be commended on their leader who was a wonderful man, a Brigadier General, Paul, forgotten his surname, but he did a wonderful job. And everybody that went from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The doctors and the nurses and the people that assisted, they were wonderful. And it made it

31:30 perfect for us. Amazing being in Port Moresby was the security was at a very high level. Round Moresby things are not as good as they used to be. Very high unemployment and lots of people around. And we were advised not to wander away on our own of a day or a night. And everywhere we went, went to like to the Police

32:00 Academy or Police Head Office there, the RSL, we were escorted by police and army. And even the army when we went around to Popondetta, the Royal Australian Army was there. And we were treated like stars. But they had to grab transport from everywhere like old buses and whatnot to go through the

32:30 kunai grass from Popondetta airstrip it was just a bus and going through the jungle. And it must have really brought back to the AIF men who all had suffered horrendous damage, oh wounds whilst they were there. And it must have brought back really torrid memories to them of what they went through in that isthmus of flat land. Because see the battle from Popondetta, Buna

33:00 and Sanananda, the casualties were tremendous. But when we got back there, it, we came back and back to reality. Back to Sydney and that was it. Once again I apologise for breaking down.

No problem. Did you get a sense when you were there, I mean I guess everybody who was

there, the infantry

33:30 **and the airmen of how important that whole New Guinea campaigns had been?**

Yes the, oh you mean sort of how they felt when they went back.

And how you felt, I mean just looking back.

I felt, I felt I appreciated what the army people did compared to what we did. Ours was like a clean war.

34:00 But the army, they were there, they slept night after night in their sleeping bags if they could, in rain and slush and mud. At least the air force got back to tents and whatnot. And at least we could have a wash. But Kokoda, Milne Bay all the other, where they were, didn't matter, once they left civilisation they lived on hard rations and whatnot until they were

34:30 relieved. I don't know how often they were relieved but they, they were buggered when they got back to their camps where they could sort of humanise themselves again. But like with the air force, ours was rough, we thought it was real hardships. But nothing compared to what the army had to go through.

Was there a real sense of appreciation from

35:00 **the army of the contribution the air force had made?**

I think one couldn't have done, one without the other. The navy used to get you there, escort you there, looked after you when they were on ships. We always used to fly in there. And then when we were at, everywhere we were based, we had, we didn't have Australian Army around us. Like we were moving forward with the, I think it was the USAF [United States Air Force], I think the

35:30 13th Air Force and we were under their command. But we had the American Army looking after us. We were always in their perimeter. But when we were at Milne Bay we had the AIF looked after us at that business. And they did a wonderful job. And I'm here today and that's what we never got over the Owen Stanley Ranges because we were on the Moresby side and they were on the other side. This is

36:00 later on during the war. And as I said the war was progressing our way. But everywhere they went their bases were all perimeter bases, where they had the army round protecting what was in their, where their base was. Oh no, one couldn't have done without the other. Always ready to give you a hand. Didn't matter if you were walking or whatnot, a truck would pick you up or whatnot.

36:30 And that's it.

I want to ask, just to go back to your air force experience. Something I wanted to ask before was you mentioned the Japanese and their kamikaze tactics. Which they did in planes as well. I mean as an airman, could you understand that tactic of …?

I can understand

37:00 that tactic as in desperation of when they're losing the war and how wonderful the Emperor was then in Japan. And it was, he was God. He was God. And to me it was a cruel treach… not treacherous way, an heroic way of them doing their bit for their country and whatnot. And

37:30 how they would so dedicated, they were prepared to give their life for their cause. And basically to me there, they to me are heroes. Go back to what terrorism now is the most awful thing in my life. These are murderers,

38:00 they're villains. These men were fighting in a cause in a war where you accept that people do want to kill you. But these people, these terrorists they, I'm not going to get on a bandwagon but there's something got to be done about it. And it's the greatest scourge of this present time. The greatest scourge. They used to have Fifth Column [spies] in World War II

38:30 where they behind the lines, they're blowing up train lines and things like that. But these bastards, I can think of worse words than bastards, are going in amongst civilians and people and young kids and whatnot. I can't say any more about it. It's as against what the Japs did in kamikaze, that was war. But this is not war, it's a treacherous thing this terrorism. And Al Qaeda

39:00 and it's terrible. I feel for our future generation. It's just pure hatred.

Tape 9

00:32 **We were talking about when you came back from the war. It was a little bit difficult sometimes with civilian life missing the air force. I was wondering, as a taxi driver, how did you cope being your own boss?**

Well I think the best thing about being a taxi driver was that I was my own boss. I was doing my own thing.

01:00 But I, when I sort of put in, I put in for everything as I said before, like Fleet Arm Air Force and blah, blah, blah sort of thing. I vowed and declared that through the whole war, I was in, out in the open. I left an office where I was in four walls from day to day. And I thought even

01:30 when I was there, the rumours that used to sweep through the office you know. Somebody rang up and said something about this. And I thought it was like a Peyton Place [a soap opera], rumours went round right and left. Or somebody had a birthday or something. It was going round there. And I lived with it, I thought that was alright, very good. But then the time came that I joined the air force. And from the time I joined the air force the only time you were indoors was doing your lessons.

02:00 And then you were out flying in beautiful fresh air. And then when you went to, when you went to like a permanent air force station, like up in Darwin, you were sort of disciplined and whatnot. Which was quite disciplined then because permanent air force. But you were out outside, you were flying, you were doing this and doing that. Then you'd get back into the routine when you were on land sort of thing. And but then when you were away at the war, you weren't

02:30 at the war sort of up, when the war started in Darwin you were never in administration, you were in the job that you were supposed to do. You were flying all the time or you were in amongst the aircraft or you were helping them to sort of do this and do that around the hangar all the time. And doing this when I finished the war I thought that I could never go back into an office and be sort of regimented,

03:00 sort of shackled to inside. And I thought "Well I've got my own business and I'll work at that." Of which I did until, and I was out in the fresh air all the time. If I wasn't behind the wheel of the car I was outside and or with my family and whatnot. And it helped my transition greatly. I know like lots of others they

03:30 went back into work and they became doctors. Doctors and good jobs in offices. But I thought, "I'm out in the fresh air, I'm moving around." and I felt good, I felt good. So that's what it was to me and the only thing in the long run, it wasn't a very wonderful profession to be in. But it put me on my

04:00 feet and sort of helped me raise my family which I'm very fortunate to have. But I think it helped me greatly being out in the open because I was up with the news all the time. If a headline came out you saw what was going on. You were round about aeroplanes all the time, sort of out to Mascot. You were seeing what was going on. And I can remember sort of making it my business to sort of watch this

04:30 Valiant aircraft flying in to Mascot you know with the RAF [Royal Air Force]. You could do things like that or have a look around. And course being your own boss you could do things, well, oh I used to work seven days a week but I was working for myself, I wasn't working for somebody else. And it made it quite easy I think. And the more I was on my own the more I enjoyed it.

05:00 I thought oh you know if you didn't like the boss or somebody and they gave you the bits or the S-H-I-Ts. Then, I didn't have to worry about that. I just had to worry about the Transport Department and that was it. But it was good for me. And I did everything I wanted to do. Played the sports I liked to play. Which I always, I didn't go to a very, I went to a more

05:30 active sport which was lovely. I used to, I never went to golf, I used to play tennis before the war but I went back to a more vigorous game of squash and it was the greatest sport I reckon in the world playing squash, competition squash. Played squash for twenty, twenty-five years or more. But that's the way of my transition to civilian life. And course which

06:00 also helped was then being with an Air Force Association. And sort of being up to date with it and going to various things. And like air shows. I never sort of went to very many air shows because I just thought I, well I was in air shows in the Citizen Air Force but I never worried about those things at all. But

06:30 because you're just showing the public what they're paying for. And and you're working for them. But when I left the air force entirely I thought seeing people doing aerobatics which they're trained for and doing aerobatics. I always thought that their, I knew what their skill was and their, they were right on the edge all the time. Flying the aircraft

07:00 and I thought you know the, I wonder if this sinks in to people that flying these sort of aircraft that they've got now, how they're on the edge all the time with them. It's a, and I thought "Well I don't want to go and see you know see some of these tragedies happen over there." Shows in England where they collide and whatnot. I thought that, "I'm past that stage now, I don't want to see that." And I used to appreciate

07:30 their skills and whatnot but I never liked to see them, people getting hurt.

I was wondering you were mentioning open spaces and flying. What was the best part about being in the air force?

Best part. Was joining. Joining and going from, learning to fly. And as I said to you, you became, instead of an earthling you became an airman. And

08:00 and as I said before it's a, now days the youth sort of extends their what is it, their energy on fast motor cars and things or braking things or going to protest meetings or things like that and voice their

opinions. And where I think flying you can, with

08:30 flying you can go to it and the sky's the limit. You've got a lot of room around and if you obey the regulations you don't happen. And it's, the regulations are there now to protect everybody. And in those days of World War I where the pilots and whatnot, they were the beginning of writing the book of how the Royal Australian Air Force goes. And it grew sort of over, from a small air force in 1939

09:00 to a huge air force that had hundreds and hundreds of aeroplanes and squadrons numbers of squadrons throughout the world. And that was it. That was a, and the rules changed which you've gotta do, you've gotta have your set of rules all the way. But early in the piece that there's a lot of lairs around, I was one of them myself I think. But you were young and

09:30 and you thought it was great. But there wasn't, when you get down to it, it was, you were wonderfully trained and you were wonderfully looked after and you're still wonderfully looked after, the, now. And I've always felt sorry for the people that joined the forces that could not get away on active service.

10:00 And, and the case if somebody had to stop at home to help others go. The, I feel sorry for those people that some of them were being denied the privileges of what the people that went away to the war. Which we've spoken about time and time again.

Do you think, I mean you obviously made a very good airman.

10:30 **Do you think you would have ever joined the navy or the army?**

Oh well I liked being in the air force and after war I did as I said before I put in for everything including joining the navy. Which a lot of my friends, I knew all the blokes that joined the navy. Even my CO in 78 Squadron Curly Bryden he went to,

11:00 to the Fleet Air Arm. And the numbers of others, about five or six, they went to Fleet Air Arm. And I got down to where I had to withdraw my application because as I said I missed out on the permanent air force. I got the replies to the navy which I went and pursued it. Then I won the taxi plate and I was then married and then the,

11:30 I thought "Well, no I've gotta sort of get back and run my family." And I then withdrew, whether I'd have got in, I had to get in. But I withdrew it which put paid to that. But a lot of them they stopped on in the navy for a number of years and then got out and went back to civilian life. But even a lot of the blokes that they were lucky enough to stop on in the air force eventually they came back into civilian life a few years after the war.

12:00 But then I sort of won the bouquet after it where I got in the Citizen Air Force. And which I lived at home and whatnot but flew every second weekend and a fortnight a year on Mustangs, which was good. And I left them, left 22 Squadron just as they were going into the jet age. And I just went for a ride in a Vampire and but I never went and flew jets at all. Because the other pilots that were in 22 Squadron where

12:30 they went onto the Vampires and whatnot. So but I'm not sorry with the decision I made. So, that's it.

When you reflect over your experience, do you think the war was a positive, did you take positives from…?

Oh yes there's always positive things come from the wartime. And, the,

13:00 the saying basically after the Japanese war was that "We won the war but lost the peace." Where Japan came out of the war, they're under sort of administration sort of thing. But they got on and sort of started building things and they became a very powerful nation. Of which they still are now, although their economy is nowadays changed

13:30 a little bit. But they seemed to rise out of the war a lot more readily than what the allies did. But as I said we won the war but lost the peace. But all in all I think it's Australia has progressed, aviation's progressed, it's done a lot of good. The first thing that I think during the war, nobody thought that aircraft carriers

14:00 would be a real, avon, navigation would be any good. But it's happened and air power is the thing to be watched and whatnot. And I think it's getting to the stage where all the wars will be sort of push button wars from over the horizon. You know everybody's firing at you and yet they could be two hundred mile away from you.

14:30 The whole tactics of everything has changed. Even the, the economy of countries is changing. Like as we're seeing now, this SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome] epidemic. Who would ever thought to the airlines that it'd made a lot of difference. But see it was bad enough with the attack on, in September over in New York. How aviation, commercial flying,

15:00 everybody didn't want to fly. Now they've got, now here's something that's a little wog but it's getting in and making people unhealthy and it's going round the world like wild, not like wild fire but certain area of the world. And these things can crop up every now and again where airlines just starting to feel back

and going [?]. And then people are not getting in aeroplanes. And aeroplanes don't make money if they don't have bums on seats. That's all it amounts to.

15:30 **How have you changed as a man from the time you enlisted in the air force to when you were discharged?**

How times have changed?

No how have you changed?

I've got more mellow. I've got more mellow and we all get mellow with years. We, with my family I'm, oh I don't like the way my son drives, he drives too fast. I've always got the foot on the brake, where I'd never worry. These things, there's a transition

16:00 of you up and whatnot. I prefer going from A to B nowadays with air travel so cheap. I prefer to travel all the time. Years ago when I had a family I used to drive because it was cheaper. But you sort of go along and you value. And when you're working and making money, you've got lot more money than when you're old and retired, you watch your pennies and whatnot. But that's the transition of everybody when you're up and full of energy,

16:30 you get in and every post's a winner for you. When you get married with your wife, which is wonderful. But then when you start to have children, father moves down a peg, all the way through until you've got your family. And then you're working as a team again. And then before you know Jack Robinson your mob's out elsewhere and you're Darby and Joan [a couple on their own]. And that's when you seem to taper off a bit. But that's the evolution of life all the way

17:00 through. It's one of those strange things. Not a strange thing, but that's life. See and then you go through the, there's a saying now about with all the oldies, you know "Everybody's dropping off the perch." which is true. And that's where it goes and a lot of my friends have gone lately and but you can't do much about it. You're here for, well I was proud to make three score and ten then when I made eighty,

17:30 I don't think I'll make ninety or whatnot but that's life. But I'd hate to be the last bloke that's sort of, I admire these old chaps but they're absolutely fabulous. And when you see them and the way they speak, it's a, but they're wonderful.

What did you learn about yourself as a man from the air force?

Oh I learned to

18:00 grow up. Very quickly. That's when I joined the air force. Because living at home and sort of being the only son in the family it's, you're spoilt rotten. And then there's a, I never had any money in my pocket, I was always borrowing off my father and mother and whatnot. And but then once you move away from home and whatnot, it's a I think that's why the Scouts are

18:30 so wonderful. I didn't join the Scouts or whatnot because I was at home all the time. But all my grandchildren they were in the Scouts. And one was a Queen's Scout. But they're very good and looking after themselves. But they're never at home. But it was a, I grew up quickly and you know sort of got my values in the right place. Knew what it is.

19:00 If you want anything you've got to work for it, nobody gives you anything. And that's what you've got to do. It doesn't come to you on a platter, you gotta work for it. And I think that's words of wisdom that a lot of people think of.

What would you say to a young man today if he'd, or your grandson if he told you he wanted to join the air force and go to war like you did? What advice would you give him?

I think

19:30 the services are very good. My grandsons are all in the age now where with this air, the war over at Iran [actually meant Iraq]. And then I felt for the mothers, my daughters and whatnot. I felt for all the mothers and whatnot. But I think back to the early stages, you've gotta make your mind up the, what the end

20:00 result's going to be. Whether you're going to be sort of in fear of something and the only way to do this is be positive. I wasn't very happy with it. But then, I felt that something had to be done about it and there was only one way to do it and be positive. And I was, would be one of the most happiest blokes around when I found that it didn't last very long. I thought there was treachery afoot

20:30 from the word they started to move and I think it was the outcome, although we've won this bit. The second part is, the peace part, which is going to be a very hard thing over there. And I think it makes people aware that terrorism doesn't work. It was a country under the thumb all the time over there.

21:00 **I guess we're pretty much at the end but I was wondering is there anything else, is there anything you'd like to say that we haven't covered?**

I think I've said enough. I think I've said enough, it's lovely to enjoy your company and whatnot. But

then as previous as I've said I've never done so much talking in my life and it's only sort of what's sort of happened round about me. And then all my friends,

21:30 it's the same things, what was happening around me was happening with the squadron that I was in and the blokes that were flying around me. And vice versa, the same things, we were protecting one another all the way through to make it a, to live to the life we've got. But it's a, but it was teamwork all the time. And you, one couldn't have been doing what we were doing without the others. It's

22:00 like when I had that finger trouble, then they pulled, we had to pull the other aircraft out because the strength was in the number of aircraft then. And the point is, it was, the relief was we had three quarters of it done. And then the other people relieving us because there was a rotation thing sort of going where they had a maximum amount

22:30 of cover over the [(UNCLEAR)] when it was on. But you didn't do, you didn't do things on your own. You always had company because if you went down there's some bloke to know where you went down and if anything recover. Recover you. Yeah, so, but the only thing I can talk about now is the weather and how shocking it is.

We'll leave it there.

INTERVIEW ENDS