

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Ira Withers (Dick) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1164>

### Tape 1

01:03 **Okay - if you could just start by giving us a bit of a summary or your life from the beginning until now.**

Born in 1923, May the 20th. Grew up in a town called Wentworthville, when very, very small town - not what it is now. Went to school,

01:30 went through public school, then went on to Parramatta High School, then went on to Sydney Grammar School.

**And after your school experience what happened?**

Well I went straight from school, enlisted in the air force and the Empire Air Training Scheme and that's it.

02:00 Grew up in remarkable Depression school days you know; no shoes, hungry all the time, father worked on the railway - he never had very much education but we got along alright.

**We'll go back to those years in a little while but take us through the years you were involved in the war and what happened after the war?**

Well I started off in the air force,

02:30 went to Bradfield, then to Temora. Had a small aircraft accident, re-mustered as a wireless telegraphist, went to Point Cook. Then to Adelaide, then to Darwin where I was a member 11 Sigs [Signals] Unit, at North Force Area Headquarters then I had a bit of a confrontation with an NCO [non-commissioned officer] and struck him. Well there was due reason; we were working 16 hours a day

03:00 in tropical heat, this fellow had just come up from south and the situation up north in war areas was vastly different to what is was down south and I lost my block and hit him and I'm not very proud of it now but I was called into the signal officer whose name was Squadron Leader Sheldon and

03:30 he said, "Very serious offence. It looks like you'll be facing a court martial but there happens to be an organisation that's looking for an experienced wireless operator if you accept that, volunteer for that we'll forget all about the charge. You won't go to the prison camp or the stockade in Gory so I said, 'I've got no opportunity but to accept.'" and that's when I went to SIA [Secret Intelligence Australia.

04:00 **Summarising from there - how long were you involved with that organisation?**

The SIA? From the 6th of June 1944 until, well we got out of Java on the 19th of October so I was discharged on the 26th of February so right through till about

04:30 the 10th of February '46 I was a member of that unit.

**And what happened after that?**

Got discharged, vocational guidance and they said, "You'll be a pharmacist." So I went into the Sydney University under the 'Commonwealth Re-constructing Australians' game and become a pharmacist. Still reckon they did wrong - should have been a builder.

05:00 **And how long was that pharmacy career for you?**

Right through till March the 30th 1985. I started off as an apprentice in Eastwood, did my apprenticeship there. Did a couple of other jobs and my ex-master asked me back and I worked there and I became a partner and worked right there. In '77 he retired, sold

05:30 me his part of the business and I took over individually till March '85 when another pharmacist came along and wanted to buy the business. He came on a Thursday, I came home and said to my wife, "Had an offer to buy the business." she said, "Take it. I never see you. Always working." Rang him up on

Monday and said, 'Sold'. Just like that. Retired about 18 and a half years ago gone like a flash.

06:00 Don't know what I've done with it.

**Thanks for that Dick. We'll rewind now and start at the beginning and get as much detail as we can about your pre-war life. Paint a picture of Wentworthville for us - what was it like then?**

Well it was semi-rural.

06:30 It was only a small town then. It was about a few miles from Parramatta. The Wentworthville you see today is no relation of the Wentworthville in those days. It'd be in the streets one or two houses you know, that many houses together was a populated area. Fire station, some civil general stores, a hotel, a railway station, the police station was next door to us which was just an ordinary house with a cell built out of railway sleepers in the backyard. That was it.

07:00 Wentworthville public school was just an ordinary little country school. We played sport, at three o'clock o Friday afternoon you had sport - that's all the sports you had. Normal reading, writing, arithmetic. Strict teachers, believed in discipline which I feel is lacking in many of the teachers today.

07:30 Wasn't unusual to get six on the hand regularly once a week.

**Could you tell me a little about your mum and dad?**

In what manner?

**What did your dad do for a living and what was it like around the house as a family?**

08:00 **What sort of a character was your dad and your mum?**

Well I had great admiration for my father. He grew up in the country down in the Chiltern Valley near Rutherglen, so did my mother come from Rutherglen. He had never very much education, a country school, had to work on the farm. Couple of bad seasons and the bank foreclosed and I said he'd never had much education. He's a veteran

08:30 of the First World War, artillery man, got wounded, ended up a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensioner]. I said we worked on the railway, he used to study as hard as he could to try and improve himself. Ended up as Assistant Station Master at Granville in those days. In the days when he was working he used to take all the rotten jobs like he'd go to a place called Mulgrave, which is

09:00 a different place now but had only a sidey, take the shift there. But ended up had to stay the night and they gave you two and sixpence for a bed, well there's no beds available so we used to - in school holidays I used to go out with Dad and I used to collect the coal off the side of the road to clean the kerosene lamps and I was the junior porter on all those signals. We used to sleep in the waiting room and for that two and sixpence

09:30 we managed to save up and buy a motorcar so we was able in 1929 we bought an old motorcar so we were able to go there and we'd come back in the morning and do our gardening and look after the vegetable patch and that was in school holidays like that so we struggled on there.

**Was that a regular way you'd spend a holiday?**

That was most of my holidays though sometimes when we got the car and he had a holiday we might go fishing down to Rutherglen valley or something like that.

10:00 Have a car trip there - that was the event of the year.

**So for those holidays it'd basically be you and your dad at the station and mum at home?**

Yes Mum would stay at home. Yeah. I said he used to take the shift work all the rotten jobs but they just paid a little bit extra and we needed the money in the Depression. Because one's that been in the Depression never. Forget it. The number of men that used to come to the house would do anything for a feed so I'm proud to

10:30 say that my mother always happened to find something to give them a feed and sent them on their way but that was the days of the Depression.

**What sort of a character was your mum?**

Strong. She'd grown up on a farm. Came from a reasonable family. My grandfather he had a vineyard down in Rutherglen, in fact if you look over there you'll see a couple of prizes he won for his winemaking.

11:00 And he also was foreclosed by the banks. Had a couple of bad seasons and couldn't handle it. There was a JP [Justice of the Peace] and a magistrate, they just closed on him. So I don't like banks very much. I could have been a rich man down on the prime of the Chiltern Valley and Rutherglen except for them.

11:30 **And you mentioned the struggle of the Depression years there - can you tell us a bit more about what those times were like for you?**

Well nobody had any money. Everybody helped one another. We'd all grow our own vegetables and had our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and fowls and things like that. We'd have a good crop of potatoes and we'd distribute them round. Next neighbour had a good crop of beetroot we all got beetroot.

12:00 You had pumpkins, we had pumpkins. We shared, we looked much more caring to one another. Somebody got eel they'd feed one another. If you weren't able, if you had something wrong with you, you just got feed. You got looked after. You looked after one another, there was no fortress mentality like there is now. In summertime you slept with your front door wide open, your back door wide open. No air-conditioning or

12:30 fans or anything like that. Leave your goods there, go away on holidays, everybody would look after it. There was much more caring atmosphere amongst the people than there is these days.

**So there was a real strong sense of community spirit?**

A real tribal spirit I'd say. Community spirit was there. Everybody helped one another.

13:00 **Did you have a lot of mates back in those days?**

Yes we had a lot of mates. Everybody was your mate. You'd have fought them but when I say, say every Friday afternoon after school or after sport there'd be a fight. It was a wrestle. It was part of the thing. You know you'd have a wrestle or a fight and we used to go away camping. A few of us used to go away camping too on the weekends. We didn't have a tent we just had a

13:30 piece of old rag or something that would act as a tent and our billy cans were made out of jam tins and we'd go off and have a camp. Later, as I got older, some of us used to go down to Jerusalem Bay off Cowan, we'd get the train to Cowan and we'd go down to Jerusalem Bay on a Friday afternoon and we'd just take some sunshine milk which is powdered milk, a bit of tea, some rice,

14:00 not much else and we'd live off blue swimmer crabs or off the hare tail rod, we'd live off that, that would be our meal. And then come back on Sunday, get the train back to Wentworthville. We'd live off the land for the weekend. Camp, we learned to survive and I think that made us good stead in the years to come where people would be up in the jungle and bush and they had no idea how to look after them, no idea of hygiene, whereas it was just natural for us. We were like little

14:30 aboriginals.

**So that was very much a part of your lifestyle from early days?**

It was yes. There was a picture show in Wentworthville. Sixpence to get in - that was on Saturday afternoon maybe some time but it was not very often did you get to do it. And a penny for an ice-cream if you were really lucky, if you worked hard. A lot of us used to sell newspapers, deliver messages for the butchers. I used to collect bracken for the butchers every Saturday

15:00 morning it was my job for collecting bracken for the butcher to put in his window. The baker, had a lot to carry, the baker had a lot of horses where he used to do his delivery so you'd get a job in the stables doing a bit of cleaning up or running messages for him or doing something like that. Delivering the paper, I used to sell papers in front of the hotel on a Saturday night sometimes and that was good because six o'clock closing, the fellas would have

15:30 a few sherbets in the afternoon. See it's a penny. You might threepence and he'd forget his change or say, "Keep the change." you know he might have got a win on the starting price, the SP, so you never know and a threepence was a lot of money.

**So you'd muster money together that way and take pleasure in spending it at the picture show?**

16:00 We were very careful about spending it. That's why I psychologically have an adverse effect to machines these days. Once upon a time I put a penny in a chocolate machine and didn't get my chocolate out so I've never trusted one of those machines since. I need counselling on that.

**And you were an only child?**

Only child yes.

**Do you think that had any influence on your character?**

Probably did but you weren't an only child in the fact you had lots of friends. Next door neighbours children would live at our place, I'd live in

16:30 their place. He was the local policemen. He ruled that town without fear or favour. Whenever we got caught for anything like stealing food or anything like that his children, his boys and me, would all get a belting with the policeman's thick leather belt. I'd come home and I'd get another one but no, you had plenty of friends. That's what it was.

**Do you think you were a bit of a rascal in those days?**

17:00 That's not a good question. I think to think of myself as a perfect child. We did get up to mischief, no doubt about that. We got up to mischief, we did things that probably now would be classed as vandalism, not really vandalism as it is today, if a house got vacant the first one to break the front window with a stone was regarded as something like that. But when we used to steal fruit and do things like that we

17:30 never vandalised the trees. We never took more than we could reasonably consume. Apples and peaches or something, just a few down your shirt that was it but no other vandalism I can think of. There's no graffiti, stuff like that. Reasonable mischievous kids, got up to plenty of mischief.

**Who were your role models as a young boy?**

18:00 We didn't have role models in those days. Maybe later on Don Bradman [Australian cricketer] was or Dale O'Reilly or Fleetwood Smith or something like that in the football thing but I can't remember that.

**Would you say that your mum and dad had a big impact on the development of your personality?**

They probably did yeah. They had a, strange as it

18:30 may seem my mother was further to the right than Genghis Khan. She belonged to the Menzies UAP [United Australia Party] Liberal Party, my father was a union delegate for the railway but they never had any arguments and there was never any discussion. There was never any antagonism. My father said he never went to work without a hot meal and he never came home and there wasn't a hot meal ready.

**19:00 Back in those days it was common to grab a gun and shoot a rabbit?**

Everybody had a .22 sitting in the corner. Well I say everybody, no, it was not uncommon for the .22 single shot or something like that sitting in the corner there. Oh yes, plenty of time for rabbiting. I've still got some of my rabbit traps. I believe they're illegal these days but we used to go trapping rabbits and somebody had some ferrets but we didn't like ferrets because they used to

19:30 get down there, find the kittens in there and then we'd have to get them out again, dig them out or do something like that. But that's alright. Rabbits were reasonably substantial part of the diet.

**So you were handy with a gun from a young age?**

Yes. You learnt how other use firearms and you were taught, well you learnt the dangers of it and they are a potent thing. They're not a thing to play around with. Of course there were accidents and people played around with them but

20:00 you learnt to respect them and I think that, well I feel that children should have some sort of training like that in them now because they're a way of life. Like my own children, even when children weren't allowed near hotels of anything like that, when right Eastwood Glee Club started they served alcohol and these children only three and four and they served alcohol with the meals then which is unusual. So I joined the right Eastwood Glee Club so I could take them down there

20:30 and they'd learn to use alcohol as it should be used, as something to enjoy but not use excessively.

**Could you tell us about high school and what your impressions were of the high school?**

Well, I didn't get on very well at Parramatta High School. I suppose I can blame the teachers or something like that but my father decided that he'd send me to Sydney

21:00 Grammar School. So that would happen. I was never a grade A academic. I just used to scrape through all the time.

**Did you know what you wanted to do with your life then?**

No. didn't know what I wanted to do in those days. But see the war clouds were coming. All the young fellows eager to get in. The Abyssinian War had been on. Do you recall that one? The Italians and the

21:30 Abyssinians? That had been on and everybody was eager or concerned about that. But when the '39-'45 war started in fact we were camping up at Glenbrook. A few of us were doing some rock climbing. We used to go and do rock climbing there camping up there over the weekend and we didn't have any ropes or any like that we just used to climb up the rocks. We had a pair of sand shoes but that was it.

22:00 If I saw people doing what we were doing now you'd get rather worried about it but we didn't worry about it because we were young and stupid and that was sport.

**You alluded to feeling the clouds of war coming - when would you pinpoint when you really started to sense that? Round about what year would you say?**

22:30 This would be in '39. Early '39. You could see it coming. That was it you just - it's hard to recall back that far but you know we'd all seen that something was going to happen. A lot of us were just eager for it to come. Couldn't wait to get there quicker. We're going to fix those Germans. Dad did it, he'd been

there in the Somme and Belgium.

23:00 He got wounded in Zonnebeke Ridge in Belgium. But it was coming; it was going to be a big adventure which it was.

**So were you one of those eager blokes?**

I think I was.

**What do you think your dad felt about you enlisting?**

He didn't want me to enlist in the army or anything that do the... he'd been through the trenches.

23:30 He reluctantly with my mother said, "Well, join the air force. You can go in as" - and I had sufficient education to go in as 'aircrew'. So I went in as an aircrew trainee. But because it was pilot only and I had sort of an accident at Temora that scrubbed me from any other aircrew.

**Do you think your dad would have preferred if you didn't go to war at all?**

24:00 I had a big sense of duty. He probably would have. So would my mother. All mothers and fathers don't want their children to go to war if you've been through it.

**So in 1939 you would have been sixteen?**

Oh dear - I'll have to work that out. I'll have to get pens and paper now. No, I was going to school then, and come time for enlistment I went

24:30 along an enlist and then didn't get in immediately. And just had to wait for a call up which came on the 20th of June 1942. Went into Bradfield Park.

**So there was a bit of a delay there?**

Yeah. In the meantime I remember I went and got a job, left school, went and got a job. I was working at Grace Brothers in Parramatta actually. Just as an ordinary salesman

25:00 there. And then when the - oh and I also worked at Fords for a while. No that was later on. I beg your pardon, that was later on. That was after I worked at Fords. I've got to get my chronological facts correct because I am apt to err a bit. Worked at Grace Brothers for a while the enlistment came and then I went to Bradfield Park.

**The atmosphere at the time. There was obviously a lot of eagerness to be involved in the war -**

25:30 **did you also detect a sense of dread or fear?**

There was. The Japanese had come down. The Japanese had come down through Malaya. They were coming down close to Australia. They were in New Guinea. Things were tough. You could buy a house anywhere.

26:00 It wasn't till '42 that the Japanese submarine came in there, came into Sydney, I think it was in May that Sydney was shelled. I know that something else happened because in I think it was late June I ended up in a coast hospital with the German measles after the smallpox vaccine and there was, I know one night we had to get out of our beds because something had happened and I was that sick

26:30 I just laid in bed. I was sick with the German measles and the smallpox vaccine you see. So that was in June I think of '42. People were frightened. There was a sense of fear. I've got to say that. There just was. Because the Japanese had been painted, first of all as little people with glasses and big teeth that couldn't see anything, that couldn't shoot, couldn't do anything, and then all of a sudden

27:00 they take over the whole of Malaya and the Dutch East Indies and the British East Indies and Borneo and they were coming down here to great pace. They made a very rapid advance and people were very, very worried and frightened.

**So there was a sense that suddenly it was a different war?**

There was yeah. A different war to the war that was happening in Europe. Because that was

27:30 by '42 that was forgotten about - we had our own problems.

**The first day that you started your career in the air force - what do you think your outlook was at that stage?**

I was going to be the best dashed pilot you ever saw in your life

28:00 and I was going to fly those planes and I was going to give the enemy buggery. Soon changed.

**Could you take us through the detail of how things unfolded with joining up with the air force? What sort of training you initially went into?**

Well initial training was a lot of educational work. I remember airframes,

- 28:30 oh previous to going in, on the previous 20th of June going into the air force all aircrew trainees had to learn wireless telegraphy so you had to go at night to somewhere - I can't remember where it is now and learn Morse code. You learn the basic Morse code so we did that but that was when I was on what they call I think the air force reserve where you went and learnt your Morse code and did some other basic things that were
- 29:00 extended when you went into the air force. But in Bradfield Park it was two sessions of PT [physical training], physical torture per day, which was as hard as any physical torture could be. It had ex-professional people like wrestlers and such things that gave you the works. You learnt unarmed combat, you did a lot of air frames,
- 29:30 engines, what else was there? Mathematics, navigation, all those subjects went there and I tell you the day started as six o'clock and ended up at ten o'clock at night. You did long, long hours in there learning all the time. That was essentially the initial training school at Bradfield Park.
- 30:00 **Was that exclusively air force?**
- Yes Bradfield was totally aircraft.
- Were you stationed down there or was that somewhere you travelled to each day?**
- No I was stationed there. Once you went in that was it. Forget about home. How long was that? I think it was about two or three months you spent there then you were posted
- 30:30 to another one. After you did your training and passed there I did a short period at Bankstown as they called aircrew guards at Bankstown. That's where I had my first flying experience in a Wirraway. There was a few remnants of Wirraways left they hadn't, they lost most of them up in New Guinea but there's one down there. Had what's called air experience there and we acted as guards. I wouldn't say we were very good guards but they filled us in some time before our posting to Temora
- 31:00 which was Number 10 Elementary Flying School. Tiger Moths.
- At Bankstown can you take us through the experience of flying for the first time?**
- I was eager to get into it. That's it and I was almost air sick because they did a lot of you know aerobatics that the Wirraway can do but
- 31:30 that's it was air experience. You found out what it was like to get up in an aeroplane because aeroplanes were, people didn't travel in aeroplanes in those days. They were an unknown factor but it was quite thrilling and quite enjoyable. Exciting.
- Could you give us a description of what the Wirraway was like?**
- Well it's a two-seater monoplane, metal,
- 32:00 and I think it had fabric on the tailplane and that's about all. A radial engine as opposed to an in-line engine. No I can't give you more detail than that.
- Your first flight was it just you in there?**
- No the pilot and myself - that's all. It was only a two seater. They put a parachute on you, strapped you in, the ground crew did that and then you
- 32:30 just took off and kept your feet off the controls and hand steers. Sat like that while they did it. Still I can see - have to cast my mind back. Sit there right sided, engine revs up, takes off down the strip, goes up and all of a sudden you leave the air and watch the things get smaller and smaller and smaller. And then he took it up above the clouds and that's one thing above a cloud and that's one thing I think - above a cloud and you could see the halo. The aircraft in a halo
- 33:00 on top of the cloud. Funny little thing - not significant but sticks in my memory.
- Did you feel safe in one of those planes?**
- Didn't even, don't think that ever came into it.
- How many of those flights would you have done?**
- I only did one.
- Were you aware at Bankstown of any accidents that were had with blokes going up for the first time?**
- 33:30 Oh yes, accidents were reasonably common. They had some Airacobras from the United States Air Force there, there was United States Air Force personnel stationed there too. They were called Airacobras. I remember those. They had a few accidents there, you always had a few, just a fact of life.
- Do you remember much about the Airacobra?**

34:00 No. Guarded them, or should I say on a cold winter night walked round there but it was either July or August, pretty cold out at Bankstown on those nights walking around there. Wouldn't say I was the best guard in the world - more interested in keeping warm than I was in looking after the aircraft. You know you did four hours off and four hours on, four hours off and four hours on.

34:30 **Could you take us through a typical day at Bankstown? Give us an idea of how big a group you were with there and what a typical would be like.**

Well a typical day was divided into four-hour sessions. It was about twenty of us I think from memory. Yeah about twenty I think and we just, we were instructed, well we hadn't had much firearms training

35:00 at Bradfield so we were given some .303 rifle and the bayonet, told how to use it and I don't think we ever had any range practice with it. We were given a magazine with five rounds of .303 ammunition in it, you were a guard. That was it. Sometimes you did the main gate where you had to learn to present arms and when an officer or somebody of high ranking I wouldn't say our drill was the

35:30 best you've ever seen in the world but we sort of got by and that was it. It was a slope arms. You know this sort of thing - now what do I do? You lift it there, you lift it there and then you put it over there and you do that. I think that's what you do anyway that'll do. He'd give us a salute and go on and they did.

**How long were you at Bankstown?**

Only about ten days, a fortnight while we were waiting. They had to find something

36:00 for you to do. They just can't leave you lying down so they, all the air crew I think did their air crew guard position for a while, while they waited for their posting. So I said that was the posting to Temora.

**Can you explain what happened in Temora? Just how things unfolded after leaving Bankstown.**

Well not only did you do more educational work in a plane like gunnery -

36:30 I learnt the insides out of the Browning .303 aircraft machine gun size 11, 1180 rounds per minute. Learnt how to clean stoppages and things like that, learned about air frames, more navigation, more wireless telegraphy - everybody else had a little bit or wireless telegraphy. Then you did

37:00 your flying, you went out with the satellites were your main thing. There were a lot of little what they call satellites they were literally in somebody's paddock. They put up an air sock, a truck that had a red cross on the side of it that probably had half a dozen bandages and something like that in it. As long as the strip was and they could take off that was a satellite. They spread the aircraft round. And you did

37:30 you training there back then and it was a fairly long day too. And as you progressed it came to night flying when you, well you had to take your turn at night flying. I never got to night flying. I had my accident before that.

**What elements of the training did you enjoy the most?**

I can't answer that question. It was a case of your duty - you had to do it -

38:00 enjoyment didn't come into it. You were going to learn to do a job so I said enjoyment didn't come into it whether you liked it or not you were stuck with it and you had to do it.

**Do you think you had a natural inclination to any area?**

No. Just wanted to do it and get away from, get on and do it. Eager to get on.

38:30 **And how many flights do you think you did before you had your accident?**

I soloed so I'd have at least ten hours. It wasn't long after that.

**And you were enjoying the flying at that time?**

I think so. It was quite alright. Take-offs I was a bit,

39:00 I needed more practice with those because taking off the aircraft tends to swing a bit to the left and they say pick a tree at the end of the field and I'd pick a tree and I'd go for it and then I'd pick that tree, then I'd pick that tree, and I'd picked that tree so some of my takeoffs I know instead of being straight up were a bit like that. I remember those and, "You must pick that tree and you must use your

39:30 rudder bar to keep it straight." "No, no I picked that one."

**Were you getting to a point where you felt like you were enjoying the flying and it was a natural thing for you?**

I don't know about natural thing but yes I was enjoying it. We could fly through a rainstorm so you'd only have a helmet and goggles. Fly through a rainstorm like a 1000

40:00 little things pitting, I didn't enjoy that very much so had to make a bit of a scarf to break the rain when it hit but you know you're going, you take off at 66 miles an hour and you get up to about 80. And hit rain drops at 80 you know it hurts a bit.

40:30 End of tape

## Tape 2

00:44 To a degree I don't mean to the extreme.

**We'll go back to your childhood and you mentioned the unremarkable Depression days but in fact they were quite remarkable**

01:00 **compared to the way we live now. Can you talk about your day as a child. How would you get up, what would you do? Give us some detail so we can really live it again.**

Lived about half a mile from the school.

01:30 Only wore shoes in winter because you couldn't afford shoes. So you'd get up have your breakfast, probably rolled oats or something like that. None of these prepared cereals like that. They weren't there or you couldn't afford them. Oh, puffed wheat was a thing you could get those days. I remember that, brought that back but mainly rolled oats, you know, porridge. A couple of slices of bread,

02:00 butter maybe, or dripping and sandwiches might be, know what was sandwiches? A couple of sandwiches and lucky if you piece of fruit. Walk to school, go to school, I had a play lunch time. Sometimes you swapped your sandwiches for something with other children and they might have a marmite sandwich - Vegemite had just come out I think something like that - they'd have Marmite or something like that

02:30 or anything you'd swap a sandwich and have that at morning playtime. Do your lessons; reading, writing, arithmetic was about the main things there were. There weren't many more subjects that I can remember. Come home, then you had, you've have your duties in the morning like you had to feed the fowls. You filled in your time doing those, cleaned your room - your room had to be all nice and tidy.

03:00 Dress, go to school. Lunch, come home. Then you'd be more chores around the place. If you were lucky enough you might be able to go out for a game of cricket or football and then you might have to go and sell your papers or do some messages for the local butcher or go to the baker or the stables and do a bit of cleaning out of stables or things like that but that was good because you might get a cake as well as your sixpence.

03:30 And that'd be it. We did manage to buy a radio. A Gulbransen brand radio and that was, listened to that but I can't remember anything. I remember what was it? Bluebottle was in it. Can't remember anything else I know but that was the thing. Tarzan of the Apes was one of the things on the thing.

04:00 And then you were that tired anyway you were sent to bed at a certain time because you were young and that was it. I know, when I think back the hygiene habits weren't as high personally as they were in those days because to have a bath you had to heat the water up in the copper, bring it in, put it in the bath so baths was confined to once or twice a week but in the morning you had to wash your face and hair and

04:30 clean your teeth and do things like that. Fortunately we weren't on water tanks in there. Wentworthville had pipe water so that was thing, but to prepare a bath - the bathrooms were nothing like they are nowadays - just a bath and a sink. Showers were not as common.

05:00 **You spoke about getting a wireless for the first time in your home - how did that change your life? You must have suddenly got more information about...**

Oh yes. We used to listen to the cricket and the test cricket coming from I think it was Adam and Gilmore used to get the cables from England and they used to

05:30 put it over with... hit a pencil on or something like that for a ball getting hit and a rather vivid description. It was a big change in life to have a radio. There weren't too many round the town and often in the evening before tea or something you'd have half a dozen children from the neighbourhood all sitting there wide-eyed looking at the noises, music and things coming out of this big square box that

06:00 we had. Oh the excitement.

**What would you be listening to?**

Well the news, 2FC news would be on or 2BL news. Then I said I remember Tarzan and the Apes. Yes What? was the name of the program. Bluebottle was in it but I can't remember the rest of his names but it was a larrikin

06:30 children - always getting into trouble at school and doing things but... I can't remember much more else. Weather reports, always important were weather reports. That came over 2FC and you heard, well as I say you were much more educated - in the papers you got the latest news. You'd hear something

had happened in England or America or something like that and there it happened yesterday over here and about the day and still three weeks time. The worlds going mad.

07:00 It's going at a great rate and it only took seven days to fly from England. Or ten days or something like that. Yes, the radio did make a big impression on everybody that had anything to do with it.

**You ended up working with radio - do you think that having a wireless...?**

That was more by that was by design rather than by

07:30 desire. When I was re-mustered to wireless telegraphers that was it. You're going to be a wireless telegrapher whether you like it or not that's it. You can take that or... Oh we were offered a discharge. When you were scrubbed, which is the word for failed, you could take a discharge and go into the army or you could get re-mustered and they wanted wireless telegraphers

08:00 or wireless operators you became that. You had to have certain education qualifications. You wouldn't end up as a general hand. Now I don't know if you know the order of the air force but you have I think it's five groups depends on your educational ability and what the group one, lets say doctors, lawyers people like that, right down to group five which are labourers, general hands

08:30 that's sort of thing there and wireless telegraphers are group two. Your remuneration or pay went in accordance to your group too so you could be an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] in group two which was ten [shillings] and sixpence a day, and the labourers would probably be six shillings a day. So it depends on your qualifications for a pay rise rather than your rank rise.

09:00 **You must have had a pretty good education then?**

Well I went through the leaving certificate which would be what I don't know what year it would be now but it would be the equivalent of the HSC [Higher School Certificate] now. I should imagine, leaving certificate was the final one. There's one more examination called a matriculation which required higher qualifications to enter into university but because I had the leaving certificate

09:30 and my age they commonwealth reconstruction training scheme granted me what they call a war service matriculation that allowed me go to Uni which wasn't as high a standard as the normal matriculation because I just scraped through the leaving certificate. See everybody was eager to get going - they haven't got time for study they want to get out and do something.

**Was that because you had a childhood that was a lot of time spent outdoors?**

10:00 **We did spend a lot of time outdoors. I was also a boy scout which I think or I'm sure helped me a lot. I knew how to look after myself in the bush. Surprising the number of people can't tell north or south, don't know the little tricks and things you learn to keep comfortable at night,**

10:30 **how to make the best utilisation of food, how to find palatable water. There's a lot of little things that you just can't learn from books that you do learn from practical experience with camping and things when you did that. It helped survival.**

**Would you say it was more boy scouts training than what you're father passed on to you about surviving that kept you in good stead for the war?**

11:00 **No it's hard to put a border in that because they both taught me. Both taught me different I suppose they call them skills these days. You learnt.**

**What were some of the things that your father passed on to you as in moral values - what did he try and instil in you when you were growing up?**

I'll tell you one saying he had: "Love God, trust

11:30 few, always paddle your own canoe." Which I have. I wouldn't say the first bits right but the rest of it is...

**You were talking about some of the moral values that your father instilled in you and he had a special saying for you.**

12:00 **How much did you live by that?**

Well you were made to. Discipline was strict, discipline was much stricter. You just had to abide by what your father and mother said and like the referee on a football field - his word's law.

12:30 You don't argue with it, you do it. Not like I say in rugby union they still do it, in rugby league they argue with the referee and some of the tennis players argue with the referee or the umpire. But it just didn't argue back, you did what you were told or try and sneaked away and did something else but in general you obeyed what your parents said and I think that goes for all the children in

13:00 the district that I can remember. There was a few larrikins but... No, discipline was much stricter.

**One of the things your father said was trust no-one...**

No, trust few.

**Trust few. Ok. But you were saying that in the Depression years when you grew up there was a good sense of community and trust among people so how did that sit with you - it seems conflicting.**

13:30 It does seem conflicting when you put it that way but I didn't have any problem with it. Now, that'll take a bit of thinking to explain won't it. Probably trust few applied to people that you didn't know. Don't fall for the first story that comes to you.

14:00 If you know the people, well, you can trust them but if you don't know them don't trust them. I never thought it that way, I just accepted the little motto or saying or whatever it is; "Love God, trust few and always paddle your own canoe." Be independent which we have been, look after yourself too but don't take everybody's word that you don't know for gospel.

14:30 You're really digging deep aren't you?

**Can you think of any specific examples where you actually applied these rules? Can you tell us a story about...**

No. This is seventy or eighty years ago. My memory's not that good. No, I can't give you any.

15:00 examples. Tonight at two o'clock in the morning I might be able to think of it.

**What about your father was in World War I - did he ever talk about his experiences to you or pass on what he'd learned?**

Not very much, not very much. He used to go to his reunions and talk about

15:30 friends, quite excited about it, meet his old mates like I do. But never went into detail of the experiences he'd been through. He was partially deaf. I said he got wounded, reasonably severely to end up as TPI, but never discussed as much. I know as a child sometimes he'd have a piece of shrapnel in the back of his shoulder and I sat there with a needle trying to

16:00 fish it out because they used to cut little black pieces - I've got a scar of one myself there - pick these little bits of shrapnel out and we used to keep them in a bottle.

**So he used to still have shrapnel in his body years after he'd come back from the war?**

Yeah. Mine's only a burn, they picked that bit out there. I've still got a few scars, I've got one still there and a couple there of when I got affected.

16:30 **Was your father in much pain?**

It used to, it did, yeah. Yeah. He was a very calm man. Very, he suffered a lot and he could stand pain. I could tell you once upon a time he broke his thumb, which happened to be on a weekend. It was ten and six to go to a doctor in those days so he didn't do it he got just a piece of stick, whittled it down,

17:00 point a bandage there. Set it himself.

**So this is obviously something he'd learnt in the trenches?**

I don't think so. No, he just said, "It's broken. Oh well I think you splint those. Yeah, that'll do. Fix that up there like that." Probably wore it for a few days and they said, "Oh no what's the point?" and threw it away. That's one little thing he did.

17:30 **You seem to really admire some of your father's qualities. You mentioned that he was always keen to do the hardest jobs - did he pass these traits onto you?**

18:00 I think he did too. To a degree. If you've got to do a job, go and do it. And he did mainly these jobs there - they weren't the hardest, they were the one - like shift work. To do shift work start at twelve o'clock at night or four o'clock in the afternoon. is not a desirable type of job to have, it was better to be a nine to fiver.

18:30 But the shift work pays more and you needed the money and that's why he took them - because we needed the money and help.

**How did your mother do any extra work - how did she spend her days?**

Looking after us. When I say extra work, women didn't go out to

19:00 work those days. Even if they did they'd be only single women that went until they were married and as soon as you were married you knocked off work and became a housewife. She used to keep the place spotless, feed us, washed us. See washing wasn't like it is nowadays. Monday was washing day for which the kindling wood had to be chopped up, cut up, the copper had to be lit,

19:30 the water boiled, in goes the clothes, rung by hand - sheets and all things, into the rinsing water, then

the blue, Reckett's blue. Then the shirts and collars and things like that were starched. You had to mix up Silver Star Starch in a... mix up and do that. And then when they were hung out the ironing had to be done - that was Tuesday. And not everybody had an electric iron with a steam on it.

20:00 Linen's had to be damped down, often the iron was - there's an old one out there at the doorstep - had to eat that up and then iron that. So ironing was a long job as was washing - it was a days job. And that took up two days. As for cleaning and things like that - no vacuum cleaners - brooms, maybe a carpet sweeper.

20:30 Carpet one thing or another carpet but they were modern things but they're not as good as the broom.

**What did you learn from your mum?**

She taught me to darn, sew - I'm still one of the few people that still darns socks - and general be useful. Learn the skills that people needed. Cook, I don't do much cooking these days if it's not in a tin or frozen - I

21:00 don't cook much but oh, I do cook sometimes but in wintertime but not much but she taught me how to cook and things like that and all those sort of things. Because foods were much more basic then. Tea, sugar, rice, flour, salt, eggs - you didn't go much past that unless there was some cinnamon or something like that. Chocolate cakes were an unknown. Except for the

21:30 baker, you know, the baker he might bake tarts or things like that but you used simple basic ingredients. There were no fancy things. Food was plain, good. The bread that they make these days is hard to find, like the minute you'd come home from school and have a slice of bread and a scrape - a scrape was like grease out of the baking dish or something like that. But it was good. Maybe our tastes have changed but the bread was just different. It was edible - you could eat a whole slice of bread and

22:00 enjoy it. And she used to bake her own bread too.

**You were an only child - was that a decision your parents made?**

No, medical.

**So did that mean that maybe your mum had more spare time because she had less children to do some things for herself?**

My mother never had any spare time. If she wasn't looking after us she was looking after somebody else.

22:30 She was a member of the Women's Guild, which was a Church of England Women's Association that used to go around doing good works and looking after people - things like that. I forget what they called it - community aid - but I tell you she used to help people and do things like that. She was always busy. Kept out of mischief.

**Did she ever tell you about her experiences helping other people?**

No. You did it. You didn't talk about it, you just did it.

23:00 **So when you were having dinner with your parents in the evenings what would you talk about?**

Oh dear. I couldn't remember what we used to talk about. Probably a discussion as I say and things. If there was cricket on or football, cricket mainly that was on, that was discussed. Father might say... because my father worked shift work too and he wasn't always available for dinner.

23:30 **You sometimes had other people around - you said your mum would cook for more than just the family?**

Oh yes the next-door neighbour's child might come in and say, "Jeez, are you having gravel pie tonight?" So right-o - they might be at home for their first course but if it was apple pie they'd be at our place for their gravel pie.

**So she was a good cook?**

24:00 Not bad.

**What about when war was drawing closer as an older child - did the discussions at dinner change? Were people talking about the war or the prospect of war?**

I can't answer that question I'm afraid. Because all your school work was discussed too. They'd be a discussion on school work and what we were doing and I can't remember clearly what the

24:30 details of the conversations would be in those days. I beg your pardon for it but I but I can't say that I did.

**What about your mother's experience of war - she lived through the First World War...**

My mother's a bit like me, a bit reticent. Didn't discuss it much at all.

**It must have had some effect on her?**

It did. But she kept it to herself.

25:00 **You said that your parents were different politically but they still managed to get on?**

Oh yes, I've mentioned that but there was no antagonism whatsoever, no. See a lot of time the wife voted as the husband says in those times, but it didn't happen in our family. She could say she was one of the first liberated women that way but no, just didn't come up.

25:30 I just mentioned that in passing. They got on extremely well. My father did everything for my mother and my mother did everything for my father.

**It sounds like you had a relatively happy childhood?**

I think it was. It was normal you made your own fun. There was no entertainment supplied, I said picture theatres were very rare you went to the pictures but only what you saved up of your own money. You weren't given sixpence by your parents.

26:00 If you wanted to go to the pictures you go and earn your money. And you could travel too. You could travel into Parramatta or something, you come home at ten o'clock at night. You'd be ten years old and nobody would... you didn't have to worry about anything. Walk home in the dark, walk all the way from Parramatta in the dark, didn't worry a bit. Much freer those days, most things. Nothing to worry about

26:30 footpads or pickerheads or anything like that. It was just normal. Friday night shopping was on in those days and you might go into Parramatta on a Friday there and come home on the train at ten o'clock at night and all your goods and chattels and purchases and things like that - nobody worried. Nowadays no woman in her right sense would send a child into Parramatta to go home at ten o'clock at night.

27:00 **Who do you think you're more like - your mum or dad?**

Well my mother was a Taurean too so if you're interested in astrology you might say I'm like her but I still had a great admiration for my father. He was a great father.

**As an older child leading up to the war**

27:30 **did you have a girlfriend or did you have... what were your relationships like with women then?**

Well, we were going to school. Girls were girls and boys were boys and you mixed a bit. You teased the girls, you'd allow them to come and play cricket with you - you only did if you were a bit short of a member of your team. You reluctantly allowed them to field at a long off or something like that. And you

28:00 belonged to social groups. Church was one of the social activities you did. Come Sunday school picnic you become an Anglican, or a Church of England, Presbyterian, a Methodist or a Baptist just before Sunday school picnic was ready so you could go to the Sunday school picnic and all the churches did the same. That's what I say, the protestant churches did, the Roman Catholics were a bit... Because they were ruled by Nuns in Wentworthville and

28:30 they were very strict but normally you know you mixed in, all the churches mixed in together and you'd see one chap at the Baptist church one day and one chap at the Anglican church the next week there because it depends what's going on. We were a little group.

**You mentioned you met your wife Joan at school?**

We went to school together yeah.

29:00 **Did you get on with her during that time?**

No

**Did you notice her then?**

No we didn't ignore each other but no there was no special relationships it was just before the war. After I enlisted that happened. She wrote to me and I wrote back and it went from there.

**Can you talk about that in a little bit more detail? Why did she write to you? Something must have happened?**

I don't know. The families on Sundays sometimes after church would come home and maybe if you

29:30 had your roast dinner that's good. You'd go and visit someone for afternoon tea. The usual thing was to walk somewhere, have a look at their garden, have afternoon tea and then walk home. I said Wentworthville wasn't a very populous area so we'd visit them a few times. See my father-in-law too, he was a great, he was an original ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] - Military Medal, that's it. Just why she wrote to me I have no idea but I wrote

30:00 back and it just continued from there.

**What did she write to you in the letter?**

I've got no idea.

**Do you remember what you wrote back?**

No. Haven't a clue. Wouldn't have the faintest idea what happened.

**Can you talk in a bit of detail about enlisting - what was going through your mind when you decided that you would enlist?**

To enlist to be a volunteer, if you didn't volunteer

30:30 you were called up for militia and that was a choice of the army and whatever happened. My father didn't want me to go into the army so I got it, that's why I enlisted in the air force because he said it'd be cleaner than living in the trenches of France and Belgium. It'd be a clean war.

**So the air force was more your father's choice than your choice?**

31:00 Well I was very interested in aeroplanes. Let's say a mutual choice. Well, on his advice yes and my own inspiration probably the air force was it because I was interested in aeroplanes and flying. It was I suppose you'd use the words glamorous and exciting in those days. Hero worship was, I suppose so yeah.

31:30 **When you say hero worship - what do you mean?**

Well they were the cream of the pick. It wasn't like being a footslogger down there. It was a gentlemen's activity rather than mud and slush and he'd been through that and he didn't want me doing that. He would have thought of that. I can only assume that though, I don't know.

32:00 **And when you actually started your training - did you feel that it was as glamorous as how it was portrayed?**

The glamour soon - let's say 24 hours! Well it was going to be, never got there, but it was going to be. It was going to be exciting.

**You mentioned you didn't have any role models...**

No I don't think we did.

32:30 **...did you have a famous flier or someone like that? If you liked aeroplanes then perhaps someone you wanted to be like or someone you were training with that you wanted to be like?**

Well, Kingsford Smith and old man Hinkler, they were people of respect. Amy Johnson, they were people that did something great and wouldn't it be wonderful I suppose to be like them. You're digging too far deep into my psyche.

33:00 **Did you think that perhaps being in the air force you'd get more girls?**

No. Can't think so. I never thought so.

**Could you take us through your accident in detail?**

33:30 I'll only relate it briefly because that's one of greatest things in my life. Coming in on the five hundred foot you do what they call a turn of... I was coming in on the gliding, doing a gliding turn at five hundred feet and just when I got not far there the engine backfired and the aircraft had a bit of a fire in it so I just dropped it into the ground very quickly and got out. And that's it.

34:00 **So was it a mechanical fault then?**

It backfired, yeah caught fire and Tiger Moths are only a petrol tank with cloth and enough metal in them to make a bicycle and they burnt pretty quickly but I survived.

**And what happened? Did you break your leg?**

No I injured my eye.

**You injured your eye? Oh.**

34:30 **As you were crashing do you remember what was going through your mind?**

No. Only I've got to get this thing down quickly and get out of this thing. That's all. No I can't give you anything like that. Just get out, survive.

**And the plane caught fire as you were...?**

Yeah, yeah.

**Did you lose many of your mates while training in accidents?**

Yes.

35:00 One of my mates - his name was Pinhead Paton - he and another fellow collided on one corner of a circuit. Two of them hit together and they went down. That was the first casualty that I was with. I remember him though, Pinhead Paton, he had a small head so they called him Pinhead. But he and another two aircraft crashed on the corner of a circuit and went down. Both

35:30 burnt that hit.

**Considering the amount of accident while training did you consider yourself lucky to survive or were you...?**

Nonchalant about it? Yeah. Times not up yet. I don't think I worried about it much. Might have at the time. But the greatest attitude - thank God it's not me.

36:00 **What did your mum say when she heard about the accident - did she want you to pull out?**

Can't remember. Can't remember except, see every day they posted a casualty list - sometimes up to half a page. As long as she didn't get that telegram. Generally the local minister of religion or the policeman or something would get a telegram and he'd turn up with consolations. Word soon spread, and that was it.

36:30 I lost quite a number of mates.

**You lost people in your neighbourhood?**

Yes. As an incident - some years ago there was a return to Wentworthville public school of sixth class. The only two males that turned up were Bob Pinkerton and myself. Never went to another one.

37:00 **When was that?**

I can't remember it was back in about the seventies, early seventies. But he's gone, he's gone, that's all that's left of us was the two of us. Never coming here again. It's too lonely.

**The telegram - I just got a picture of what that must have been like...**

Well it was the person's

37:30 parents or their next of kin. Telegram came across, that was it.

**When you saw the priest or whoever walking down the street - what happened to whoever was delivering the telegram at the time.**

Generally the Wentworthville postmaster delivered it and they had post boys that had you know push bikes - theirs was a horrible job, it was a heavy pushbike - but the postmaster

38:00 would generally, he made arrangements for the local minister or somebody else to come with him. Never had the experience, but I know. What I can think anecdotally was that they went along 'Here's a telegram'

**And did they come at a certain time of the day; was there a time when people were waiting for the postmaster to come?**

Not that I can remember. The telegrams might have come through any time, I don't remember.

38:30 I wasn't involved in that I was away but I can't remember much about that but I know that the dread was getting a telegram.

**When you were training the war was in Asia rather than in Europe...**

As far as we were concerned it was in Asia, yes.

**Did that shift**

39:00 **change the mood of society a bit?**

Oh definitely. Yeah. Previously when it was only in Europe it was something away over there, nothing to do with us much even though we were sending our troops, our air force was working, our navy was working over there. But when the Japanese come down that was really serious. They were at our doorstep. Australia was going to be invaded. Never happened before, what were we going to do? And they were sending fellows up

39:30 there with a months training. You saw the enlistment like... we used to say you'd be called up, lets say a group, eighteen years old would be called up - doctor put his hand on your hand and said, 'You're warm, you're in. You're cold, bury him'. Medical standards dropped. That's what we used to say anyway. 'You're warm, you're in. You're cold, bury him'.

40:00 **After your accident did you have to go into hospital?**

I spent a little time in hospital there but it wasn't much it was just a bit of a bash on the head. Nothing more than you'd get from a football game.

**And during that time you made the decision to become a wireless operator?**

No that was made for me. As I said, yeah I don't know where that come from. We had the choice of getting a discharge and going and you'd be called up immediately into the army, or getting re-mustered. Well, they must have needed wireless operators so they re-mustered

40:30 me as a wireless telegraphist. Any objections? Nah. Right go to Point Cook. How do you get there? Find your own way. Here's a travel warrant. You get on the train at Temora you go to Stockinbingal you wait there four o'clock in the morning, you pick up a train to Junee. I can remember that because sitting on the railway station in Junee in the middle of a cold winter night waiting for the train to come through. Go to Albury, change. Go down

41:00 to I think it was Pincer Street and find out where you go and go out to Point Cook and present yourself 'Here I am'. Oh right, good. That was it. Can't remember much detail of that but that's what you did. You found your own way. If you'd have liked you could have said, 'Well, I'll decided I'll won't go there'. You could have gone AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave].

**What would have happened to you then?**

Well, they'd get you in the end. They'd give you so many days of absence without leave the you were classed as a deserter I think and

41:30 a deserter is nobody's friend. It was a crime, being a deserter, it was a crime for you not to report them.

## Tape 3

01:19 **I want to pick the story up at Temora. Can you tell me how you recall feeling when you were told by your superiors that you could no longer pursue**

01:30 **your path towards being a pilot? What were your initial feelings when you were told that you could no longer pursue that path towards being a pilot?**

Well, probably a little bit disappointed, sense of failure, but acceptable. Didn't

02:00 reach the standards so go and do something else.

**Do you think you're being a bit tough on yourself in that really the situation was brought about by mechanical failure with the fire starting in your plane and you really just had to deal with landing the thing as best you could?**

Well, I can't recollect this moment without

02:30 prior thought what happened. It just happened and it happened and inevitable so make the most of it. I just can't give a complete answer of what thoughts went through my mind at the time.

**So when they then mentioned wireless operator what were your first impressions about what that was going to be like for you?**

Ok. Righto.

03:00 **So once that news was passed on can you just take us through the story of what happened next?**

Well, I spent a few days in hospital getting better, patched up and then you just went on. I said, packed up your gear you said, 'You got your posting - you're going to Point Cook'. Literally, 'Here's your travel warrants and your thing, find your own way there'.

03:30 I said, "So where's Point Cook?" "Oh, it's down that way somewhere." "Good." "You get the train to Stockinbingal anyway and you change there." Those details you know I've forgotten. Eventually as I said I landed at Point Cook. It was the most godforsaken place you've ever been to in your life. It was cold and wet and windy and cold and wet and windy and cold and wet and windy. And that was it.

04:00 **Did that environment dampen your spirits?**

Don't think so. Just something new, let's have a go at it.

**Can you tell us what you did there? What was the training all about?**

Well, I'd had some experience in wireless telegraphy but you still

04:30 had to start off at basic and go and taught the Morse Code and taught how to use a key. And during the

course they needed a couple of, some people to do what they called air radio. Now, the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] worked on what they call x signals. The word x or the letter x

05:00 plus a figure after them made a sentence. You said this figure instead of a sentence. Now, that was used by the RAAF. See there were no civilian aircraft working at the time but they still had civilian what they called aircraft controllers and they worked what they called air radio. Something slightly different. So I did a couple of weeks course on air radio too.

05:30 Because I had the experience in wireless... you know, knew the Morse code and was doing five to ten words a minute I was taken off this, given my air radio course and then came back to it. Now later on during the course that x signals were replaced by q signals which was more universal - the Americans used q signals, I think the English used q signals. Now like

06:00 can I say 'q-q-r' means 'air raid red'. You just sent 'q-q-r' - 'air raid red'. 'Q-p-k' means 'that is doubtful'. You used them instead of sending you know 'I don't believe you' or 'there's doubt' you'd send 'q-p-k'. And I just happened to be at the time present to go through both lots and be conversant with both the three systems.

06:30 **So the q system was a more universal system and the x system was exclusive to the RAAF?**

I couldn't tell you. I can't say yea or nay. Probably was exclusive to air force personnel in the British Empire but with the advent of the Americans coming in and such like things it was just replaced by the q signals - that was it. And that was it.

07:00 You had your log book with all your thing and you got to know some of them reasonably well that you didn't even need to have to look up there. Some of the common ones like - oh, I've forgotten. I know 'q-p-k' means 'that is doubtful' and 'q-q-r' is 'air raid red' and I think it was q-q-y is 'air raid yellow' and 'q-q-g' was 'air raid green'. You know, they're coming, they're here, they're gone.

07:30 **Can you just take us through which colour means what?**

Well, yellow: they're coming, red: they're here and green: they've gone - all clear. So with the radio operator they stayed till the last moment and as soon as that 'q-q-r' come through - straight to the trenches as fast as your legs would carry you because they were not far off. They were close. Because you had to be at your radio all the time and

08:00 believe me off the starting block with that 'q-q-r' come on it was just a yell, grab your tin hat and go for the trench.

**Could you tell me - you mentioned your Morse code speed - was that considered a good speed at the time?**

The good speed's around about twenty-five words per minute. That was what you were expected - between twenty and twenty-five words per minute. Now

08:30 it good atmospheric a good radio operator on the other end, experienced one on this end - you could get through twenty-five words a minute ok. See, you don't actually listen, it's second habit, you just write down. See I always reckon radio operators have got nothing between the ears because all the signals go in one ear and come out here. You get to do it, you've heard stories of people like radio operators being at a social function and they're on standby and over the radio signal they hear

09:00 something comes and they're off and another one comes and they don't take any notice. It gets to be second nature. You're talking eight hours a day with it and it becomes second nature to you. Subconsciously you do it.

**You mentioned along with the Morse code you referred to a key?**

They key? That's your radio key that you use.

09:30 **That you do your Morse code with?**

Yeah. We had very little to do with voice reproduction. Air radio did too but it had to be close - the range wasn't there. The only other time when we were given a couple of walkie-talkies for a operation and the batteries were flat we found so we just threw them in the sea. They were useless.

10:00 **Tell me how long you were at Point Cook?**

Oh dear. I think it was about a four month course. June, July, August... I can't really remember. About four or five months course it would be.

10:30 And then I went to embarkation depot in South Australia and then flew up to Gowrie there. I can't give you accurately what it was, I'd have to sit down and think about that and try and get dates and times and weather climates - you know, whether it was hot or cold. All I know was when I got to the tropics it was damn hot, naturally, but I can't give you.... About four or five months

11:00 I think the course was there.

**When you did leave there did you feel you had had adequate training and did you feel prepared for what you were about to do?**

It was irrelevant. You just went. You were going north on your tropical tour, you're only going to be there twelve months, eighteen months later you're still there. They told you lies.

11:30 You'd only be going for twelve months and then you'll come home on leave and it never eventuated but things were too grim.

**So what were your feelings when you were just heading off north - what was on your mind at that stage?**

We're going. That's all I can tell you. We're going north.

**You were heading into the Darwin area at a time that**

12:00 **the bombing had already commenced up there?**

It had commenced. I only suffered a couple of air raids up there. I can only recall now being in two that we had to really run and where the bombs came down. I can't recall anymore. Though later on we did get a, Melville Island when I was there,

12:30 that was later on, that was in late '44 - yeah it'd have to be late '44 - we did get a couple of people come, enemy come over and fire a few shots at us but that was when I was in the other unit.

**So with the knowledge that you were heading to the very part of Australia that the Japs were attacking how did that make you feel?**

13:00 You're going. I can't recall. I don't think I had any gripes. These things were just accepted. It's funny to sit down now and analyse one's thoughts now, what I was going to think then. In sixty years time will somebody come and... why not, here's what I thought.

**Can you take us through what happened when you did arrive up north and where they took you and what happened after that?**

You landed at Gowrie.

13:30 Very, very hot place. Deserted, desert, flat as a tack, tin sheds, hot. Very hot. Waited there for a while and then you got motor transport up and I got motor transport up to 11 Signals Unit which was north west area headquarters, sixty miles out south of Darwin. You presented

14:00 yourself at the orderly office you got sent over to your tent and get ready and various NCOs come along and said, "Well you'll be on this watch." and that's it. So you went and did your job. And they had their - it was fairly big that - they had their teleprinters, land lines and air communication there. You didn't have much choice where you went, you just went in and there was a blank seat there that's where you sat and you might

14:30 find anybody at the end of it. Got their land lines, you didn't do teleprinters because they were typists and we didn't type. And then we'd do the, where the, you worked say Brisbane, Melbourne, where else? Perth, other places over the air.

15:00 **Gowrie is where you touched down is it?**

Where we landed.

**And the area where you ended up setting up was at Coomalie?**

Near Coomalie yes. Near Coomalie. 60 miles south of, the 60 mile peg - distance was measured in pegs there - and you were 60 miles or so. Past, north of Adelaide River because

15:30 once upon a time I decided to take a - I had a cousin down there at Adelaide River in the army - and I decided to go down and see him one day so I took a little bit of time off.

**And was there just the one unit stationed there?**

As far as I can remember yeah. 11 signals unit it was.

16:00 **Could you tell us a bit more about the unit? How many people it comprised of, what the living quarters were like - that sort of thing?**

The living quarters were in tents which you made yourself very comfortable. Made myself a nice little bed out of poles, rods, cut down and managed to scrounge some sacks, you know Hessian bags and made a nice little bed that goes in and I know I had a stand on the bottom, I had a stand on the bottom, not only as a brace but to put my equipment and things like that on there.

16:30 Tent, that's about all the living quarters were. There were four to a tent. How many was in the...? Well, the wireless room would have held... let me think. Lets say about 15. They'd be about fifteen to twenty land lines. There were four

17:00 teleprinters and there were a dozen other radios there that worked the air. So what would that be? Thirty? About thirty on a watch so you could say there were three watches so that would be what? Say a hundred personnel would be radio or teleprinter operators there. And then next door would be the cipher staff. You never mixed, all you saw was a little shutter, which you handed the signals to or they came through that. You

17:30 never mixed with cipher staff because they had all the coding machines and things and wireless operators were not allowed to mix with cipher staff. Security arrangement you'd call it these days.

**How many cipher staff do you think there was?**

No idea. As I said they were all behind a sealed room. They were all in that room with a little shutter and you wouldn't know if there was ten, twenty

18:00 or fifty. Probably about twenty I'd say. They had to cipher and in-cipher. Fair bit of material coming through - you work eight hours there on a watch. And well, land lines went pretty continuously. Sometimes doing the airwaves there wasn't so many messages coming through. Sometimes on the airwaves you might sit there for an hour and nothing happened. All you're doing is listening, twirling your dial, listening to the tone to try to pick up

18:30 something. See because the frequencies vary and they move off frequency and you have to keep searching just in case someone's looking for you or something but it'd be... But other times if there was a flap or something like that they'd be busy and you might be quiet. But landlines went to the operational airfield and we should be sending out the orders for them and what they might have to do like where they might have to put a search area,

19:00 where they might have to have bombs on, or depth charges. Just depends on that situation what was going to happen. If they were having an air strike on a ship they might be taking some bombs and some depth charges. And they would come through in plain language. Only that which went over the air was encoded by the cipher staff but still all messages went through the cipher staff

19:30 and there was probably some little clerk there sitting - that in that one, that in that one and that in that one.

**What sort of areas at that stage were you sending that information to?**

As far as I can remember, that was north, that'd be Brisbane. Melbourne, Perth. Plus places like Morotai or Moresby. That's all I can remember. I'm not sure about Moresby.

20:00 Some of them went up there also, they were stationed at Morotai working.

**So you would be passing information on to those posts?**

Or receiving it.

**And were you sending information up into the Indies region and Java and New Guinea?**

No. New Guinea maybe, Moresby I think yeah.

20:30 I just got doubtful. No I think there was Moresby but no, it was all RAAF information. There was nothing coming out of Netherlands East Indies or any enemy occupied territory as far as I can recall.

**So it wasn't international information as such to was stuff that was being circulated within the country?**

Yeah.

21:00 That was at this time. Later on I'll tell you something else when I get round to it later on but at this moment it was all South West Pacific.

**So did you have different days where you were doing different tasks or was every day the same?**

You worked watches. Now one week you'd do so the day shift - I think it was eight o'clock till twelve.

21:30 Eight o'clock till twelve, say one o'clock till five. Don't hold me to these correctly. That'd be a day shift and then you'd do the evening shift which was twelve till one, five o'clock till twelve midnight. Then you'll do the dog watch; twelve o'clock midnight till eight o'clock in the morning. And you took that in rotation. Now there'd be times when you'd change over from one shift to the other and

22:00 you know you wouldn't have much rest or you might have a day's rest. Look I'd have to sit down with pencil and paper and work it out to give you accurately what it was but three shifts and you rotated so day, evening, dog watch and as I said I'd have to sit down and work that out on paper to give you the details of it but I know the evening shift did the lunchtime break for the wireless operators. You had to go and do the break and then

22:30 come back and do that and that was in the good times. In the other times we were working sixteen hours a go and things like that. When things were moving on, like when the Americans went into the

Philippines and things like that I think I was still there then. I know we were working sixteen hour shifts. If there was a flap on or something going on you just worked and worked and worked and I think there was a reduction in the number of radio operators - they were taken away too

23:00 to do other duties - some might be sent to the Philippines or somewhere else or up to New Guinea. You just had to fill in, there had to be somebody on the other end then so you just did it. You didn't have any choice - you couldn't go to the union and say 'I can only do eight hours' that was it. You just did it.

**As well as relaying Allied messages around the country were you also keeping a watch out for enemy**

23:30 **transmissions at that stage?**

No. But some units of FELO [Far East Liaison Office] people later on they learnt Katakana which was the Japanese system of radio operating and they used to do intercepts but I had nothing to do with intercepts.

**Can you take us through that first time that you were in a bombing raid? Can you give us a rough idea of when it was and**

24:00 **how the experience was?**

Towards the end of '42? I can't remember if it was '42 or '43. But all I know that the first time it came it was a 'q-q-y' and I had to ask, "What does this mean?" and they said, "Oh, they're coming. Where'd you see

24:30 that?" and I said, "Outside." Well you know I don't know if they were the actual words but get yourself ready to run because North West Area headquarters in the night time, well it was all blackout there, would be a prime target so get ready to run. And ok, you just kept on working and then when the 'q-q-r' come through well it's just a bit like a panic. You just, you said 'q-q-r', oh no what did you say? I don't know what you said

25:00 but looked at the other bloke and, "Look we're gone. We're going off for a moment." and you just grabbed everything and ran for the trenches and sat there and when they come over and you heard a bomb drop your trench was four feet deep and by the time the bombing raid was over it was six feet deep. You'd dug it with your fingernails and the tin hat you had on your head, you pulled it right down over your ears.

**How long would that experience last for?**

It was only about half an hour you sat in the trenches. I suppose it would be about half an

25:30 hour. You just you know look up and see if there's anything, the anti-aircraft batteries would come up and we had a daylight one I know that where a Japanese came over. He was doing a reconnaissance and that Spitfires from Coomalie chased him, I heard that. I heard the air traffic controllers. Now that came through by radio somewhere. I can't remember details on that. I know that the aircraft control and they had

26:00 radar or something like that, anyway they had him in sight, had the enemy in sight and they put the spitfire onto the back of him. You know half a mile above him and halfway behind him and a hundred feet above him. I heard them do that but I can't remember details on that one. That's just a little bit of... I'd have to think about that more. I remember that one, that was a daylight reconnaissance they sent over.

26:30 **Do you think finally being in that situation where the threat of war was immediate and direct had a big impact on you?**

Too right you found out it wasn't all fun and games then. All of a sudden you woke up. I said, 'Fair dinkum. This is for real'. Up till those first bombing raids it wasn't, well, it wasn't that real. But it got worse, it got real real. You know - they're

27:00 having a go at me. I don't like that I want to have a go at them. Yeah ok, but not me. I'll try and play heroes but that's what it was. All of a sudden you realised it was serious when people start throwing things at you.

**The unit - was that stationed right next to an airstrip?**

No. I forget how far it was from Coomalie but that was the closest one. There was Hughes Field that wasn't so far away

27:30 but I think that had Mitchells. No, Batchelor had Mitchells. I can't remember what Hughes had. And Fenton had Liberators down there and I forget what else - I can't remember that in detail. I'd have to sit down and think.

**Do you know much about the specifications of those planes? In broad terms - the Mitchell?**

28:00 Well that had two engines. A tricycle landing gear tricycle landing in front. They were the, 18 Squadron

was the Dutch squadron, though it did have Australian personnel in it too.

**And your unit - you were all Australians?**

Yes. All RAAF personnel.

**Did you make some mates there?**

yes. Made mates alright. If you

28:30 lived in a tent with four fellows you'd get on with them. I can only remember one name, can't remember his first name, McLaren. Because I tell you an incident about that. During on of the... well, we had a few reconnaissance over us, I say it's reconnaissance rather than a bombing raid. I said, "I can hear a kite. Where is it?" and he says, I said, "Is it one of ours?"

29:00 This is not verbatim but, "One of ours?" and he said, "I think so. I'm not sure." I said, "Where is it?" he said, "I can see it." I said, "Where is it?" He said, "Behind the tree." and I said, "What tree?" "The green tree." And we were surrounded by green trees. He wondered why I started to laugh because you're in the middle of... our tents are all camouflaged and that and he said, "Behind the tree." "Which tree?" "The green tree." Now how would you know which tree it was behind then? So

29:30 I just remember that incident.

**What was your state of mind at that stage as far as how you felt about your involvement in the war?**

State of mind.

**Were you satisfied with where you'd found yourself and your contribution?**

No. I wasn't satisfied I was eager to do more because you know doing an

30:00 eight hour shift on a radio and coming round and doing some more and doing that - it was a bit boring and a bit negative. Except for the occasional air raid it wasn't very exciting. I couldn't say I was satisfied but still it was accepted. It was part of the job you did and had to do it. It's like washing up - you've got to do it and whether you like it or not it's got to be done

30:30 so you go and do it and you can do it with good grace or you can do it with bad grace so we all did it with a good grace. We didn't look at ourselves as heroes or making a contribution to saving the world for democracy. It was something you had to do so you just went and did it. And didn't start whining about anything, of course we all moaned about... You always had a moan, always had to have a moan, you can't be an Australian serviceman if you don't grizzle and moan and whine and criticise everything that's going on.

31:00 Bosses don't know what they're doing, they've got no idea - we do but they don't. We did that but you went and did your job and you did it. Well, most of us did there were some bludgers and things like that but you had to do it and that was it. Get into it.

**What did you do to deal with that boredom?**

Read a postage stamp. That was mostly

31:30 but often time you were tired. It was boring, you swine bashed. I used to go out in the bush sometimes with a rifle and have a few shots at things like that to keep my eye in because wireless operators don't handle weapons. They carry a .303, you carry that all the time but I just liked to keep my skills because as I say I was a fair shot.

**Do you recall any other incidents of interest that took place at that**

32:00 **time before your circumstances then changed again?**

Incidents of interest, no, I said I took a little while off to go and see my cousin down Adelaide river.

**How long did you take off?**

Can't remember - I stayed overnight though. Somebody covered for me. All I did was take my eating irons and a ground sheet and I stood on the side of the road and of course the traffic you could sit on the side on the road and you'd get a lift down to Adelaide River. I forget how many Adelaide River was from there. I just got a lift down

32:30 and stayed there. Stayed overnight there, ate in the sergeants' mess there and I was only an NIC [?] in the air force but he was a sergeant so I slipped in there and then next morning decided to go back home.

**Is that something that some of the other blokes used to do?**

No fear. Oh, another incident; every now and again on what was it - the evening shift - they'd have a truck that went from

- 33:00 North West Area Headquarters to Berry Springs and you could have a swim. And they'd always be two or three chaps there with .303s sitting around the place there watching for crocodiles. You'd go and have a swim but fair foffa they were watching for the crocodiles. Or they were supposed to be anyway so you had faith in them and went and had a swim. Occasionally theatre people would arrive.
- 33:30 That's right yeah. I think Gary Cooper from memory. I think it was Gary Cooper - can't remember much about it but you'd have pictures every now and again. The cinema unit would come along and you'd have pictures. I can't remember what they were. That was about the only entertainment and mail from home and you'd write a few letters and post them off and write a few letters and post them off.
- 34:00 **Through the course of those raids that were happening around the unit were you aware of any of your blokes getting injured or killed?**
- Yeah
- Can you tell us a bit about that?**
- It wasn't widespread but we did suffer casualties. I think it was probably a mistake in dropping the bomb rather than accurate bombing but there was one case where a bomb hit a slit trench
- 34:30 and a few casualties there.
- Injuries and fatalities?**
- Fatalities and injuries, yeah. See the bomb shrapnel spreads you know. And it's just like - whoosh - wipes out everything in a certain area but you can be you know thirty feet away in another split trench with your head down and all you hear is the bang and hear the things
- 35:00 whistling over and the foliage, any foliage there getting ripped away, and that's it. But you can hear it coming down. They whistle as they come down. But that's always late.
- It must be a haunting sound when you hear that?**
- I have great sympathy for the people of London. They went through a terrible time. They copped that every night for a while and during the day.
- 35:30 I have great respect for all [(UNCLEAR)] because to be bombed day and night would be a terrible experience.
- That situation where there were fatalities - were you in that direct area when that happened?**
- Fifty yards away. I was in the closet trench. If I'd have run for the distance one away I'd have probably copped it. There you are - thank
- 36:00 God it's not me. That's all I can say. Accept it, but that's when your eyes were opened to the fair dinkum, it's fair dinkum from then on.
- Do you think your think changed then to help you cope with fatalities?**
- Do I think my thinking changed? I think it did yes. I said your eyes were opened. You realised it wasn't a fun
- 36:30 and games anymore. It was fair dinkum.
- The blokes who were killed in that situation - did you know them?**
- Well, they were part of the watch so you knew everybody's face if not by names. I can't remember many names now but at work if you were a wireless operator you put a pair of these headphones on your ears and you sit down there with your radio and that's it - you're all on your own. For a while.
- 37:00 You and the other chap on the end and the Japanese direction finders if you were on the air they were out there looking for you but if you were on a land line the other chap on the end is the only person with whom you converse for say eight hours or sixteen hours or twelve hours or whatever you've got to do. You're in a little world of your own.
- Within that world was there loneliness?**
- Didn't have time - you were too busy. There might be loneliness if you were doing an air watch and
- 37:30 there's nothing happening. Yeah, you got bored. You might have doodled on something but you had a log book and that log book is sacrosanct. You don't write anything in that log book that doesn't happen or is untrue. That's the bible.
- Were you writing a lot of letters home at that stage?**
- Probably a couple a week. You'd have to do something to fill in your time.
- 38:00 And thanks you know to the eight hour shift you'd have time. You did something you know, you did something.

**Did you receive letters back from both mum and dad or would they write together?**

Yeah, yeah. And my aunts and my relations and things like that. I remember one of my aunties used to send me parcels. She sent me a nice pair of woollen mittens and a nice balaclava and a nice scarf. The temperature in Darwin was about thirty five degrees and the humidity's 99%. In fact I've still got the balaclava

38:30 out there. You need those things like a hole in the head. But never the less they were a gift and there might be a fruitcake or something like that or some rare things because you couldn't get, things were hard to get down here; butter was rationed the poor fellows, and if they got butter and things but they'd send, family would send little things like that up for you.

39:00 **At that stage - how did you feel the war was progressing? Did you feel like there was an end coming or did it feel like it was going to go on forever?**

No. At that time, they were starting to get ready for Europe. Things were still crook. The Japanese had been held at Milne Bay, we were gradually getting them back but things

39:30 were going pretty slowly and things were not as bright as they could have been.

**Did you feel - were you holding your breath and wondering what the Japanese were going to do next to Australia? Did you feel that their strikes were going to move closer?**

I think, and given that answer to the question, I think they still could have come. That's my spontaneous answer to your question.

40:00 I think they still could have come. Because you never trust your enemy do you? He could have been mounting for something else.

40:30 End of tape

## Tape 4

00:45 **You spoke before about some of the men you were working with going troppo while you were working in Darwin as a wireless operator - can you talk about that a bit further?**

01:00 I don't think I can. I just didn't take much notice of them - they were going troppo and that's right - off they went. Sometimes they went to hospital, sometimes they were just ignored, sometimes it was made fun of unfortunately, we all pretended we were going troppo anyway. We thought it might be a ticket south - it didn't work. I can't give you a great deal of experience about that.

01:30 **What happens when you go troppo?**

Well they started doing peculiar things and looking for things. You know, running around and scratching around looking for things - probably their discharge. Wait till I think of examples, saying things that are irrelevant to the situation.

02:00 Hallucinating, you could call it that a name there - that's it - you're going troppo.

**You observed this happening in Darwin - you weren't sort of in the thick of the conflict but guys were already losing the plot?**

Yeah, well the heat, the humidity, the constant work I suppose no doubt some of them, you never knew what was going on at home either. They might get a letter that wasn't helpful

02:30 and it was probably a form of relief for some of them. I can't go into much detail on that because I didn't take much notice of them really. But you know - 'So and so's gone troppo' 'Oh right-o, ok' and that's it. Anything that unusual to the situation might be roughly classed as troppo.

**What did you**

03:00 **do to stop yourself from going troppo?**

Sleep when I could. Or find little things to do, did a bit of wood carving with a pen knife or things like that or do something, do something. You know clean up, wash clothes, write a letter. You know, mostly you're going

03:30 to work so every time you'd get a hit on the back, or they call spine bashing, that's nothing like it. You'd just sort of go into a coma, lie back, have a sleep, have a think, have a bit of a nap you're ready for the next session of work.

**What's spine bashing?**

Lying on your back. Have you come across that expression before? Oh well spine bashing was a popular sport you know - 'I think I might go and have my spine out' and down flat on the back

04:00 because in the tropical heat you know it's very wary so if you got a few hours on your back it's called spine bashing.

**You also or some of your mates were able to alleviate the boredom by making their own homebrew?**

They did yes but I didn't say that. I don't think I brought that up - somebody else has brought that up. I didn't mention anything about home brew at all. But some of them did, had a go at it. They made chuffers.

04:30 And chuffers I don't know details of because I was a non-imbiber in those days. Didn't have very much at all, occasionally. I used to trade my beer rations - the very few beer rations I got I used to trade them away for other things but some people had a go at home brewing. I did have a go at home brewing later on but that's not till '45 when I

05:00 did something in that direction.

**What did you used to trade for your beer rations?**

I was into cigarettes then. Cigarettes or any...that's about all.

**What kind of cigarettes did you smoke back then?**

Anything I could lay my hands on. Lucky Strikes or Chesterfield or Camels or those desired but most of the ration ones were Capstan.

05:30 So I had to trade them for those.

**You mentioned that the Japanese - after the bombing of Darwin - maybe the immediate threat was dissipated - but you said you always felt like the Japanese could come at any time - was this a general feeling**

06:00 **of all Australians at the time? Was this a huge fear?**

I can't speak for all Australians but I can speak for a small group. Remember we were a small group - we worked out there was about thirty on the watch. That would be the people with whom you mixed so you can only speak for them. I think generally there was a sense of awareness and we're going to go back

06:30 so it's going to be a long, hard, bloody trip right back to Japan which has proved to be costly. And some of... The Americans I felt were, they had the numbers so they could take casualties, we Australians I think always looked like we were saying, 'We'll save ourselves for later on'. The less casualties you have the better but I feel American generals in general didn't worry themselves too much for casualties.

07:00 But we'd always felt there'd be a road... We're going back, we've got to go back through the islands. A time will come.

**When you say that about the Americans - do you mean they weren't concerned with Australian casualties or American casualties?**

They'd be less concerned about Australian casualties than anything but I feel that they,

07:30 this is only a personal opinion, I feel the Americans worked on manpower and firepower. The more battle we throw at the enemy, the more enemy... we'll do it by attrition. We'll just wipe them out with firepower and men. That's my personal opinion. They didn't seem to be worried because they worked on the assumption - "We've got the best medical treatment in the world - if we get hit we'll have you back in hospital in ten minutes." but we worked on the assumption, "We're not going to get hit. We're going to get him."

08:00 **That's a real difference in attitude isn't it between you and the Americans.**

I feel so but as I said that's my personal opinion. It can be open to correction by a lot of people that know much more about the other service than I do.

**Do you feel that that kind of attitude made you a better fighter?**

Yes. No, it made you a better soldier.

08:30 Because there's nothing like being a survivor.

**You talked about surviving a lot in the Depression years - did all of those things you learnt then make you feel like you were a survivor?**

Well I didn't feel like a survivor but I knew that I would try to survive. So that's why you run into a slip trench in an air raid -

09:00 if you don't want to survive you stand up there, but if you see this air raid comes and the slip trenches are there you get into it and you're going to survive. That's the attitude, you're going to do everything

else to keep in one piece. You drive on the road, you drive safely, try driving on the right-hand road back to Randwick and see how far you get. See and that's a survivor - if you go and keep to the rules and drive on the left hand side of the road. It's survival, same attitude taken in

09:30 a different range of situations.

**You were talking about the signals you might listen to during the day as a wireless operator - can you give us a specific example of what you might hear while you were listening?**

What came through the earphones? Well in tropical areas you're always going to get interference because if a tropical

10:00 storm comes the airs are bombarded with strange crackles and whistles and all sorts of sounds. You people have probably heard the old short wave radios and things like that where the signals and the voices are distorted. You've got a pair of earphones on your ears like, not as fancy as those, but old bakelite things - your ears sweat,

10:30 get sort of hot externa and those complications like that you're constantly doing. The signals are coming through and you're looking for some little signal that comes through that you recognize as your call sign. But static and interference is a way of life up in the tropics, it can be very annoying and disturbing sometimes but another operator would be sending a signal and there'd be a crash halfway through it so you missed half a group

11:00 or something like that so you've got to go back and ask for a repeat, an IMI which means repeat group so it can take time and stress and you have to listen hard to sometimes because signals can be only coming from a small radio set - the signals are weak and you have to strain to hear them, or try and adjust your equipment to get the best volume as you can.

11:30 **While you were working there did anyone make a catastrophic mistake or was there any accidents because you couldn't hear properly through the phones?**

Not that I know of, no. I think hardly that anybody could make a mistake from anybody else. It's an individual me to you conversation if you like between two wireless operators over the air using Morse Code.

12:00 Unless of course you get some other signal that's coming through stronger than you that's very close to your frequency. Well that can cause a lot of trouble then so if you have the opportunity, you tell the other operator to change his frequency or something to another frequency. As in the case of working native, changing what they call a crystal and come in on another frequency and hopefully you can get through on that. Hope that the conditions

12:30 are right for a better signal or one that's not covered with interference.

**Can you explain the term crystal again?**

Yes. Well the operatives, the natives, our agents in Java and Sumatra had little what they call transceivers - they're only about as big as a cigar box. Had a little key on there and they had a crystal tuned to a frequency so if they wanted just one frequency you just put in that crystal - like a

13:00 two pronged thing - very delicate they were. We had to be very careful with them and change the frequency just pull that out and put the other one in and it's give you a different frequency. We had them all coded and reckoned that if you changed to frequency A to frequency C and if you had a reasonably long message and you thought your operative might be getting - because you've always got to be aware of Japanese direction finding people - you wouldn't keep it on the air too long. So you might tell him to change his crystal

13:30 half way through and he disappears off that frequency and comes up on the other frequency and you can tune into him again, take that and maybe adjust it three or four times in a ten minute message because they were only slow. They didn't do very fast Morse - they were only about five to ten words per minute and some of them had idiosyncrasies that I knew because I'd trained them so lets say Toa - do you know any Morse?

14:00 T - one dot, I - two dots, S - three dots, H - four dots, figure 5 - five dots. Now Toa if he sent three dots it might be anything from two to five so if he sent a coded message it was a very simple code we might rapidly decode it and if we couldn't make sense of say group 5 we'd ask for him to repeat group 5

14:30 and the S might turn out to be an H or an I or something. He didn't have the ability to pick his dots very well. So we knew this so we allowed for it, if the message translated ok and it made sense that was alright but we as a check we ask him to repeat group 5 and then we'd send him off the air. Kept him off the air as long as possible because a wireless signal is a shout in any language and somebody looking for it will know it.

15:00 And if they can get a couple of Japanese to direction find it well then he's a gone coon.

**This was happening later on?**

That was later on yeah. In Darwin we didn't worry much about that but the Japanese probably know

where we are right to the pinpoint so why worry.

**There was one incident that changed the course of your war career**

15:30 **and that was the incident with the NCO - can you walk us through that - exactly what happened, how you met him and what caused you to be angry with him and what happened after that?**

Well I think you've given some detail - we were working long shifts, it was hot, it was humid, we were busy, we were going flat out,

16:00 this rooster arrives up from south somewhere, from headquarters all spick and span. Now up there it's a different atmosphere - all the baloney and bull is gone. You get there and you've got to do a job. This fellow thought he was running a place down at headquarters in Melbourne or something like that and he wanted everything spick and span and he wanted all the caps to call him by his rank and everything like that whereas you might say, "Sarge!" or, "Hey Sarge' here!"

16:30 He didn't like that and he had a few words with me and I felt a bit short tempered and one thing led to another and - impetuous young fellow- dropped him.

**Did you deck him?**

Yeah. Of course that caused a bit of an uproar, "Jeez you think he hasn't dropped him!" I think that the squadron leader

17:00 Sheldon was a bit sympathetic to me because see a lot of the pomp and ceremony of headquarters down in Melbourne was not up there - you haven't got time for it. Paraded in the morning or when you were going on shift just to see you all there - "You've got your firearm, you've got your ammunition, you've got your tin hat, you've got that? Ok fellows lets go." and I have to say that the marching was not very good quality.

17:30 We just ambled along, hung up your rifle, hung up your tin hat, took off your wrist bow or whatever you had and went straight to your key or your watch or something and do that. Minimum bullshit. Well this fellow was all for it, he wanted to keep it going and it just didn't wash with the... In the couple of weeks that he was there he wasn't very popular.

18:00 **So after that he was moved?**

I don't know - I was moved. But I wouldn't be surprised if he was posted.

**So what happened after that - you had two options?**

18:30 Well it's not very much naturally this is a very serious offence and up before the signals officer -

19:00 I remember his name, Squadron Leader Sheldon - he explained it to me that I'd committed an offence that was worthy of a court martial but just happened that they had a unit which needed experienced wireless operators and, "You've had experience, you're an experienced wireless operator, we know that you're pretty good or reasonably good." which I was - I'll say that with modesty - and I had experience. "If you accept that posting in that unit we'll forget all about the

19:30 prison camp at Gowrie because you're going to go there for sure." So that's it. Accept. That's it, just like that. So right-o, finish your watch or whatever it was - go and finish your watch and I did that and it was only a day I think. Yeah, that was one day and the next day, "Pack your gear and be at the orderlies office by 9 o'clock."

20:00 So I was at the orderly office at 9 o'clock with my gear packed. A truck pulled up and out of it gets a lieutenant in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and he says to me, "Are you the new spark that's going?" "Yes." he said, "Well, I've got the bump. Wait and I'll go and sign for you." so he went in, signed for me, hopped in the utility truck and I said, "Right-o, okay." "Throw your gear in the back there." - for an LAC to sit next to an officer was a bit unusual at that time

20:30 at that time. Threw my kit in the back, hopped in the side of the car and off we went. His name was Lieutenant Peter Everett. Up we went to Darwin. Want me to continue?

**Why were you called a sparkie?**

A sparker. You know that carpenters are called 'chippies'? Well sparkers because the radio

21:00 was named for wireless operators - sparkers - because they're suppose to make sparks. But they called us sparkers. Babbling brook, a cook. What else was there? I can't think of any at the moment but that's just a slang thing, you know, a sparker. Doesn't everybody know that?

21:30 **Tell us about this journey to Darwin with Lieutenant Peter Everett.**

Right-o. He had a bit of a heavy foot and we had this ute, something like a Dodge ute or something of those days remember and we were racing along the road and I don't know where we were at the time but he was well exceeding the speed limit because there were speed limits. Happened to look in the

back and there's two MPs [Military Police] following. So he speeds up a bit, then he slows down a bit, then he speeds up a bit more and slows down and chases

22:00 them. Anyway he tears into the side, jumps out of the car, whips open the bonnet and he said to me, 'Don't say a word. Don't say a bloody word. Not a word! Sit there'. Lifts up the bonnet, dives into the engine and starts pulling things around there and the police come up and I think they're corporals or something like that and he says, 'Hi. There's something wrong with the accelerator of this car. I'm having trouble with it'. He says, 'Every time I put my foot down on it, it either jumps forward or goes back' he said, 'I can't, I haven't been able to slow it down'.

22:30 So they give him a... "Ah! he says, "There it is! There's something jammed in the side there look." so he whips out a piece of wire or something like that and puts it... "There it is. She'll be right now." So they give him a caution and walk off. Very cunning.

**Did they know that he was of a high ranking?**

They had no idea he was an officer till they got to us.

23:00 If it had been anybody else they'd have probably lumbered him straight away.

**So what was it like when you arrived at was it House 26?**

That's Darwin yeah. I arrived, got out of the car, and wondering where I am because there was a house on the edge of the air field at Darwin right on the

23:30 Western side of Darwin airfield. This house on stilts there. I look at it; "Damn. It's alright." and there's an American tent next to it and I look at it. Little natives running. "What am I into?" Anyway down the steps comes a white man in a sarong.

24:00 All he's got on is a sarong. "Ah." he says, "My new sparker. How do you do? My name's Kim Hardacre - Wing Commander." My God! What have I got into here? Anyway chappie says, "You've just had a long trip and no lunch. Come down get Bugis to get something to eat." and I thought, "Jeez, this is a bit strange for a little LAC." So I go down to the tent and I ask for Bugis and this little fellow comes up. He's only about four foot six high or something like that and I said, "I need a meal."

24:30 "Uh?" "A meal." "Uh?" "A meal. Eat, eat." "Oh yes." and he comes in with a spoon and I thought it was tomato and it turned out to be chilli - nearly burnt my mouth out. Anyway, coming in there he laughed so I laughed too and I said, "I'll get you later." to myself. And that was it so we started off and then Lieutenant King was there,

25:00 yeah Lieutenant King, Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve. Then another chap met me Flight Lieutenant Lionel McLachlan and I was the only other rank around there and McLachlan was a wireless operator - Marconi trained. So started me off and that was it. Straight into the duties and he said, "You'll be doing a different sort of Morse code than you've been doing. If you get up to five to ten words a minute you'll be doing well

25:30 on some of these stations. Other ones you'll be working back to Brisbane or Melbourne you'll do your normal wireless operating." I worked out later that I was working with somebody inside Java or Halmaheras or Timor or somewhere like that. Somebody that was under stress. Somebody that wasn't as efficiently trained as we were as wireless operators and you had to comfort them and look after them and help them. All this was told to me and I learnt from Lionel McLachlan. You've got to help these

26:00 fellows, they're in a dangerous situation. If they knock off in the middle of a message don't get angry cause you would in normal wireless operating, you'd get angry if something upsets the normal tenor but these guys you've got to comfort and look after them because they're not in desirable situations.

**Did you actually know that you were now working for Intelligence?**

No. Not at that time. It wasn't till a little later.

26:30 Now the word DNI, Department [Directorate of] Naval Intelligence turned up and I wondered what I was doing with that and that's when I started to learn that I was working for Allied Intelligence Bureau and I was working in SIA section - that's Secret Intelligence Agent [Australia]. I didn't know what it was at first, they just used the word SIA but later on I found out what the full term was.

**When you realised you were working for intelligence did it make you feel...?**

Didn't give a worry. Didn't worry about it. Right-o, just another job, do the best I can and when I was working with those poor buggers in Timor and things like that well I did my best to help them and comfort them and look after them and be patient and not bully them because a wireless operator can be a natural bully if he wants to. There was different grades of signals,

27:30 lets say there's operations, there's operations immediate, there's PM1's which are aircraft movements and they go down in scale and if you've got an operation immediate signal to send through and this chappie, your other wireless operator comes up with what's he got some aircraft movement you just had to hold that aircraft movement. So many a time a plane would leave one place and go to another and nobody would know it was coming. So you could be a

28:00 natural bully with the priority of your signals.

**Was it not in your nature to be a bully? Did handling the Javanese in a different way to you'd been used to come easily?**

Yes. Well I don't know if it come easy but I had to do it so I did the best I could. I realised, when I learnt under what situation they were I put myself in their place and I'd give everybody the comfort I could

28:30 and I'd expect that comfort or help or assistance and I know that I had a low powered set, I'd had difficulty in my location I might be and anybody like that needs all the help they can so you're patient and you don't bully them. But a wireless operator if I was working back to Brisbane or Melbourne I knew there was a European trained like I was I'd bully him. If I had a signal of higher priority I'd tell him, "Shut up and I'm sending mine through

29:00 I'll break your message." and if he had an important message and I had an operations immediate I'd break his message and put mine through because that was by the book.

**When you say you had a low powered machine what do you mean by that?**

No the operators have a low powered machine

**In Java?**

Yeah. Well they couldn't have a great... Let's say on one operation [(UNCLEAR)] they had a camera, a Leica camera, where he got it from

29:30 I don't know but he had it. He didn't have any of the equipment you've got - all he could do what take photos so there was a difference in powers and things like that. The simile I'm trying to make, you can take a picture with a box brownie or you could have all this equipment but it'd still take a picture. It was carrying it and transporting it and using it was the problem. It's like the radios you could have. You could have great big long radio equipment or you could have small little stuff like you've got nowadays, those transistors.

30:00 But wireless equipment worked on valves and things in those days and there was no such thing as transistors and chips they were valves. Have you ever seen a radio valve? They're like a little, like a light globe. Some of them are smaller, some are larger, some of them go up to the size of pumpkins in the big transmitters but they're that sort of equipment and it had to be cared for and looked after and treated carefully and it just didn't have the power of transmission over distance.

30:30 **So you must have often lost signals because of that did you?**

Oh yes. There was times when the range just wasn't there. If the atmospheric conditions weren't right the signal wouldn't get through and that was it.

**Can you give us an example of you getting a message and you sending one back? Can you walk us through what would have happened?**

31:00 From where to where?

**From where you were in Darwin to Java.**

I'm at House 26 now in Darwin?

**Yeah**

And to where am I going?

**Say sending a message to Java and receiving one. Can you walk us through exactly what would happen?**

Well they worked on schedules. It might be anywhere round the clock- never the same die at the same time. Lets say

31:30 for instance ten o'clock in the morning, at about five to ten I'd start the owner generator - that was for my transmitter and the receiver. I'd turn to what frequency I expected him on and I'd tune in my equipment like that and I'd sit there and wait. Now if I didn't hear anything for about say five past ten I might send out his call sign a couple of times. Give him a plot. I'd keep on working looking each side of the...

32:00 because you've heard of the fluctuations and variations, turning my, looking each side of his frequency looking for him. He might come up and he mightn't come up. Give him twenty minutes, half an hour, off. Finished. Now if he did come up I got him, I'd send a signal that I received him and go ahead. Now that was the letter R means 'I received. I hear you'

32:30 then if I heard him I'd pick up and send him K and that means for him to go ahead so he'd transmit his message. If it was a short message right-o, I'd give him received and then AR - that means 'Close down' and then that was the next thing. Now depending, as I said later on I'll get into this, most of the time from the first part we took the message as is.

- 33:00 It might come in coded Malay, it might come in coded English. Cause I just kept a group of letters, five figured groups of letters and I'd pass it on to King who'd do the decoding, corrections and he'd give me another piece of paper with another code on it which I'd transmit back to mostly Brisbane, Caboolture actually, they'd go back to Caboolture. So from ensign I don't know where it went.
- 33:30 **What was a typical message from Java?**
- Do you want to see some?
- If you could actually explain first that'd be great.**
- Well it might say, 'Twenty-five Japanese marines, two gun posts, one false gun'
- 34:00 'White man seen in prison compound' 'Boat stores arrive 25th' - like that. If there'd been any bombing or they'd done a little bit of bombing they might give a report of targets hit or not hit
- 34:30 or something like that. I didn't see a lot of them, then. I didn't see any translations, or I didn't see many translations. As I said in a small unit like that there's not many secrets. Seeing as I was the only non-commissioned officer or seeing as I was the only LAC, the other rank, we all ate together. This got to be common for SIA. Now normally in the army, navy or air force you have different messes for different things. We only had two messes,
- 35:00 those for the whites and those for the natives. So we all ate together.
- You were working with different nationalities probably for the first time - what was that like?**
- Where are we? Darwin the first time or House 26?
- House 26.**
- There was only the two nationalities to start off with. It was as I say the
- 35:30 Europeans - Kim Hardacre was in the RAF [Royal Air Force] actually - King was an Australian, Lionel McLachlan was in the RAAF.
- But then there was the natives...**
- The natives yeah. They were never enlisted in these natives. Came from various islands - a lot of them had the name Abdullah so to distinguish between the Abdullah's we'd have a Abdullah Baraja - he'd come from
- 36:00 some sort of place and Abdullah Bugis he'd come from the Celebes. So you distinguished, there'd be Abdullah from Eastwood or Abdullah from Carlingford and that's how you could distinguish them.
- Was this your first contact with Indonesians or Asians?**
- Yeah it was my first contact with Asians yeah.
- What was that like? Can you tell us how you felt about them?**
- They were blackfellows, that was all. You got to know them
- 36:30 alright. You had the goods, the bads and the indifferents like any other people.
- You seemed to have warmed to Bugis straight away? You had a joke with each other.**
- How much do you want to know about him?
- Well we'll talk lots more about him perhaps but first thing...**
- He became my offsider and bodyguard. More astute and cunning little man you've never seen in your life.
- 37:00 He knew all the tricks. He was very good to me - looked at me as Tuan [master] and when only the two of us were there sometimes later on as we got to Gowak and I'd address him as 'Papa' that's 'father' and he'd address me as 'Lucky lucky' meaning 'boy'. But that was only between ourselves, no natives. If some of the white fellows had known that they'd have gone off their brain.
- 37:30 **Why?**
- It's not done. You just didn't mix with natives in those days old girl. Hey, this was not the done thing. 'What do you think you're doing mixing with somebody like that? We'll send you out to the colonies'. It wasn't the done thing - that's why I got on with him so well because I tried to maintain lets say, superior to them because I was their leader but I also wasn't a boong basher like some of them and
- 38:00 I say that word because we had a couple of fellows that ended up in Malaya, Englishmen, and I called the boong bashers - they just treated the natives like dirt and because I did these little things to them that's what I reckon, paid off, survived.

**Did Bugis get round in a sarong as well?**

Sarong with his little cap.

**And Hardacre he was wearing a sarong. Did you ever take to wearing a sarong?**

38:30 Yes. It was the dress of the day at one time.

**And this was while you were in Darwin?**

No I didn't start wearing a sarong till I left Darwin later on. I became more associated with it and when you were up in the islands you turned native. We didn't wear identification disks, any clothing we had had no, if you look on all the clothing it's got a little label,

39:00 no label on our clothing at all. They were all taken off. All marks of identification were taken away.

**How long were you at House 26 in Darwin before you were moved to Melville Island?**

I would say a couple of months. Now Melville Island, Snake Bay was the operational headquarters.

39:30 And they gradually moved from Darwin over to Melville Island and I went over to Melville Island there to help them set it up. There I met several other people that had come in under, you've got to get this chronologically correct. I was there for a while and then I came back to Caboolture, then I went back to Melville Island, and then I went to Serua,

40:00 and then I come back from that and the town plan operation was starting. Had the preparation for that and at one stage I went off to Nila, come back and then went on to town plan but in the meantime this was a very intense time. I did a lot of travelling and I was never in one place for a very long time. It was back in, just after

40:30 Christmas in '45. Now I started training the natives around about Christmas at Mount Gravatt, that's when I first got the first load of them to train them and I went away a few times and come back and back a few times in there before we finally went off on the town plan operation. That's as near as I can think. I'll have to sit down with pencil and paper and think to get it chronologically...

41:00 I didn't think what you were going to do and I didn't give it much homework but if I'd have did I could have stopped it then and thought and when I did some things for PAL I did some writing so I could probably have a look back at that and give you more accurate dates because I spent a few months on that and I'd have to go and correct things and change them and say, 'No that didn't happen then, something else happened' so you've got to go back now and get it in correct chronological order but I'll give it to you roughly.

41:30 End of tape

## Tape 5

00:47 **So obviously ending up with the SIA just was a big turnaround in your war experience.**

01:00 **Was this something that you quietly felt good about?**

Yes. It was a complete turnaround. The methods of... Very little distinguish between office and other ranks, the distinguishing was between the Europeans and the natives but not only in or

01:30 it was quite alien to me at first to be able to mix with officers and treated as one and naturally one was expected to act as one which you did. You've got to think that sixty years ago the bar between natives and Europeans was great higher than it is now. And one learnt to maintain ones position and dignity but still kept their respect

02:00 and don't take any nonsense from them but respect them and I found respecting them, being reasonable firm when the needs be but also have a joke with them which a lot of the English people that had been in the Islands as planters and that didn't do. They treated the natives, some of them treated them... Chader treated them, Chader had a great respect for them because he'd grown up in Sarawak, he was a member of the Sarawak civil service, his father had been a gun

02:30 runner and Chader had a lot of respect for the natives. He could converse and he could also write that curly-wurly writing, I don't know what it's called - Sanskrit I think it is or something like that. For which FELO, the Far Eastern Liaison Officers, used to get him to translate their propaganda material which they printed and dropped by aircraft into the various occupied areas. Chader used to do that when he was downtown. But I always found that it was a totally different

03:00 situation to what it is in the RAAF.

**I get the sense that there was a real feeling almost of family amongst you men?**

It was. It really was a type of family. You were one of us and we were a close knit family. You addressed, well Chader, he was always addressed as skipper

- 03:30 but I remember going to Hahndorf House and he said, 'Don't call me skipper this time. Call me Sir' I said, 'Alright. Ok'. Because we were going to mix with other people but amongst our own the only we actually called sir was Kendall. Captain Kendall Royal Navy Reserve Controller. He was another fine man but we were no parades, no kit inspections, no anything like
- 04:00 that once you were in this unit. You had a much more companionable, close unit. Went up to the Atherton at Caboolture to get some money to but something, you know, stores or something you need you'd just say, you might say Sir or skip or some of them we even addressed by their first name amongst yourselves but when you were out with public or somewhere else of with other units you maintained your dignity and
- 04:30 you would call sir or with respect, or something like that. At Caboolture two messes, and for breakfast you might be sitting next to a squadron leader, a wing commander, somebody in the Royal Naval Reserve, a Canadian, a New Zealand lieutenant and at lunchtime and at dinner well it was maybe the same but once a week there would be a formal mess dinner which was the officers
- 05:00 sit at one table and the NCOs at another table and the other ranks, you know the lackeys, the privates and the LAC and things at another table but we were all served by native servants which had white, well all had white jackets. Just you're a wing commander sitting at that table and I'm an LAC sitting at that table. All the same mood, maybe if there was any port or alcohol or things like that it would be parted. Just act like an officers mess, even though you were the lowest rank and
- 05:30 you were expected to act in that same manner. Don't be a hooligan and keep to your manners and in a manner of dress and mode. Breakfast might be working clothes but the formal mess dinner was all starched, clean, shiny, everything. RAAF personnel used to wear their black tie. We did it properly even though we were... As I said that was a family, you were quite right in that too.

06:00 **Your rank at that time was...?**

LAC - Leading Aircraftman.

**Now could you take us through the line of command that you were operating with there - you've mentioned Chader, can you just take us through the...?**

He was a Lieutenant in the RAF. There was Ken McKenzie, he was a Lieutenant in the Royal New Zealand Expeditionary Force. There was

- 06:30 Captain Kendall, Royal Naval Reserve, Wing Commander Briton, RAF, Kin Hardacre, Wing Commander RAF, Lieutenant Gillet, Phil Ledge, Lieutenant both AIF, Lieutenant Loch Nicholson RANVR [Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve], Captain Pearce, a Pommy, I don't know what he was in.
- 07:00 Who else? Lionel Morse AIF Lieutenant, went to Captain later, who else? Now that's Francis Drake Lieutenant RANVR, and then you'd have a lot of RAF fellows. At Caboolture there was some civilians,
- 07:30 some British, some Australian civilians. All working for, well they were sworn into the Australia Military forces but they were working for SIS [Secret Intelligence Service - MI6] in London.

**Could you tell me about Caboolture? Was that headquarters?**

Yes that was the wireless headquarters.

- 08:00 The main, well the headquarters was a place called 'Craigroyston' and a hundred and 64 Bowen Terrace Brisbane, just near the Storey Bridge. That was say the Brisbane headquarters but Caboolture was an old house that belonged to a planter. He'd donated it or lent it to SIS. That's where all the radio stations were, all the radio equipment and also it was partly used for some training too
- 08:30 like unarmed defence and we had our first how to use a parachute lesson there. And very nice house, two storey house, swimming pool, tennis court, bowling green, gold taps in the bathroom and there irrespective of rank you either had one or two to a room with proper beds. So we were looked after, well we didn't sleep on palliasses on the floor like you did so we were looked after. It was a much
- 09:00 with SIR it was a much better accommodation and when possible food. Equipment: we had the pick of what we liked. We'd go down to Milton and we'd take what you like and sign for it. Open house you know, it was like a free house at Grace Brothers or Anthony Hordern's, or David Jones you know, go and help yourself and sign for it. That's all it was.

**What sort of equipment would you be getting?**

- 09:30 Anything your little heart desired as long as it conformed with the general way of equipment by that I mean there's no use picking a .45 colt revolver and me picking a .38 colt revolver. There's no use you picking a .45 sub machine gun and me picking a 9 millimetre sub machine gun. So we used to confer and settle - most of us settled on the Austin Sub-machine gun or a .38 pistol. We always found the pistols

10:00 more reliable than automatics. Automatics tend to jam, pistols never do.

**And why did you go for the Austin?**

It seems a nice weapon. Thompson, well, it was heavier, jammed more, had two sorts of magazines, a tube magazine or a drum magazine, and the drum magazine made too much noise in the jungle. It used to rattle. Now in the jungle sounds get

10:30 confused. You can pick a shot, or you can't pick a shot, a shot might come in and in the jungle you mightn't be able to find from whence it come. You rattle a stone in a tin and you can pick it up almost straight away and the Thompson had that sort of rattle that you'd be able to pinpoint it and there's nothing like not being able to be pinpointed. So that was amongst the other reasons - the Austin

11:00 was a reliable gun, lighter than the Thompson, it's only 9 millimetre compared to the .45 but there's not much difference. You hit a bloke with four 9 millimetre bullets and four .45s - he's still a mess and they were interchangeable with one another. If you had a multitude of calibres it's not good - if he runs out of ammo and I've got plenty of .45 and he can only fire .38s that's not much good to him or me. So we tried to do a bit of standardisation.

11:30 **Caboolture- what locality is that?**

North of Brisbane. It's 30 miles north of Roman Street Brisbane and in those days if you were down in Brisbane and you wanted to go back to Caboolture you got in any train going north. They were only steam trains, any train going north. They all had to stop at Caboolture, some of them for water they only got thirty miles. So it didn't matter if the train was going to Rockhampton or Cairns you could still get on it.

12:00 **So you ended up spending a fair amount of time around Brisbane going there and going to 'Craigroyston'?**

Well mixed times, I never spent a lot of time in anywhere except at Mount Gravatt - that's where I did the training of the natives for the WT [Wireless Transmission]. I think I probably spent more time there in total time than... I wouldn't have spent much time at Caboolture

12:30 because we used to go there and do things but we wouldn't be staying there. I only slept there a couple of nights. Whereas Caboolture you spent a bit of time but spent more time in Caboolture when we were back, after, in October, December '45 spent there. But at Mount Gravatt I spent a reasonable amount of time training the natives there.

**Mount Gravatt - that process of training the natives**

13:00 **roughly how long after you joined up with the SIA did that happen?**

I went into the SIA on the 6th of June 1944, was at Darwin, then to Melville Island and then down to... That started just about before Christmas '44 and there was intermittent spaces. I had a few away from them and I think

13:30 Ken McKenzie, he was with me in Gravatt. He took over the training while I was away but see the training was not only teaching them Morse but you don't sit them in a room, you take them out into the bush and I used to dig them out sometimes at night when it was raining. No, it's not a nice thing - you're having a nice sleep, it's raining down there like that but dig them out and drag them out and take them out into the bush and make them send off a message to somebody else whose sitting back nice and comfy in the room but you had to do these things. There's

14:00 no use putting them up in the bush if they haven't had the experience with the rain coming down on their radio set and something like that. They had to learn how to keep it dry. Clean them and dry and there's nothing like practical experience so the worst experience I could give them was going to make things better when they're up there.

**How were those natives sourced? How did they come to be with you?**

Well, the reason is

14:30 a few were picked up and put into as agents and they had not training and they were lost. But Sir Vyner Brooke who'd been the Raja of Sarawak had a secretary, a Scotsman who had turned to Islam, become a Muslim. And he had the idea that we could get some of the natives that had gone to Mecca to make their pilgrimage and insert them. Well,

15:00 you know an Islam should make his pilgrimage to Mecca especially during the Ramadan. And they go there and a lot of them went there and didn't have their fare back, couldn't get back. Now King, or Sheik Ibn Saud was... Saudi Arabia was very pro-allied and the British foreign office went and made arrangements for

15:30 some of them to come out here. Now originally it to be a grandiose thing of I think it was 750 or something like that were going to come out but finally only about twenty came out here. They were offered, and all of them had made their Hajj, you know, entitled to a green turban. Now, to be a Hajji is a man superior as compared to ordinary natives. He was

16:00 respected, orders were obeyed, he's a, let's say like a Roman Catholic priest in the olden days when everybody confessed to him, told him everything, if they sent him to do something... He was a man of superior in the community and that's what it was in those days then and so they'd make ideal intelligence agents so they were brought back, they were trained in wireless telegraphy; that was my job, intelligence

16:30 gathering and goodness knows what else they were trained in and then they were inserted in. I'm very pleased to say that none of our party were lost.

**Did you find that these gentlemen were willing to be involved?**

They were getting well paid. And some of them wanted to get back to, they wanted to be reunited with their families but they were made sure that they never went back to their families. Because

17:00 all of a sudden they'd turn up and you know you went to Mecca, you turn up, how'd you get back here? And there's a bush telegraph that works pretty well. Just like the Australian bush the telegraph works well. Yeah.

**And did you feel like you could trust these blokes from the outset?**

Once I got to know, there was only one I reckon that if I ever saw him drinking beside a pool and I didn't know who he was I'd shoot him. That was a chap called Hallam.

17:30 The rest, when I gained their confidence, they gained my confidence.

**What was the period you worked with these guys?**

Well intermittently all the way from say December '44 to October '45. That would be the period covered which I had contact and training and operational work with them.

**18:00 And how close were you to these guys after that period of training?**

Well, you didn't know what happened. We trained them and then... now what happened there? Toa finished training just after we came back from Nila and I didn't hear anything more

18:30 from him until he turned up in crew party in...[phone rings]

**Can you pick that thought up?**

Toa. We were talking about. Now I'm trying to think when I last heard from him but the next time I heard from him -when I picked him up

19:00 near the.. early in June when he was working out of just near Batavia. He was in the first party that came up and I heard him and I said, 'That's Toa'.

**And how was that reunion?**

I just heard him on the air. He came in with a message. Come up, he was the first one to come up. But see I'd trained them, you know what a wireless operator's what they called fist

19:30 is as distinguishable and yours and my voice. If you're under stress I can tell by your voice. If you're calm and collected I can tell by your voice - same way with a wireless operator's fist; you can tell when they're calm and collected, you can tell when they're under stress and you pick them as well as voices you can pick up somebody on the telephone. It's just one of those things that happen and as soon as Toa had done a group, he wouldn't have needed to have done a group, I said, 'That's Toa'.

20:00 So we knew who everyone. Who was it? Suleiman I think was up in Sumatra and I just knew them. I kept thinking; Baraja, Abdullah Baraja was down in Bath in the southwest of Java - I could tell, didn't need any code names for them. I knew who they were straight away and they knew my fist but see they had faith in me - they knew the Tuan would be looking after them, he'd keep them off the air, he wouldn't waste time giving them messages

20:30 or things there because I'd trained them - keep off the air, keep off the air and I didn't tell them I'd look after them but you had to look after them. And that was it.

**Is that ability to detect someone's fist - were you familiar with wireless operators who didn't have that ability or was that something that most of them did have?**

When you worked with a wireless operator enough, if I talked to you often enough and you rang me up I'd recognise you on the phone. Yes,

21:00 well it's just like voices. Everybody's voice is different slightly, just like everybody's fist is different and you get to know the fist and the voices. There was one time when I was working near Delhi from Caboolture. I'd get the same operator and he'd be doing the same fist and I know it was Christmas and I said, 'M-x-h-n-y' and he sent back, "What's that?" and I said, "M-x-h-n-y." and it was the 24th of December and he didn't work out that I'd sent out "Merry Xmas Happy New Year -

21:30 m-x-h-n-y." And he didn't work it out but I knew his fist. If he was a stranger I wouldn't have done that

but because I knew his fist and I'd been talking to him I wished him a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year.

**You mentioned earlier the Owen generator?**

Onan. O-N-A-N generator.

**Can you tell us about that?**

22:00 Well it was made in American and weighed 160 pounds. They're heavy, ran off petrol.

**And that provided the power?**

That provided the power. Little transistors worked of batteries and portable generators. You know you had to go like that. Put it in a coconut log and that generates power. But the Onan generator was used in the town plan operation because we had

22:30 150 watt transmitter and we had AR88s and RCA - Radio Corporation of America - RCA 88s as receivers. And they are getting upgrading from the little stuff - more powerful, it had the longest range to receive and transmit because we needed it. But the Onan generator worked the 150 watt transmitter and out receivers.

23:00 **We'll go into town plan later - I gather that Melville Island was one of the first places you went to after starting at House 26. Why did they get you out there?**

That was our operational headquarters and they were setting it up. It was just nearby the mission station run by Gribble, a chap called Gribble,

23:30 Missionary Gribble and he'd established his own coast-watching service of the Aboriginals and there was some very fine ones there too. I remember Ginger One was the leader, his name was Ginger One but Gribble had got some little white caps from the navy and some khaki shorts from the navy and they used to act as guards. They'd be on the guards, on the guards, on the walkie talkie, because

24:00 Tanimbar Island's not far up from Melville Island. You know it's only a small row across the water the Arafura Sea up to Tanimbar Islands so they were constantly on guard and they were acting as guards and they were very fine people too.

**Was that your first experience mixing with Aboriginals?**

No. Well, in Wentworthville there was an aboriginal family - their name was Perry. I never realised they were Aboriginal

24:30 because they mixed in, they were just, they were you and me. They were Aboriginal but nobody took any notice. Kenny Perry, he was one of the boys, played cricket, played football, went to school with us, did everything that boys do. We didn't realise there was a colour difference.

**So being up in Melville Island was the first time you saw them not in an urban setting - in a more rural environment?**

25:00 Yeah.

**And how long were you at Melville Island helping set up that situation?**

I think I was only there a couple of weeks. We set it up there but I did mix with the natives a bit there too. I had several meals with them and went hunting with them once and got to know them. Always keep friends with the natives you know. But you know, as I said, several meals with them and they

25:30 took me hunting. They did try to show us a bit of bush craft but bush craft in Melville Islands going to be very different is when you get up in the jungle. Because you, see I'd volunteered to be an operative, you had the choice to be an operative or not. No good disrespect if you weren't but I chose for the operative and anyway it paid money - paid ten shillings a day. King's bounty. So

26:00 I took that and they taught the fellows a few things they didn't know but I don't think there's anything about fighting that they didn't know. They knew a lot about looking after yourself in the scrub, how to make yourself comfortable is the main thing at night.

**When did they offer you that option of being an operative? Was that straight away?**

No. It wasn't offered to me till

26:30 well, around about December, around about Christmas time I think in '44. That was when town plan was first coming up.

**So agreeing to become an operative - what did that entail?**

Nothing. "Will you volunteer to go on operative service into enemy occupied territory. Yes or no?" "Yes." "Right, finish, bang. No - goodbye."

27:00 **Well if it was goodbye would it just be they'd keep you on another course in Australia?**

Yes more like you'd be sent back to the RAAF because once you'd detached from the RAAF, the RAAF don't want to know you. They're gone. I think somewhere in my service record I'm posted number two personal reserve pool and I think that's what it is. What that means is - there's all the odd bods we don't want to know and put them that's what we'll do to them so when he's killed we'll just know which unit he was in.

27:30 **You mentioned the guys in your team that you first met at House 26 - when you were moving around to these places were you always moving as a group or...?**

Oh no. I think White, Lee and myself came down to Brisbane once. That's about the biggest group I moved in. I brought Bugis down on

28:00 leave once to Sydney with me but no you'd just go on your own. I suppose if you need be you could have gone AWOL if you wanted to but it's not in my nature to do that. If they said, "Dick go down to Brisbane and get a ticket, go to Sydney and have a couple of days leave." " That's what I'll do." "Come back in three or four days." which I do.

**So Bugis didn't go to Melville?**

I can't remember if

28:30 he was in Melville while I was there. I mixed Mount Gravatt, Mount Gravatt is where comes Bugis again. That's where he looked after me.

**Now I believe you and Bugis used to talk about the bogey man?**

Well Bugis is from Celebes and that's where the saying bogeyman

29:00 comes from. You know bogeymans that used to scare children, well Abdullah was from Celebes and that's a slang name for, like you'd call a South Australian crow eater Celebes natives are bogis. Spelt b-o-g-i-s.

**So you had him with you in Mount Gravatt and was that where you really cemented that bond?**

29:30 Yes. Do you want Mount Gravatt?

**Yes please.**

Well Mount Gravatt there were two messes; it was the Europeans which if I was the only non commissioned officer and I used to eat there - natives had their mess. I had a little room where I used to sleep and some of the officers used to sleep there. Lionel Morse was the officer in charge. There was Morse, Garland,

30:00 Graham Garland, Ken McKenzie, forget who else. We were quite a happy little group till Captain Pearce ex-federated my stage teacher British army arrived and we woke up before long and I wasn't a commissioned officer and that sort of upset him. I could see him getting upset and said, "Something's going to happen." so I said to Bugis, "Fix me another mess." I said

30:30 "I'm going to get kicked out of here before long I can see it coming." I mightn't have said those words but that's what I said. So he fixed me up a nice little mess in the radio room next to the radio room, a nice bed, sheets, crockery with QR on it - Queensland Railways - got nicked from somewhere. A nice picture of George VI and Queen Elizabeth, some glasses. Nice little thing, ice little thing. I used to get a cup of tea in the morning

31:00 washing all done and I know I invited Chader down there for a meal one night. He was quite surprised at the difference in quality what they got and what I got. Bugis looked after me like that and I said to Pearce that I was going to go to another mess, that I didn't think I was welcome in this one. And he was the chappie that gave me instructions on training the natives and he gave me a book, it's one he'd written, I've still got it out there. He said, "There's a book - that's in Malay"

31:30 and he never gave me any help in translation. If it hadn't been for the little English Bugis...I learnt Malay pretty rapidly then with help from Bugis and the book and the other natives. And a few - if you got a team of natives - and you've always got the pressure on you to do it. Pearce didn't give me any help whatsoever. It was below his dignity to talk to LAC in the RAAF or some of these natives - that was his attitude. You could see it standing out a mile. As I said he was a boong-basher.

32:00 And I ignored him. I got on with my job and taught them. I learnt to speak reasonably fluent Malay.

**So you picked up Malay pretty quickly?**

Pretty easy language to learn. Minimal grammar. When I anyway fluently, I can communicate. I won't say I spoke the correct words but I got the meaning of what I wanted across.

32:30 **What sort of things would you talk to Bugis about when you had some time?**

Would you like to leave the room?

**I'm sure Kylie's [interviewer] heard a lot worse.**

Yeah but it embarrasses me. No, no, he had a great affinity for copulation.

33:00 He believed it was his duty to impregnate every woman within a hundred miles.

**And he was keen to encourage you to do the same?**

No he didn't do that. No, but one incident there. He used to disappear at Mount Gravatt every now and again. Disappear for the night. Now I'm other stupid - I used to keep an eye on these boys because they weren't supposed to go out anywhere and Bugis

33:30 used to disappear and at one stage we had a chain wire fence around the place and anyway one night I happened to be out around the place and I seen Bugis disappear so I followed him. At a distance and see how he got under the fence, hole in the fence "I wonder where you're off to?" so I waited there and early next morning I got up and had a look and no his bunk hadn't been slept in, he's spent the night out there so I came in next morning and I forget what it was anyway I said, "Oh where were you last night?" "Left a message."

34:00 "Where were you last night Bugis? You weren't in your bed. I know." And he confessed he had a girlfriend. So I said, "Alright, ok. Right we'll go and see her one night." "Oh yes Tuan! Come along." So we went along there and she's ugly as a hatful of monkeys. Oh God she was ugly. You close your ears to this. Anyway we had a nice meal there and I knew what he was going to do so I said, "I'm going home Bugis, I'll

34:30 see you in the morning." In the morning I said, "Look Bugis that woman you've got she's as ugly as a hatful of monkeys." "Yes Tuan, yes Tuan. Nobody else touch her, plenty pooki, plenty pooki." There you are, I've said it.

**Thanks Dick. What nationality was the lady?**

I think she had a touch of Aboriginal in here. Aboriginal white but jeez she was ugly.

35:00 But she wasn't a bad cook, it was quite a nice meal that we prepared but I didn't want to spoil his pitch 'Ok. Good luck, best of British luck to you son'.

**Did you have any contact with women around this time? Where they around at all?**

No not very much. I had too much respect for my wife. Well, she wasn't my wife but my girlfriend then. No I

35:30 was one of those fellows that didn't play around. I didn't have time. I didn't get that much leave.

**Did you miss the feeling of having femininity around you?**

No. Not at all.

**So by that stage you had made a commitment to your wife to be?**

36:00 No I hadn't made any commitment. Not any legal commitment or any other thing but while I said we probably hated each other at school. She went to the same church as I did and grew up and mixed . together. I still respected her. We didn't get engaged till the day I got discharged and we didn't get married for another three years.

36:30 **But you had established that you were sweethearts?**

Yeah I think so, yeah. I think our unspoken commitment was probably there. We did click though we weren't supposed to. We weren't astrologically aligned. We weren't. See I'm an earth sign and she's a water sign and earth and water make mud. But we

37:00 busted that theory anyway.

**Did you draw comfort from that relationship at that stage?**

Yes. I suppose you could call it comfort. It was nice to do it, nice to have somebody to write to and get things. She sent me little gifts and goodies.

**After Mount Gravatt**

37:30 **are we moving onto Nila?**

Nila. Serua came before Nila.

**Ok can you take us through that one?**

Well that wasn't very long. That was I think probably about January '45. I was at Snake Bay at the time. There was a party out of Serua, Ken Gillett Lieutenant,

38:00 Keith Ross LAC wireless operator and a couple of natives. Keith Ross got shot in the knee and they

needed a replacement to bring him back. Jack Delaney was sort of, he's on standby ready to go. Unfortunately he'd developed tinea round his crutch and a person who I shall not name said, "Oh they paint you with Miconazole." so I painted round his crutch with Miconazole

- 38:30 and have you ever used Miconazole? It's like being painted with sulphuric acid it's got salicylic acid in it. He got really upset and he was yelling and screaming with pain and we were throwing water on him and the news come in and I think it was McKenzie, McKenzie I think it was, anyway somebody come in and said, "Oh he can't go. Who did this to him?" I said, "Me." he said, "Get your kit you're off." And I stayed only there about
- 39:00 two other three days and Corporal John Riley came out and relieved me and I went back. That's right, I'd started on town plan. Because we were doing a bit of testing between Snake Bay and Caboolture on radio frequencies, that's why I was up there, doing a bit of testing on that. That's when I went out and then come back and that was only a short visit to Serua.
- 39:30 **After Serua...**
- Back to Mount Gravatt, or Caboolture, Caboolture for a time getting stores and equipment and radio equipment ready. The Canadians had come out had ostensibly come to tropicalise, or weather proof their equipment. That was just a cover story because they didn't know much about it,
- 40:00 I knew more about it than they did anyway and I used to go and get French letters, condoms, put my radio valve in them, tie it up and I experimented mixed up a... of soft paraffin that's like Vaseline and beeswax to make a ... used to melt this and stick thing in there and then put them in another one and do the same with that and that tropicalised them alright too. Used to squeeze them all so it got all the air out and that tropicalised the crystals and the radio valves.
- 40:30 And would also act as a bit of packing.
- So that was pretty much you improvising?**
- Well you had to. There weren't that many of us there so you had to do it. Use your initiative and they did that for a while then I was back at Snake Bay. That's when Drake, White, Anderson, Emin
- 41:00 and myself went to Nila.
- 41:30 End of tape

## Tape 6

- 00:43 **We were talking about languages - when Bugis taught you Malay - did learning another language open up your sort of door to a whole new culture?**
- 01:00 Well it wasn't only a language it was religions. They're all Islamic and I had to learn their habits, their likes and dislikes. Now once upon a time I caught Hallam picking his toenails with a fork. Some of their standards of hygiene were not too good - he was down there picking his toenails with a fork so I burst into the room and I threatened to rub some bacon in his face.
- 01:30 Well that was the biggest insult - to use a pig on him - that you could have. That was like, well that was the worst thing you could do to rub a bit of pig on his face. You learnt these little things. I learnt Islamic culture, I suppose you could use the word culture - it's just a new word to me it doesn't mean much to me, culture. Cultures something you grow in a
- 02:00 Petri dish. You know you put a bit of bacteria in it and you grow a culture but their habits and their language - well, it was a great learning experience. Every day a new word, or every day several new words. All the good words and bad words too but as I said I was reasonably fluent in it. I could make myself understood. If I asked them where the Japanese were they could tell me. But still they have a different attitude too. If
- 02:30 you say, 'Where are the Japanese' they go like that. Now where are the Japanese? Well they're coming from there and they're going there. Now if you said, "Where's the Japanese?" you might say, "Over there." you'd turn head but they'd go like that - they've come from there and going there. So you had to learn those little things like that - it's a bit peculiar at first but you soon picked them up.
- 03:00 **Can you talk about some of the habits that the Malays you worked with had that were really different to the habits of Australians? Some of the things that really stood out to you at the time?**
- Things that stood out? Well when I was at Caboolture for a while there was some of them there. I'll give you a habit they had: to keep my eye in I used to get a .22 rifle and go
- 03:30 down with a torch at night when the flying foxes were round and I used the shoot the flying foxes and

by night with a spotlight, just a torch. Had Bugis or someone like that with me and then they'd grab them and they'd cook them and they used to invite me down to share the meal. Well, I always happened to be on watch that meal. I used to be very fond of flying fox. I don't know if I've ever eaten it, I made sure I didn't eat it in

04:00 Caboolture. Habit? It's hard to think of them now. It's something I'd have to think about. You got so used to them. Some of them did their sallets five times a day, some of them didn't, depends on how religious they were. You know, Bugis would do it sometimes - that's why I got a cup of tea in the mornings - before dawn he'd get up and do his sallets. You know what a sallet is?

04:30 Well, a good Muslim must pray to Mecca five times a day and all I used to do, I always had my compass and a watch, now do you know how to tell north by your watch? In the southern hemisphere you put 12 o'clock on the sun and half way between that and the hour hand's north. Now if you know where north is you can work out where Mecca was so if you go into a Muslim country you'll go into your hotel room and you'll look up on the wall and you'll see an arrow. And you wonder what it's for -

05:00 that points to Mecca. So they do their first sallet before dawn if you're a real good one or if you can and the times there. They get down on their little prayer mat and they do a salaam and I'd get me a cup of tea after that. So they used to always tell me these little things because well it just showed them that I was interested in them and that I was their father and protector - I wanted them to do the right thing. So I think that's why I got on reasonably well with them.

05:30 And I didn't like to try and bully them - I had to discipline them sometimes - but I didn't bully them. I know I'm patting myself on the back but that's the way it was. Other little habits - didn't like eating with a knife but they'd eat with spoons and forks. Very modest some of them, very modest. Didn't like other people seeing their bodies. Extremely modest some of them were.

06:00 What else? Give me a clue.

#### **You said sometimes you had to reprimand them...?**

Well they weren't doing their job, they weren't playing, they weren't working hard enough. See of you've got a group of men you've always got to get someone who's feeling a bit tired or something like that or he doesn't want to do this or he doesn't want to do that. I worked on the assumption... I used the Spartan principle. The Spartan principle is to make it as hard as you can in training because when you get out in war

06:30 of in the field it's easy. We've done it. It's not as hard as it was when we were in training - and that's what I worked on. The harder you worked them all in training the easier it was going to be when you get up there.

#### **How did other Australians react to Malays being in their town? It must have been highly unusual at the time.**

In their town?

#### **When you were at Mount Gravatt there was...**

Oh right. Well there were a lot of Filipinos there too.

07:00 Not at Mount Gravatt, but in Brisbane. The American troops in Brisbane, we dressed our fellows and when we let them go into town we dressed them in American uniforms without any badges of rank or just anything - they're just plain uniforms there so they could mix with Filipinos because you can't tell the difference between... Can you tell the difference between a Filipino and a Malay? I don't think you could. Can you tell the difference between Chinese and Japanese or a Korean? You can now but you've only done that by learning it haven't you

07:30 and observing them? Well, the same way people in Brisbane didn't know whether they were Malays, or Chinamen or what, or Filipinos or what they were. So they could get away with it as long as they didn't get into trouble and they didn't either. They got the finger wagged at them about getting into trouble.

#### **What would have happened if people did discover they were Malays? Would they have been treated differently by the Australians in Brisbane?**

Got no idea and didn't have the experience. All my fellows did what I said.

08:00 I put the fear of God, the fear of Allah into them. Well, I said they got to trust me and so if I told them not to go in that area - like there was an American service canteen on the West side of Brisbane - I told them not to go there. And they didn't, they didn't go across the Brisbane river. South Brisbane, not south Brisbane, the west side of Brisbane. You go over the Victoria bridge and it's just along and down there. They told them not... to keep away from that area -

08:30 don't go there. So they didn't. As far as I know.

#### **What would happen?**

Well as far as I know they'd get mixed up with Filipinos and a lot of black aboriginals were there too and they would have picked them. Filipino would have picked them so we just told them to keep away for

there and as far as I know they did. I never had any problems with them. Besides I'd certainly cancel all their leave if they did.

09:00 Make one mistake - you're not getting out of the camp. I tell you I was tough. I can be if I want to be. I'm the easiest bloke in the world as long as you do what I say.

**You took Bugis to Sydney at one point while you were at Mount Gravatt - tell us about that journey?**

Where did you hear this from? I don't think I've told you this.

**Oh, I think you have.**

No, you might have picked it up from somewhere else.

**You mentioned it before.**

09:30 I may have mentioned it but not here today. I'm not as stupid as I look.

**You mentioned it. No, you did mention it before.**

Anyway...

**Tell us about it**

I told Stokes, he was the lieutenant commander in the navy, that time I had a few days leave to go home and see the family and my girlfriend in Sydney. And I said, 'I'd like to take Bugis with me because he needs a bit of a break' so

10:00 we had to travel priority one in the aircraft so we came down to Sydney and I knew what Bugis was going to do - he was going to head for Kings Cross straight away so I wagged the finger at him and said, 'Now you contact me'. He knew how to use the phone and they had a phone at the place at Wentworthville so I told him, 'Now you ring me every day' and I said, "As sure as eggs in a couple of days we're going to get a telegram to come back and it's going to be marked "return immediately". We'll take no notice of it. We'll wait till we get one marked urgent." and I said, "I'll ring you

10:30 and you tell me where you are." and I said, "I'll contact you." I said, "Meet you out at Mascot." So sure enough I think the telegram arrived - ha, didn't get it. And then the one came 'urgent' so I said, "Oh well, better do it." so I went in there and got Bugis, decked him up, went out to Mascot and of course I had no badges of rank and he had no badges of rank and we get out to the air travel people and we go up and say, "We've got to go up to Brisbane. Here's my priority." And there's

11:00 the transport office has a look at it "Oh jeez, priority one. Got to get him on the plane." or words to that effect. These are not actual words but I could see him saying "Oh dear." So he looks around and finds I think a Captain or a Major or something, calls him over and says "Sorry sir, we've got to take you off that plane. These two men have got to go to Brisbane." and this fellow got rather upset and I know he said, looked down his nose and said, "These are only privates!" or

11:30 something like that. "Why have I got to get off the plane for them?" And the aircraft movement fellow said, "Well, these men have priority one sir and you're only going on leave." and I know, he's getting very, very upset and Bugis looks over and goes to him.

**Sounds like a real character. What was Kings Cross like during the wartime?**

12:00 Well I didn't see it. How would I know what it's like? All I knew was what the reputation was.

**Did Bugis tell you what it was like?**

Oh well he had a pretty good time. He slept on the plane all the way back. Because he could curl up and sleep, he'd sleep on barbed wire. Give him a bit of barbed wire and a sheet of corrugated iron and he'd go to sleep.

12:30 **When you took leave in Sydney and you saw your then girlfriend at the time what did you talk about? Did you talk to her about your service or did you talk to the women about those kinds of things?**

Never mentioned it.

**Did she ever ask?**

Yes. My father-in-law did and I tell him, 'I signed the Secrecy Act, Freddy, I'm sorry'

13:00 and he understood and he didn't ask anymore. They used to ask me and I just used to tell them how my health was and things like that maybe I skipped a few things but I didn't tell them what I was doing or where I'd been. Lets say I never got beyond Darwin till after the war but I never mentioned, never went into detail because I was more interested in talking to them and seeing what they were doing because my wife used to work for, she did some nights in a canteen

13:30 on central railway station, Australian canteen. She wouldn't have anything to do with the Americans,

she used to do other work too as well as work she used to work in a rural bank. She kept herself busy like that ship we'd talk about that. But I didn't have that much time it was only a couple of days and I think that's about the only, I think that was the only leave I had while I was there. I told you the old story - you'd do a tropics and do a 12 months and 18 months later you're still there. Didn't mean a thing - you didn't have much leave.

14:00 **At Melville Island you mentioned you had a part in setting up that base - what did that involve?**

Finding a suitable site for transmitters, finding a suitable site and then getting some sort of huts built to put them in, weatherproof, what sort of equipment we've got, how we can arrange it,

14:30 where you're going to put everything. Have we got enough stores or signal pads, pencils? Things like that. Where were our power generators going to go? That sort of thing. It's just like organising a little house - you've got to move into a new house, you've moved into a place, you haven't got a house, you've got some equipment - how are you going to store it? Where are you going to put it? Which is the best place? Where's it protected? Because I said at Melville Island we got a few visits from Japanese planes that used to come and look for us

15:00 and fire a few shots at us sometimes and we got hold of a transport like, it wasn't a Brits buggy [?] but something like that, that sort of a truck. Well we were more interested in saving this Brits buggy than everything else so we built some camouflaged areas and all the wireless operators learnt to drive. Not very well but the natives, the aboriginals there have a very good sense of hearing. They could hear an aircraft coming so as soon as one comes we'd all race for the truck so we could have a drive to drive it

15:30 into the camouflaged area. So we learnt roughly to drive that way. But we never got, the camp never got hit but they did find, they hit the native camp once upon a time because they weren't camouflaged but they never, well they came close to us sometimes. I think they just fired out at random, that was the thing - had a few shots then you'd go back to Tanimbar and say, 'We shot up the Australian camp'.

16:00 **How many Aboriginals were killed when that camp was hit?**

None were killed. No.

**When you were on Melville Island this is the first time you encountered Japanese secret police?**

No. The secret police they didn't, they operated in Java and Bali.

**But this is when you heard about their operations when you were in...?**

16:30 Well, you sort of learnt about them. I used to tune into Tokyo Rose and get the news too from her. She was a propaganda machine from Japan and she did her best to lower the morale of all the allied troops making all suggestive sort of things and all sorts of things. But she was interesting to learn. You learnt the war wasn't going too good. I think the Americans might have taken some of the Philippines again ready to move on but as far as she was concerned the Japanese were holding out their will and

17:00 they killed Americans by the millions - soon no more Americans. She was a propaganda machine but it was nice to listen to her.

**Was everyone listening to her or was that because you were a wireless operator?**

Well I was a sneaky wireless operator. I found out her frequency. Like I used to listen to the ABC in Perth sometimes to get the latest news from there.

**Did you ever think that maybe**

17:30 **she knew the allied forces were also listening to her and giving you confusing messages?**

Oh yeah, she knew that and fellows used to listen to her and laughed at her. I know one thing - she tried to discourage the servicemen from taking their Atebrin. That's got you hasn't it. Atebrin is an anti-malarial - it turns you yellow. You've got to take an Atebrin tablet every day.

18:00 It turns you yellow but it gives you protection against Malaria. Well Malaria's a very debilitating disease. You get a dose of Malaria you're down and out. Fatal many times. And if she could discourage anyone from not taking their Atebrin and a servicemen gets Malaria well, he's out of combat. So they used to do things like that.

**How did she used to try to do that? What did she say?**

Oh - it'd stop your sex-drive. And we used to say that doesn't matter

18:30 a bit to us. There's nothing here. Well that's one of the things anyway. Such like things. She'd put in inferences that it'd effect your body health if you took them.

**Can you tell us what you knew about the Japanese secret police at the time? They were very feared I heard...**

- They'd make the Gestapo look like kindergarten teachers. They're cruel, yeah. The only two
- 19:00 that I had anything to do with was Ishiawa who was known as 'Yellow Tiger' - very cruel man. He was in Bali. In Bali - you know those islands? You go from island to island up there just like you'd go from Eastwood to West Ryde and his offsider Kawasiwa, he wasn't so bad, but Yellow Tiger, Ishiawa was... Sorry I got the names back to front.
- 19:30 Kawasiwa was Yellow Tiger, Ishiawa was his offsider. He had bad teeth and he used to have a yellow moustache sometimes so they called him 'Yellow Tiger'. I believe he was hanged later on. Both of them. At one of the war criminal tribunals, he was executed.
- Why did he have such a formidable reputation?**
- 20:00 He was cruel, I can't tell you why. He had a lot of collaborators. I've got a bit of information out there if I could refresh my memory with it.
- Do you remember one particular incident?**
- No, I don't remember any particular incidents about him. I only remember his name Kawasiwa and Ishiawa.
- And people spoke about him in the intelligence services?**
- They knew their names.
- 20:30 And a lot of the collaborators too that were with the Japanese - they were known and they got the chop too. Justice was pretty quick in some of those war tribunals. There was none of this trial by jury or things like that. If it got pointed out and proved guilty - bang! Well it had to be.
- 21:00 **You spoke about the Japanese secret police - do you know if they knew of you?**
- Yes. As individuals? Well they knew Gerry Ascombe as an individual. Now he was the Canadian Sergeant from the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical engineers that was a Sergeant in our London party and they knew about him. We all had prices on our head.
- What was the price on your head?**
- 21:30 Got no idea. Wasn't interested, they weren't going to get my head I can tell you that. Not with me on it anyway. No but I know that Gerry had a price on his head. I could almost find out for you but you'd have to give me time. Gerry unfortunately died but somewhere I've got written down what he wrote about that. He was a Canadian - I kept in contact with him after the war. He married an Australian girl, and he turned blind. He came out here on a visit with some of his mates
- 22:00 that had been out here before and we had a couple of dinners together but wasn't phased with his blindness. He could even pour wine - he was blind. Stick his thumb over the edge and say, "Don't mind a bit of thumb?". And I noticed when we were eating - we had a roll and he was the only one that didn't have any crumbs on the table cloth around him.
- Amazing. Getting back to the Japanese secret police - you said they made the Gestapo look like**
- 22:30 **kids - why? What were the Japanese secret police renowned for?**
- Cruelty. Cruelty.
- What kind of...? Can you elaborate?**
- Thrashing with bamboo, bayoneting. I can't elaborate much but I know they had the reputation for... If they wanted a confession from you, you might as well give it to them straight away because they're going to get it within a short time.
- 23:00 They had various, devious means of torture too. They liked to use the old torture - that's what I understand. Never intimately connected with them but that's just anecdotal.
- You said the Japanese secret police were cruel but did you also have a respect for their abilities?**
- No. I didn't have respect for them at all. I didn't
- 23:30 want anything to do with them thank you. The further away from me they were the better I liked them. No, we were never closely associated with anybody like that. I was never closely associated to any of the enemy except once and that was on Nila. That close association was a confrontation which five of them landed and two of them got away. We got the other three.
- 24:00 **At Melville Island - how did you establish intelligence with the natives?**
- Well they were aboriginal natives there mostly.

**I mean that you were in contact with in Java.**

Oh, through the radio. There was some up in the Halmaheras, there was some up in Celebes, there was some up in Borneo.

24:30 Some up in Borneo at different times. See an agent might go into a place for two or three days, he might go in for two or three weeks, he might go for a couple of months. See we left in June and didn't come back till October on town plan but the other place in Nila, we were only there about eight days.

**How did you know who you could trust?**

You didn't but our party leaders, they'd

25:00 been more briefed than us. We had people like Bugis and Nor and Amin that could talk to them and we always took gifts. You know you might take a few rolls of cloth or something, fish hooks and needles I found were wonderful presents. Of course you took a gift, you made friends with them and treated them with respect and then got their trust. You could never be

25:30 fully trustful of anybody because you only need one collaborator in the tribe and their a gone camp.

**Did you find that they could be bought? Would the Japanese go and give them gifts and would they get the same loyalty?**

Yes. Japanese bought a lot of collaborators in Java, especially the Chinese. They didn't get too many Hindus - lot of Hindus in Java - didn't get too many of them but they did get a number of Chinamen. I only tell you that

26:00 from they ended up in the war tribunal, war crimes tribunal.

**Why was it they were able to attract the Chinese to their cause and not the Hindus?**

You'd have to ask them.

**Did you find that as Australians that the natives in Java related to you better because you were a colony than they did say the British or the Dutch?**

They related to us better because I think we treated them better. They hated the

26:30 Dutch. The Javanese absolutely hated the Dutch. In Borneo the Dyaks and some of the other tribes, the Sea Dyaks and the...what's the ones starting with M? Mobits or something like that and the Punans. The British treated the natives there much better and they got on much better. But in Java, the Dutch were hated because the Dutch were arrogant, I'd say cruel, bombastic,

27:00 treated the natives like dirt. This is a chance to get myself back. That's why the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity has prospered so well when the Japanese came down. They were going to free Southeast Asia from the white man's rule. They were going to get plenty to eat, plenty of money, all the white mans things and naturally they all turned to become pro-Japanese. It wasn't till after the wait thing that the food shortage came and the Japanese showed

27:30 their true colours that people reversed saying, 'Well the Poms weren't too bad anyway'. But they didn't do that to the Dutch. A few of them did. I won't say that goes for 100% of the population. Like Julius Tahia, he was an Indonesian, he worked for NEFIS [Netherlands Forces Intelligence Section] which is the Netherlands, East Indies intelligence service which is part of the Allied Intelligence Bureau. He stayed pro-ally. Not so

28:00 long ago he passed away. He was a friend of mine; he was a very nice fellow. Indonesian originally, married an Australian girl.

**Was he a Javanese Hindu?**

No a Javanese Christian.

**How long did it take for the Javanese to turn?**

28:30 Well let's say I can't tell you how long but lets say towards the end of, the latter half of '44 when the Allies started to win and in June they went into Europe and things started to get a bit brighter

29:00 for us and things got worse for the Japanese and the food shortage was the main thing. The price of rice and all the other things went up considerably and the Japanese were just taking all the rice paddies. They were just going through them - that's when the turning point started. And it started to effect the local population like that. And the Japanese were very cruel to the Javanese for some reason - I don't know why. A lot, you might say a few of our

29:30 fellows ended up in prison camps and things like that but many, many, many, many more Javanese ended up in labour camps and working like that for the Japanese. They worked them till they died.

**Do you think they treated them worse than they treated Australians?**

Yes. I'd say without too much thought - spontaneously - yes.

30:00 **Why would that be?**

I can't give you a positive answer on that I'm afraid but nonetheless that's what they did. They treated the Indians very badly too. The Japanese if they caught some Indians or something like that they'd instead of chaining them up they used to put wire through the Achilles heel and bind their two legs together like that.

30:30 **Ouch.**

Stops them from running. Sheep, easy. You asked me why they were cruel. That was one of their favourite tricks. A piece wire, only need about eight inches of wire, through the Achilles heel there, wind it up, tighten them stops them running away doesn't it? Can't hop too far like that.

31:00 **Hearing these stories about the Japanese did you grow to hate them?**

Let's say I don't like them. But unfortunately when they played the French in the rugby league I was barracking for them. I was barracking for them because of their defensive play. They did, they played that well. That defensive play against the French there they played a real good game. They didn't win, but they struggled hard and I think that's why I was barracking for them. I never thought I'd do it.

31:30 I went down the club and I said, 'I never thought I'd do this' but the Japanese had been very good to our unit because I was invited over there to act as a, well they called me an advisor something for a film. Unfortunately McCann and I didn't agree with what they said so they whizzed us off but later on a group from the midget submarine association came out here and we were asked to entertain them. At first we said, 'No'

32:00 but then the Department of Foreign Affairs pleaded with us because of trade figures - this was a long time from the 80's and we go along, reluctantly along and they were a pretty good type. They were association associated with the Japanese Submarine attack on Sydney, and in fact one of the I think she was Aunty or something like that of one of the blokes that were killed presented Joan - that's my wife - with a lovely wallet and card and things like that

32:30 and I said, 'Hey-o, didn't think much of her nephew did she? We knock her nephew off and she gives you this' and they gave her a key ring of the kamikaze badge - it's a chrysanthemum - it only opens once and then it dies. It's out there somewhere. That's off the point though - these are sidelines.

33:00 **At the time did you think that you had the trust of the natives you worked with? Were you fairly confident of that or...?**

I was always aware.

33:30 Always aware, trust few. Trust comes in a degree - except for Bugis and Nor never 100% trust but yes with Bugis - yeah. One thing that I regret though is I never kept in contact with him because if ever there was a person that would have sponsored him in this country I'd have sponsored him. That's one of the things - when we left Camp Freeman on about the

34:00 20th of October - never contacted him since. Never tried to. Only in these recent years that I wish, I curse myself for not making an attempt to do it because he was a great fellow.

**Do you know if he's still alive?**

Don't know. Never had anything to do.

34:30 There was one of the members of our association was in the SIA. He was 2IC of the Bintang Siang - the boat we had - he was also our conducting officer. Do you know what a conducting officer is? Well he's a sheep dog. He rounds you up, sees you've got all your equipment, gets the equipment you want, looks after you and does everything for you because when you're going on an operation you're a little bit edgy and the conducting officer

35:00 is the one that finally kisses you goodbye and he looks out and does everything. He was our conducting officer. He was in the bank before he enlisted and because he could speak Malay the Bank of New South Wales, no the National Bank put him into Batavia which became what is it now? Jakarta, for a while and he happened to meet up with one of the chaps he knew and he sent his children, paid for his children to

35:30 go to school. And I'm very sorry that I never did the same thing for Bugis 'cause I would have. One of my sins of the mission.

**What were you doing in Nila?**

36:00 Well from my assumption now, let's go back a bit further. Transport was always hard to get for insertions of parties. A lot of them could be only done by submarine or surface boat. Submarines main job was to sink enemy shipping and they didn't like special missions of asserting agents, it distracted from their main thing and they were dangerous. To take a submarine in close

36:30 thing and land a couple of agents in - it wasn't a thing submarine commanders liked to do. So this is my assumption now that Nila was the establish of a base for surface craft. That they would be able to

penetrate easier into enemy occupied territory and when we were there we had to do tests for tide, soil samples on the beach and things, availability of water supply, weathers,

37:00 the natives were friendly. They'd been a party there once before and had come out. On the way there we had to pick up from Serua a couple of what they call MSX kits. They were kits that if any air crew were shot down, they would know that somewhere on this island there were rescue kits: food, radio transmitter, receiver, medical supplies and such things like that. Little kit.

37:30 About a bit bigger than that, like that. They've got all the little things in there that they need to call for help. We had to pick up a couple of those - plant one in Nila and one in Teor. That's another little island not far away. So I feel that this, our reconnaissance of Nila was in preparation for the establishment of a base that was known as the Salmon Project.

38:00 My opinion.

**What was the Salmon project?**

That was the establishment of the base at Nila as a base for surface craft.

**How did you spend your days at Nila?**

Working, setting up radio, doing schedules, keeping watch, there was plenty to do. It was a 24 hour day. You had a bit of sleep when you can. I didn't have many contacts with the natives. Drake and

38:30 who was it? Amin. Amin was the ones that contacted the native chiefs and things like that and gave them gifts and they were on our side.

**How did you know they were on your side?**

Well they took the gifts and they were friendly. That's about on our side. Pointed out where we could get water. See waters a thing that you can't transport very well. You can transport food and you can transport a lot

39:00 of concentrated food but you can't transport concentrated water so you've got to have a reasonable supply and you've got to have a consistent supply and if you can find a nice little palatable spring well, that's a good place to establish a base.

**Is there anything you remember at Nila that stands out? Was it a difficult time for you?**

Well, we had to get out. Well, every now and again - I suppose I'd better enlarge on it - every now and again a Japanese

39:30 patrol boat used to come by. The Japanese would send out patrol boats. A long time ago one had landed at Nila and had a look and one day one appeared on the horizon and we got warning of it. This time they landed. Five of them came ashore in a dinghy, we took to the bush, there was a confrontation.

40:00 **Between you and...?**

Between our party and them. Two of them got away back to the boat. They sprayed us with machine gun fire. We couldn't retaliate because all we had was one .303 rifle and some Austen guns and they didn't have the range. The rifles wouldn't have done any good anyway. Bill White had a go at them but it didn't do any good - he had the .303. So we decided, Drake decided that it was better to pull out because when that

40:30 boat got back to the Japanese base they weren't going to be very happy. Now the old sergeant major said, "What's happened to the other three blokes?" and they'd say "They got them on Nila." "We'll see about that eh? Come on fellows we'll give these blokes a going over."

**Until then your existence there was unknown to the Japanese?**

Yeah as far as I know. The boat didn't have any radio equipment on it. I determined that because I couldn't see any radio masts or aerials or anything that looked like it would be a radio

41:00 so I'd say it was an un-radioed boat. So that gave us, I reckon that gave us time to get out so I just went up and yelled for help: "Come and get me!"

**Who came and got you?**

The boat that put us in that came from Snake Bay. I think they call them HDMLs - Harbour Defence Motor Launches - they were just an ordinary motor launch boat. Like a, bit like a motor cruiser only a bit longer and not so fat and not so high and not so luxurious.

41:30 End of tape

00:45 **Finishing up on the Nila incident confronting the Japanese - it was a party of five Japanese and your group killed**

01:00 **three of them. How close to that conflict did you get? Were you involved in that? Can you take us through that?**

Well it's something that comes to me every now and again. The Japanese landed and they didn't expect anything because we saw them and we took to the bush.

01:30 They landed, they saw in the sand our footprints because we at that time had jungle boots on, they were rubber boots with canvas right up to the thigh and they would know jungle boot foot prints as well as anything you know. I think they were Japanese marines rather than sailors themselves. Anyway they had a bit of a squawk and spread out. The chap who was in charge of them I'd say would be an NCO, spread them some down there and some down there.

02:00 Do you want me to go into detail?

**Yeah.**

Ah, I know we were in the bush there hiding and I went up and had a look towards the wireless station they had there. Anyway, burst of Austin fire and an ack rifle shot came down. It was a rifle shot at first and down there where Fred Anderson

02:30 was. So we knew it was on then. Drake had told me to go up to the Wireless station there and protect that so I went up there. After a while I went down there and I was going along the track and I met this young nip and I say now he was all of sixteen years old - he was just as scared as I was. I reckoned I'd had more training and I got him first. Pushed him into a bush, went back up there,

03:00 nothing was happening. Nothing happened, couldn't hear any sound there. Now I might be a little not right in this but I'll be, but in general could be right. When I went down I knew where Bill White was and he was looking one way and I was looking the other way covering one another's back. Anyway Bill flipped up his - he had the rifle - boom! Right next to my right ear.

03:30 He got another one that had just come out of the bush. So that accounted for three of them - the others had just taken off and that was it. Later on I had to go back and take all the badges off this chappie - that's how I reckoned they were in the marines. Emptied out his pockets, and I buried him in the undergrowth because you know you knock a bloke off you've got to go bury him. Sometimes I wonder if he's still there. And

04:00 then they went off in their boat and they got back and they got off and the two of them in the boat got away there. We hadn't tried to have a shot at that and then after that Drake says, "Well look - we're compromised - they're going to get back we can't... Can you see any radio equipment on?" so I looked through the binocular and I said, "I can't see any sign of any aerials or things on the boat. It just looks like normal rigging. There's nothing that I can see'." so I said, "I wouldn't put that at 100%." or words to that effect. You know I can't tell you the actual words but I said,

04:30 "I think it'd be a good idea." and he said, "Yeah. Go and get us pulled out." So I went up there and pulled us out. The rest of the camp we had we started dismantling and cleaned up everything because everywhere we went we didn't leave any sign of where we'd been because we didn't want the natives getting into trouble. The last thing is before you're completely dismantled except a couple of aerials and the receiver and transmitter and when our rescue boat appeared over the horizon we were waiting and I just started to pull all the rest of it

05:00 down, pack it up and got it down to the beach and we got off and got away again. Come back to Snake Bay. Then I went back to recommence - debriefing of course - recommence the town plan operation.

**Was that the most intense moment for you of the war - that confrontation?**

That's my direct

05:30 contact. Visible, other later on up in Java. I saw them but I said I smoked more cigarettes than I fired bullets in Agra. I think I could safely say that was the only bullets I ever fired in anger.

**How do you think the experience affected you?**

It's made a big mark on me. Still think about it sometimes. Think poor bastard - I said

06:00 he was all of sixteen years old. Just a kid. I wasn't much older but it doesn't matter, I had the training, I had the experience. Got him first, it was going to be him or me. I know we looked at each other - I don't know how long. It could have been a second, it could have been four minutes. No it wasn't that long. I reacted quicker.

06:30 **That confrontation - was that something once you'd been taken off the island - was that hard to put out of your mind?**

No. Not at the time. We were too busy. I'd done my duty. My duty was to kill the enemy. My aim is good. The other that Bill got, I still think about him too. He's still

07:00 up there somewhere as far as I'm concerned but if Bill hadn't had got him he'd have got us. Because I had my back to him.

**So that was the second one and who got the third one?**

Brett Anderson got the first one. Brett Anderson got the first, I got the second and Bill White got the third.

**Did you blokes get together and talk about how you felt.**

We probably did. We didn't worry about how we felt, we just got one and we were still here. We won.

07:30 Doesn't matter how. We didn't go in for any counselling or anything like that, just put down now, made your report that's it. Boom. It's a way of life.

**After that experience did you move directly into the town plan?**

Yes.

08:00 **Can you take us through that?**

I've mentioned the town plan was originated by the Scottish secretary of Sir Vyner Brooke and these natives come out. Well that's when I went back, down to Mount Gravatt and started to prepare their radio training. They had intelligence gathering teaching also but you've got to learn how to do sketches and know what to look for. We not only did military intelligence, we did general and economic intelligence too

08:30 because a lot of our intelligence... The natives went into the towns and the villages. They mixed with the population, they learnt the price of things, they kept their eyes open as I said general and economic and military intelligence. Up at Probolinggo that's where they drew sketches of the defences round there. In other places they drew sketches of places like where there were tank traps and fox holes and such like things.

09:00 All the information you could gather on what the enemy was doing.

**So these operatives were all going into Japanese occupied areas?**

Yeah. Where a white man couldn't go. See, you couldn't put a white, that was the problem, you couldn't put a white man into native areas. You'd stand out straight away so that's why these natives were used. Because they were Hajjis, they had prestige. The natives would talk to them

09:30 and do what they say or they'd do what he says and they'd give him much more information and confidential information too. As I equate the priest of olden days where everybody confessed to him and he knew everything that was going on, well that was the same way they were too. And Islam has got a very good proselyting agency where they go forth and try and do the converts and as I said the Hajjis they were well respected people.

10:00 **So you had those operatives in place - what was the process from there for you? Did you then move to Christmas Island?**

No we weren't in in Java for very long there because we were too close to a radio station they just put us in.

**So you were initially landed in Java?**

Yes. Southeast Java.

**And what was your role to be there?**

Well we were a repeater station for them, and did our own general intelligence too. We had to do it. That's how Bugis and Nor that used to

10:30 go and do these little things while we hid in the scrub. And our idea was get there information, code it and send it back to Australia.

**So take us through landing in Java and why you ended up moving from there?**

Well initially we left Brisbane on a Royal Navy fast escort carrier. I believe we did a parachute course of two jumps

11:00 in one day. One out of I think Leyburn, I'm not very sure of that, went to Leyburn to have a look to see if I recognised if I'd been there before and then one over Caboolture where a lot of high ranking, I suppose high ranking, anyway ranking people were watching what you were doing. Four of us and a torpedo came out of a Liberator and they said, 'That's satisfactory. We can drop them into Java'. So you had to book your transport

11:30 a long time ahead and that was booked but unfortunately the amount of stores we had and the aircraft carrier, sorry correction - that's not a good Naval term - it's a fast escort carrier is the correct naval term. I learnt that to my regret. Only had swordfish and the amount of stores and personnel they had to

drop us in they'd be running back and forth to Java probably for several days so it was changed when we were in the ocean and the prau [boat]

- 12:00 - that's when we transferred to there. I now believe that Prow was under the auspices of Force 136. It worked out of Trincomalee and Ceylon and they put us in there, helped us along there and they were the ones that picked us up and took us to Christmas Island. Now we knew there was Japanese on the north coast of Christmas Island so they landed us on the south coast. When we got there
- 12:30 Chader and Bugis - and there were Malays there too - found out that they'd been a band of marauding deserters from the Indian army. When the Japanese came down these Indians had turned from their British office, slew them and became a marauding band, partly pro-ally but sort of going around the Island and living on there like that. And Chader decided that well
- 13:00 the way they were going round that he'd heard, that we'd better get out of this place because we need a reasonably safe place because we were going to be on the air working all these stations and back to Australia. We were going to have to spend a fair bit of time on the air and we wanted a nice little safe spot where we could be not worried by too many intrusions from the enemy so then it was decided that we'd go to Cocos Island.

**So it was Java, then Christmas, then Cocos?**

Yeah.

- 13:30 **And what was the problem with the Java situation - why did you have to move to Christmas?**

We were too close to Japanese base and there was a Japanese high-powered Japanese transmitter very much close to us. Now when a transmitter transmits it sends out also a ground wave, not only go out in the air but the ground wave comes along and the strength of it just clogged our, I just couldn't get out. I spent about 72 hours just with the radio on all the time trying to get out

- 14:00 to Snake Bay to say 'Help, help! Get us out of this place'. We were just too close. Now why we were inserted there I don't know. I've always thought about that whether there was a pinprick on the map, whether the Prow Captain decided that we'd dump them there or what it is. I feel that there was no reconnaissance done on that area. No aircraft had been sent over by the RAAF to take photos and see if there was anything there because nobody in their

- 14:30 right mind would have out a party of our size of seven into that area so close to the Japanese base. Somebody blew something there.

**Could you tell us what happened after leaving Christmas Island?**

Well that was very simple - we just got picked up and taken over to Cocos Island by the same prow so I think he was just sort of a wandering thing round. He was looking for, he had a

- 15:00 fair sized gun on it, when I say a fair sized gun - it'd probably be about 50 millimetres. About an inch gun, what's 50 millimetres? That's two inches isn't it? Yeah it'd be somewhere between a one and two inch gun. He would be running around looking for targets of opportunity. If he saw a little Japanese vessel... He wouldn't take on a destroyer but if he saw a little vessel he'd say 'We'll barrel this'. Because some of our other units and things like that, they used to wander around
- 15:30 looking for targets of opportunity. If you see anything lets give it a you know. I know that one of the parties from Filo was running along the coast, saw a Japanese radio station so they said, 'Ah! Target of opportunity. We'll belt this'. So that's what it is.

**So what happened for you once you got to Cocos?**

Well, once we got to Cocos Island nobody knew we were coming and they viewed us with a great deal of suspicion because units of the British army, the RAF and some of the Indian army were there. They'd just

- 16:00 arrived there and were starting to build an airfield. That was so that Liberators and other things could go and bomb Java because it's not that far from Java down there. And we were viewed with suspicion but well, it was all sorted out and we were given a little spot down the end of West Island, just near the Burial Island, Poolo Marau or Maria or something like that.

- 16:30 That's where the Malayan population used to bury their dead. On that Island there. So we had ghosts walking around with us.

**And...?**

Well we set up our station. The first one to come through was Toa that was crew, later on... Now when was that? That was in June.

- 17:00 I know on the 25th of June, I think it was the 25th of June or somewhere round there, there was to be an eclipse of the moon which I'd heard about. So I told the natives I was going to send the moon away. They didn't believe me but when the moon disappeared in the eclipse next thing I was almost worshipped when I brought it back. I made the most of it. They said, "Ye Gods!

- 17:30 He's sent the moon away and brought it back!" We were there for a while and we set up then the other station started to come in. Cayenne, Bath, Dover, all came in. And Bath who was Abdullah Baraja he was from the south west coast of Java, just near the Sunda Strait he told us once that he was having a bit of equipment trouble, he had some sketches and maps and such like things he'd done and
- 18:00 he couldn't transmit them - what could we do about it? Could we pick him up? And we thought "Well, we'll let somebody else do that." and Chader said, "No. It's our responsibility. We've got to go and get them." so we went to the RAF or the Royal Navy whoever was there and got hold of a boat and a crew there and we went and got them. Chader, Bugis and myself went in and got them. Give him some new equipment, some new stores and a new thing and got his map and come back to Cocos Island.
- 18:30 We got chased by a patrol boat there but we outran that. They fired a couple of shots at us but not a shot was fired at them in anger but on the way back just when we got away two spitfires from 136 squadron appeared, RAF to cover us. A bit late in covering but I can tell you the name of the two pilots - one was Gus Youngblood and the other was called Innuck. I still correspond with Gus's wife. Because you
- 19:00 didn't look good. Every Christmas I sent her a calendar or a Christmas card or something like, Gus died, when I went to England the Orient Express runs from London to Bournemouth - he lived in Bournemouth so I decided to take my wife on the Orient Express down to Bournemouth for a day and we went down and had the day with Gus Youngblood and his wife Horrick and I still every Christmas send a nice Australian calendar because is a great feeling when something like that
- 19:30 appears over you to cover you and the other chap was Innuck and I can't remember his other name.

**So the broader picture of town plan involved your group, which was the London team...**

London party. We were London party.

**...and what were the other teams involved?**

Bath.... Crew, Cayenne, Bath and Dover as I said before. Now Leeds was due to go in and by map I saw they went... That was marked where

- 20:00 we went in first, they were supposed to go up North near, well close enough to Batavia - it'd be along that way. West of Surabaya. Hove I heard mentioned once and I've got no idea of Hove. But if those six parties come together that would make the wireless operators that I trained. Now Dela Baraja was Bath, Suleiman was Dover,
- 20:30 Hallam I can't remember him but I'd have to do really deep thinking to think who was what but as I said I knew them all and they knew me so they no way could have had a foreign wireless operator be substituted and we had a contingency plan for if this happened too. Literally I was to keep on working but we'd know the information coming in was false but these contingency - if an enemy wireless operator
- 21:00 had substituted us well I could tell if they were under duress. If they were under duress I could tell by the tone of their fist just like you can tell when I'm emotional or under duress I could tell that. So we had contingency plans of what we would do if that happened.

**So was your party the main coordinating group that were picking up the signals?**

- 21:30 That's right. We were what you called the repeater station. We'd pick that up and we'd transfer the information back to Snake Bay. Now, I mentioned during North West Area Headquarters 11th Sig Unit the wireless transmitting telegraphists and the ciphers never mixed. We did our own coding. The book that we used for the coding was in the four by fours, it was on Hydroponics. Now what do you want to know about Hydroponics? Because it's the only book we had. You'd do a page, a line
- 22:00 in there like that and then that would be initial... a very simple code. It could be cracked by any cryptologist with twenty four hours but by the time twenty four hours was over it was too late anyway. It didn't matter. And we used to get that - sometimes it'd be in Malay, sometimes it'd be English. So there were three wireless operators so one of them might or two of them might be working. If we had crew party, you'd always have two - one working the other on standby
- 22:30 because you never know if your sets going to blow. When we were initially kitted out they were only going to give us one Waltham watch and I demanded, I was the senior wireless operator I demanded that the wireless operators had one watch each. You never know when ones going to stop or lose it or something's going to happen. Every sparky gets a watch which is fair enough and there'd always be two working and they'd work 24 hours a day. The schedules were
- 23:00 all worked out. We might have you at two o'clock in the morning, you at four o'clock the next morning or afternoon. We mightn't have you for another three or four days but we all had these schedules worked out and Rocher, Colonel Rocher who had been with the SOE [Special Operations Executive] in Belgium, nearly got caught because the silly bugger used some radio aerial, put it along his gutter and he hadn't weathered it - it was still bright copper. Silly bugger, but he did the signals plan. He not only did that - he mucked up the time schedules.

23:30 See the worlds divided into time as you know. It's four o'clock here, it's two o'clock in Perth. Well unfortunately when he looked down at the map he drew straight lines whereas the lines come down they go round islands, they don't have Java on one time this side with the line going on, on the other and he mixed up and he cost us a bit of problems with crew coming up until I'd worked out what he'd done. As I said he'd taken one time

24:00 for the whole of... ah, two times for Java and it's not. It's one time. And after that was worked everything was hunky dory. It still cost me a bit of petrol and worry. I let him know too when I saw him but he'd go in, work out a signal plan and he'd be in there a couple of days full of Benzedrine, he'd be shooting himself up with Benzedrine trying to work out a signal plan.

#### **How long were you at Cocos**

24:30 **involved in that operation?**

Well we went other Java, back... Well we didn't leave there till the 18th or 19th of October. Gradually, Chader got drawn out first. The war come, 15th the word come it's all over. We didn't believe it. But gradually we did believe it and then Chader was drawn out first, McCartney

25:00 was drawn out second, Lee was drawn out third - I think Chader was going back to Borneo because they needed him there and what was it? The British Civil Administration Unit or something. He got pulled out first. That left Ascombe, Bugis, Nor and myself to clean up the place so we gave a lot of the stuff to the natives and had our bags packed and one day the signal came through, you know, disband so we packed up what

25:30 we could do. Gave some of the food we had and some of that to the natives and went down the airstrip and got a plane back to Perth. When we got to Perth, Drake met us there. Last time I'd seen him was on Nila. He wanted my log books, my Waltham watch and said, 'Now you must never, ever say you were in Dutch National Service Ever, ever'. So there's the official secrets act broken again but I don't really care. But he wagged his finger very emphatic

26:00 about that. But I did have some documents that were not shown to the Dutch too. But see the British didn't arrive until October in Java. It was once of the last places that they were. And at that time, what a minute I went to Probolinggo once, when was that? That was the north coast of Java. When was that? I forget, it was some time anyway.

26:30 **How did you feel when you got the news that the war was over?**

Hooray! Going home, finished, had it. Chader (TAPE ERROR) he said, 'If you come back to Borneo with me I'll make you a millionaire in a year' and I said, 'No Skip, had enough'. Wish I'd have gone now. I was too eager to get back. Too eager to be a civilian. And

27:00 back at Caboolture, I was still working there, we used to work London, Melbourne, Brisbane, New Delhi - I forget where else too - from there. But too eager to be a civilian. Had enough.

#### **So you did continue to do a little bit of work with the SIA after the war was officially over?**

Yeah well, see that's say NEFIS, North East Area, which was the Coastwatchers, Z Special Unit, Services Reconnaissance Department

27:30 which was Z Special Unit anyway, closed down. We never closed down, we just moved to new premises and still going and I say for the record now there's now ASIS - Australian Secret Intelligence Service - who's the overseas intelligence gathering part of the Commonwealth Government Defence Academy. Or defence service forces.

28:00 **So when was it that you got back to Sydney and returned to your civilian life?**

I got back to Sydney around about the 25th of February. Went out to the showground, got discharged. No before I left that I went to Caboolture, not Caboolture, down to 'Craigroyston'. Saw Stocks, he came to me and he said, 'I'm going to pay you a king's bounty because you fellows done a blood money - ten shillings a day'

28:30 That amounted to a fair bit, more money than I'd ever seen in my life in cash, you don't sign for it. Slush money. So that's from the British Foreign Office pay you that so with that tucked inside my singlet came down to Sydney and out to the showground, discharged and 111 days accrued leave - that's what they owed me. So that all added up at ten and six a day. So I was a wealthy man for a while.

29:00 And on the 27th of February I was discharged and on the 27th of February I became engaged.

#### **What were your priorities at that stage?**

Well they vocational guidanced me and the counsellor or whatever they call him now, or the interviewer said, "Now what did you do before you

29:30 joined the air force?" and I said, "I was a schoolboy." "What did you intend to do after the war?" I didn't reckon I'd make it. He said, "Well, we'd better give you a vocational guidance test." So they gave me a vocational guidance test and said to me "You should be a pharmacist. You've got the education for it.

We'll get you war service matriculation, we'll send you to Sydney University to be a pharmacist, find yourself a master to be an apprentice." So I did. My mother-in-law

30:00 did that - she went to the local chemist and said, "My son's just become a chemist and you need an apprentice." My mother-in-law was a great woman, she really was. So was my father-in-law, but ended up an apprentice there and it wasn't till we were go to the university that Withers, White and Wood ex-air force. Ted White, Ian Wood ex-merchant navy,

30:30 wireless operator on the Manoora, he was a wireless operator. We worked out we'd all been vocational guidance on the same day and we all ended up as pharmacists. We thought "Gee, that's a bit of a coincidence." so we went and saw... And when we got to university there's another what you'd call a generation gap. There was the young students there of eighteen years old and us - youths, children - and us fellows that had been discharged from the war at 23, 24

31:00 or something like that. Fifty years apart. So we knew a lot of chaps in engineering and medicine and we found a lot of them, a couple of the had done the vocational guidance on the same day. Joe Da Roza one chap that I know that was in another unit, he'd done it on the same day as so and so and I said, "I know what's happened - they've rung up the University and said, 'What vacancies have you got? Vacancy for three pharmacists? Withers, White and Wood right down the bottom - pharmacy

31:30 - that wasn't a faculty in those days that was a department - they'll do." Boom. "We'll send Joe Da Roza, have we got a space in medicine? We've got two spaces - right-o - Da Roza and Kennedy, they can go." I reckon that's how we got in - that's the vocational guidance.

**How long did it take you to adjust back into a normal life?**

Not too long. I said I was going to be the best damn civilian you ever saw

32:00 in your life mate.

**And do you reckon you got there?**

Yeah. I was a great civilian. I was approached once by Major Young, a physician, doctor "You've had experience, you've been a serviceman - how would you like to join the reserve in the medical corps?"

32:30 "Gordon Young ." Short and sweet answer "No thank you."

**In a broad sense did that war - to what degree do you think your war experience changed you as a person and influenced your personality?**

It made me grow up. I know

33:00 I still act the fool, things like that but I've always been humorous. You've got to go through life with humour. As a pharmacist I've seen a, you mightn't think as a pharmacist but I've seen a lot of pain, sorrow, some dreadful cases of people, especially children. I used to do the dispensing for Brushfarm Home children and Brushfarm Home infants. I've seen neglected children come in there, generally on a Saturday night, they'd been brutalised, belted, filthy, covered with scabs,

33:30 generally on a Saturday night it would be. Peter Bishop was the doctor that used to look after them down here, he used to ring me up at nine o'clock and say 'Dick, we need you'. Go up there to Brushfarm and they'd just brought a child that's been abused or assaulted or something. There were some dreadful cases of what people can do to children. I haven't been unhappy as a pharmacist, I've had a good life as a pharmacist, I'm comfortable. Not on the pension - self-funded retiree. Made a lot of friends,

34:00 didn't make a lot of money. I'm comfortable, never go to a million but my turnover was getting close to it at one time. I employed thirteen staff at one stage so I was doing alright but as I say never become a millionaire in those days because you know, millionaire nothing these days now but I had a good life in pharmacy, made a lot of friends. Go down the street,

34:30 See now it's 18 years since I retired but I'd go down there in you know two years after and meet people, talk to them, see them standing in the street and I'd said, 'Listen Dorothy, I'm not going to stand in the street and talk to you' I said, 'Come in and have a cup of coffee'. So we'd go in and sit down and we'd have a yap But I still get people when I go down there. But they're getting fewer and fewer. More and more Chinese are getting in but when I see the people I still go down and meet them. Sometimes

35:00 it used to take me two hours to go down and buy a packet of biscuits or some bread or something. I'd come home and Joan would say "Where've you been?" and I'd say "Oh I bumped into so and so. They wanted to know how you ar." "Oh I haven't seen her for a long time." I said, "Right-o, well go and see her. You can talk to her, I spent half an hour talking to her and buying her coffee." and a lot of friends like that. So that's why when I retired people said, "Where are you going?" and I said, "I'm going to go to Eastwood." That's a good spot. If I want to borrow a cup of sugar I know where to go, and if I want a 12 foot ladder I know where to go. If I go up the Central coast I don't.

35:30 So that's why I've stayed in Eastwood.

**When you reflect on your war experiences how do you feel about war in general?**

I don't like it. Don't like it in general but I reckon every now and again you've got to thump somebody. I don't ever think we should have gone into Iraq. I don't blame us I blame our Prime Minister.

36:00 You want my personal opinion? I don't think, he wanted to make a grand stand and made a fool of himself and I don't agree with that. As for going into Bougainville, yes. But stick to your own backyard. Make friends with the Indonesians, not really proud but I've had dealings with them and when we had a function in Singapore one year in 1993 I was

36:30 be host to an Indonesian colonel in the navy and his wife because I was made host to them because she couldn't speak English but I still had a spattering of Malay so I was able to make them feel comfortable and that sort of thing. I like the in general, I wouldn't say I like their politics or their leaders of anything like that but we've got to be friends with them. And the opportunity for trade in Indonesia is enormous. If only our Department

37:00 of Trade would use a bit of sense and do their homework and go in there and don't send anything that is repugnant to them but I know one firm sent over some tinned fruit and it had on it, on the label, their trademark was an Ibis. Now if you go and buy anything from the Chinese food shop, Asian shop, you look at the pictures, you don't read the writing and when the Indonesians saw this Ibis on it they went 'Oh that's tinned Ibis or something. We're not

37:30 going to buy that'. It was I don't know some tinned fruit, it was peaches or something like that, that they don't have. If they'd have used their sense and used another trademark they could have sold peaches because I reckon they'd have loved the peaches. Another fruit for them. They don't grow peaches over in Indonesia and if a little bit of homework had been done there'd have been a chance for all those surrounding places because there's a lot of Indonesia and there's a lot of trade.

38:00 **Is there any comment you'd like to make about your experience which you haven't been able to express yet?**

Jeez, I've given you a pretty wide range. I can't think of anything. I'm very pleased with squadron leader Sheldon for sending me to this unit. I reckon he did me a tremendous favour. Amongst one of the greatest mob of fellas.

38:30 Allied Intelligence Bureau and by that I mean the SRD, the Z Special Unit, the M Special Unit, NEFIS fellows, I'm still, well every time a Dutch man I know that was in NEFIS he was the offsider of Julius Tahia, Bill Chader was his name. Every time he comes down tot Sydney we have a get together, they live up at Mount Coolum. Greatest mob of fellows you ever met in your life bar none.

39:00 **Do you remember any special songs that you blokes used to sing together?**

No. All I remember is one that I learnt from the Aborigines in Melville Island.

**How did that one go?**

You don't want me to sing it do you?

**If you can remember it?**

Well what happened, I got a little shack up on the Hawkesbury river. When I say shack, it's a shack. And every now and again I go up there and

39:30 I decide to have a barbie so I build a little fire and I squat in front of it like an aboriginal and I sing my aboriginal songs and I've got two pieces of hardwood and they make lovely clicking sticks. I've got a neighbour up there when he sees me he walks in and sort of bolts the door and the blokes flipped again, he's gone. Just a little song I learnt from them and I quite liked it.

**You don't care to sing a little verse for us?**

And have it recorded?

40:00 Not on your life. It's only other a couple of words in it but they're repeated.

**What are those words?**

Orong, Orri, De Ai ay.

**What does that mean?**

Don't know but I make it a bit different when I get up there because I sing that then I sing, 'We'll get you whitey, we'll get you whitey, you pinch our kids and steal our land, we'll get you whitey, Orong, Orri, De Ai ay'. Click the sticks and things like that and

40:30 he's gone, that bloke, he's gone.

**Do you still dream about the war?**

I did at one time but I don't now. When my wife started to get Alzheimer's - do you know anything about dementia and Alzheimer's? Well it's a very wearing job, it's a 36 hour a day job as they get worse. My

wife didn't sleep too good. She used to twitch and because she twitched I didn't get much sleep

41:00 either. I don't sleep very well anyway. I had to look after her all the time so no I might have once upon a time but I don't now. Except the incident at Nila Island. I have a think about it when I get up at two o'clock in the morning and say 'Poor bastard'.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**