Australians at War Film Archive

William Robertson (George) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

01:10 **If you could start off and give us a bit of a life summary?**

Well I was born on a very propitious date, the eleventh of November 1918, at exactly eleven o'clock when the bells were ringing all over Australia. And it was the Armistice,

01:30 signing of the Armistice, in a town called Namango. I was only there for a fortnight I think and then moved back to the parental home on, at Isisford on the Barcoo in western Queensland. Went to primary school in Isisford, barefooted through the 'bindi-is' [thorns] and 'gigi' stone. Because of my father's health problems we moved by the time I was about eight or nine to Hervey Bay. Attended

02:00 primary school at Hervey Bay then went on to high school in Maryborough. Depression days were hard living, nobody had jobs, were very few jobs available for people. Went on from high school in Maryborough to Gatton Agricultural College and obtained a Diploma of Agriculture. Worked for CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] - then called CSIR [Council for Scientific

02:30 and Industrial Research], as a technical officer. Enlisted in the army for about eighteen months before I transferred, and this was the pre war army, the militia, and then transferred to the air force in 1940-41. Trained at, in Queensland firstly at Amberley and

03:00 then to Tamworth, back to Amberley. Was appointed as a staff pilot to South Australia, a place called Mallala. Was there for eighteen months training advanced pupils. From there was transferred to Forest Hill near Wagga for conversion on to front line aircraft, the Beaufighters. From there to Number 30 Squadron at Port Moresby and

03:30 was there for nine months, from Moresby to Milne Bay to Goodenough Island to Kirrawina Island. Some thirty-five operations against the Japanese in New Britain, transferred back to Laverton in Victoria. Not that I had any particular expertise that a lot of other people didn't have, but it was just co-incidental that the first Australian built Beaufighters were about to come off the production line

04:00 at Fisherman's Bend in Williamstown. And apparently somebody who had operational flying experience in Beaufighters was required to test these Beaufighters when they came off the production line, so I sort of fell into the job. I was there for about twelve months until early 1945 and from there I was transferred back to Morotai Island

04:30 as a test pilot, for the aircraft that were crashed and damaged and needed repairs and had to be test flown before they were handed back to the squadrons. Discharged in January 1946 and from there I had a yen to go to improve my education, I went to the Queensland University for four years, '47 to '50.

05:00 Graduated as Dux or whatever it might be called in the faculty of Agricultural Science. Went back to CSIRO as CO [Commanding Officer] of the Cooper Research Laboratory at Gatton College which had a staff of about thirty people. Engaged in pastures and fodder crop research and about three years later I had a rush of blood to the head and decided

05:30 to go farming. I was successful in a land ballot for ex service men and under the War Service Land Settlement Scheme at Wandawin. I gave up my soft life as a civil servant for the rigours of primary production and was in debt for the rest of my life. Until breeding or

06:00 growing crops, wheat, sorghum, oats for stock, had sheep and fat lambs. And then moved up to within thirty kilometres of Rockhampton, established the Birralee Brahman Stud and bred Brahman bulls for twenty-odd years I suppose. The cattle are up on your, above your left shoulder there in that painting, and they were transferred to our daughter

06:30 over in Western Australia who's still conducting the Birralee Brahman Stud in Western Australia. So we retired, I was aged seventy-six when I gave up, mainly because of mobility problems, arthritis in the knees and neck problems and spinal problems. I had three or four air crashes when I was test flying and

we hadn’t heard of whiplash in those days, I’m talking about 1945, but I do

07:00 get a disability pension for those problems. And so here we are having retired now for about seven or eight years and in 189 Quarry Lane. I suppose I should have mentioned the highlight of all that was to meet a charming WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], Pat Rudd from Aramac in western Queensland who was a transport driver

07:30 in the air force and we married and I suppose we’re about fifty-eight years of marriage, haven’t had our first real argument. And as the song, I think it was a Fred Astaire song, he used to sing :”Lovely to look at, delightful to know and heaven to kiss, a combination like this…” so she filled those words admirably.

Fantastic.

08:00 **If we could start with your childhood, what would be your earliest memory?**

Earliest? I think my earliest memory was at age, I don't know, two or three years old when I got this scar under one eye, this was in the Isisford in the Barcoo. A hen with chickens and little George wanted a chicken and the

08:30 hen defended it and I guess I was lucky that it got me under the eye and not half an inch higher. Then most of my early memories are about Isisford. Our first school teacher, a wonderful lady who actually lived with us named Corrie Ryan from Tarume. And her brothers were some of the early discoverers of the Cracow gold field back in the Depression

09:00 days, the 1930’s. And then swimming in the Barcoo River. My father used to carry from Isisford or from the Emmet rail siding to Isisford, most of the goods that the Isisford people consumed and the hardware, the fencing material, the beer.

09:30 One early memory was of the trap door on the foot path of the Westward Ho Hotel and there was an endless chain on a rafter above and they would lower the beer barrels down through the hole in the floor and roll them into the bar. And somebody told me that, - I was only six, five or six or seven, I don't know, remember - but that’s where they hung people from that gallows in the ceiling. So whenever little George had to go down town he

10:00 very carefully crossed the street long before he got to the Westward Ho and walked along the opposite side of the street, keeping one eye on that hanging gallows in the Westward Ho Hotel.

Can you tell us a little bit about your parents?

Parents? Well my father was a Scottish migrant, he had his twenty-first birthday on

10:30 the boat. He was born in 1886 and he said he was sick most of the way out on the boat so he had no great liking for boats. My mother was of Polish extraction, her father was a Pole, von Snarczky, and she was reared in Isisford. They had quite a romantic meeting, my father was working on

11:00 Isis Downs a property now owned by Kerry Packer, and he was thrown from a horse and broke a leg. And incidentally an uncle of my wife’s was thrown from a horse there and was killed at Isis Downs in those days, must have had rather skittish horses. Dad had to open and shut seventeen gates with his broken leg to get to the hospital. He was there for six months, and my mother

11:30 was working in the hospital, she was a qualified nurse and I guess six months, the romance bloomed and they married and I was his number one product of that marriage.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Yes, two sisters, each of whom was a nurse. As a matter of fact my older sister, who lives in Muttaborough,

12:00 if you’ve heard of Muttaboroughsauras, the dinosaur. Well she was a nurse and it was through her nursing that she met her husband. My second sister was also a nurse, Dorothy, she had to relinquish that because of ill health. And I have a younger brother, five years younger than I, he is eighty years old, Jock, and he lives in Toowoomba.

12:30 He is quite able and worked for the CSIRO as I did, but he worked all his working life with CSIRO. He was in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], firstly in New Guinea and then subsequently in Borneo and so those are the other three members of the family. My sister Dorothy, the younger one has since died. She made the

13:00 headlines in the Maryborough Chronicle, I recall, she was less than a pound weight when she was born and lots of stories are printed about it. Mother’s wedding ring could fit over her hand as a bracelet and she was carried in Dad’s overcoat pocket. So, at I think eight month’s of age she weighed seven pounds but there were no humidicribs in those

13:30 days and I think it’s a wonderful tribute to my mother’s nursing, that, she used to bathe her with cotton wool and olive oil, just wipe her with that. She was given a drop or two of brandy too, in the food. But she grew into quite a lovely healthy girl until she was in her seventies and then she had lung problems and she died.

14:00 **Why was she given a drop or two of brandy?**

I don't know you'd better ask the nurse at the time. But you can imagine back in the early 1920's, no humidicribs, our knowledge of premature babies was probably very limited but mother persisted, she was about three months premature and as I said was less than one pound in weight. But, and the

14:30 the average weight of a child at birth is about seven pounds, well Dorothy took eight months to get to that weight. She was quite a bright, loveable person all her life, very kind and generous.

What kind of mischief did you get up to as a child?

Oh, I was a naughty boy

15:00 I think I must confess. One of the early exploits that my wife throws up her hands in horror. We had an uncle who was what we called a 'skite', terrible. Paid us a brief visit and in those days the lavatories were fifty metres behind the house, what we called the 'thunder boxes', and with a pan and a door at the back. And another cousin and I, we took a dislike to this bloke

15:30 and he was leaving that afternoon on the bus and we noticed him go down there to the toilet. So we got a sheet of newspaper and sneaked around the back, opened the door, lit up the newspaper and poked it in on top of the pan and there was a shriek of anguish from inside. We took off, fortunately there was forty acres of scrub just alongside our house at Hervey Bay. And uncle was handicapped because his

16:00 slacks or tweeds they were down around his ankles, and by the time he got them up we were a hundred metres away. So we waited until the bus went before we came out of the scrub. We travelled by train up to Maryborough to high school, this was a few years later. It was Depression days, nobody could afford to travel first class so we would set the scene

16:30 at the railway station at Maryborough and when the train pulled out, we'd get in our second class carriage, throw one leg out through the window, around the partition and through into the window of the first class and then a body would follow. So this was fairly standard, we'd travel thinking we were really somebody in the first class compartments. In sugar cane season,

17:00 the sugar cane would be loaded out of sight from the railway station, fifty metres perhaps away from the train. We'd jump down and race across and grab a stick of sugar cane out of the truck and back into the carriage again, and not do our health or teeth a lot of good by chewing sugar cane sticks to and from school. Setting fire to the 'wallum' [heathland]. The wallum was,

17:30 in those days, very low fertility, unused, hundreds of thousands of acres of this shocking country. And the only thing that it supported I guess were wallabies and bandicoots and a few brumby horses. So strike a match, we'd get a box of matches, I don't know how we could afford to buy a box of matches, and throw them down in beside the railway station and then

18:00 watch with glee as the grass went up and burned out a lot of this wallum country. These are the sort of things that ten and twelve year olds in my time would get up to so. I can understand a certain amount of vandalism even today but I can't explain to you what drove it, but we certainly weren't angels.

18:30 **Did you have any particular jobs that you had to do to help out your parents around the house?**

Well the train left at about half past six in the morning and didn't get back until seven o'clock at night. Part way through those three years the train gave way to rail motor. School was on Saturday mornings as well so there was only one and a half days really at home.

19:00 My father worked as an engineer on a lot of irrigation projects, the Orange Creek Weir near Theodore, the Bingara Weir in Bundaberg, the Stanley River Dam, which has been superseded largely now by the Wyvenhoe Dam, so he would be away for months on end and we children had to do our share of work. The kindling, the wood, keep the

19:30 wood box full and feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chickens] and so on. Mother kept a fairly tight rein on us when she could see us anyway or knew what we were up to, but of course there were times when she didn't know what we were up to. And it was, an excellent life at Hervey Bay.I can recall the bathing boxes that were standard in those days at all the sea

20:00 side resorts. Every house had a separate bathing box which was about six by eight feet down, just above the high water mark in which you went and dressed and undressed there before you went swimming. They all disappeared during or immediately after the war. Not a lot of organised

20:30 entertainment but there were things like Guy Fawkes night and New Year's Eve when we would collect all the fallen timber along the Esplanade at Hervey Bay and build these great wigwam shaped piles of logs, brush and what have you. And then set fire to them and you could see right around Hervey Bay from Point Vernon to Urangan, these wonderful fires on the fifth

21:00 of November, Guy Fawkes, and on New Year's Eve. And of course we had plenty of fire works, crackers and things which you're not allowed to have these days. Fishing, plenty of fishing, chasing crabs at

night with a torch along the sand, the high water mark. Not a lot of organised sport though, even at the school. There was one

21:30 very rough tennis court at the Torquay State School, a cricket pitch that was just natural earth, a football field that had one or two large trees in it, that were too big to move, they were all built by students and their parents, these amenities. School final day picnic was always a great thing because lots of watermelons,

22:00 and all the pupils and past pupils and parents would gather at the school for an all day picnic, which there'd be races, running, three legged races, sack races. The school sports would be marbles, tops. One of our joys was the shanghai or catapult. And

22:30 in spare time you'd see little boys wandering around in the scrub, which Hervey Bay had plenty of in those days, gazing up into the trees particularly the eucalypts that were in blossom, with their shanghais and stones trying to shoot those, what we called 'blueys', blue mountain parrots or, and 'greenies' and rosellas. If we were successful we'd then have a fire and boil them up, probably hardly acceptable

23:00 today but we used to think they were delicious. But my mother, having been reared on the Barcoo from the age of one or two, used to cook fish, the yellow belly, and the ducks would be wrapped in clay, they wouldn't be scaled or plucked, and put in the ashes of fires. And then when they were deemed to be

23:30 cooked the clay would be broken and be pulled off and feathers and scales and even the gut would be just a little hard ball in them. But apart from being told about those things, we didn't indulge in clay, baking things in clay in the fire.

24:00 **Can you tell me a little bit about Hervey Bay?**

It was quite small when I was young, for example there was no high school and no hospital, even perhaps eight miles or more from Point Vernon to Urangan. And most of the people were on the seashore side, so that's

24:30 why anybody that wanted a high school education had to go Maryborough. There was one doctor, Doctor Webb and a lot of children were born in our house, my mother having been a midwife in her nursing and there were one or two post mortems. I remember standing by Doctor Webb and watching on our table on our verandah, there simply was no hospital, no ambulance and

25:00 no high school. So that's how backward Hervey Bay was in those days. I'm talking about the 1920's. But a delightful place, the sea doesn't get rough, it's not a place for surfers except when the north wind blows, and the king tide. I think at Capricorn coast today is the day of the king tide, the record height of

25:30 tide, and the king tide brought in a bit of rough weather but that only lasted for a few days. We would row out in little flat bottomed wooden dinghies a mile or so from the coast, fishing, mainly in the mackerel season after the mackerel which was generally in August. Fortunately we had a fortnight's school holidays in August and then when I started work I would take my annual holidays in August to coincide with the mackerel season.

26:00 But whiting, would catch whiting from the beach too and I noticed there is a large fibreglass whiting about at least two metres long on Zephyr Street, which runs between Pialba and Scarness. So they weren't quite as big as that the ones we caught.

What was the population of Hervey Bay?

I can't answer that. As a school boy I wasn't

26:30 interested in those sorts of statistics but you could understand it must have been fairly small with no school, no hospital, no ambulance. And I think there were four hotels or five hotels stretched over that eight miles from Point Vernon, Pialba Hotel, Scarborough Hotel, Torquay Hotel, Urangan Hotel. But

27:00 in my time we had wonderful teachers, the same teachers right through were father and son. James Cronin, he must have been an interstate cricketer of note because he always wore a little gold shield on a chain and it had a bowler, bowling, cricket bowling. And his daughter,

27:30 Ethel Cronin, and they were still there when I left, so they were there when I started and they were still there when I left. But I think he retired probably during the war years or just prior, pre war.

So what was it like having just two teachers at your school?

Well there were probably fifty or sixty pupils at the school in those days,

28:00 so Miss Cronin taught the younger classes and her father taught me. And from there I went on, there was no scholarship or grade eight classes then, one, two, three, four, five class five. So I had to go to the high school in Maryborough to do what was called the scholarship and then I did what was called Junior.

28:30 And which was equivalent to, in New South Wales what they used to call Intermediate. Grade eight for

scholarship, grade ten was junior. From there I went to Gatton College and did a Diploma in Agriculture and also a Diploma in Horticulture because I was such a youngster, and they were equivalent to grade twelve. But

29:00 I was sixteen and I , when I was on Morotai and the war had either just ended, this was up in the Halmaheera Islands, near Borneo, and that's where the AIF took off from Morotai for the landings in Borneo. I decided that I should go to the University so I applied to the Queensland University and they very graciously

29:30 conceded me Matriculation. I hadn't matriculated because the Diploma of Agriculture didn't include physics or much chemistry and I've always been very grateful to the University of Queensland, this was back in the 1945, the end of '45, they conceded me Matriculation. I felt that I had an obligation then to the University and to

30:00 myself to make the best of that, which I did. We were married, and the four years at University which was down at the end of George Street near the Botanic Gardens now, in those days Saint Lucia was just being built. In those four years we had a house at Ashgrove, which was known as Napkin Valley because that's where all the newlyweds went. And we

30:30 had three children, and my wife has several times said, "I'm grateful that you didn't do medicine that took six or seven years, think of the brood that we might have had." But we survived or got through the course, and I think the ex service men topped, they were all in the top echelon, for results. I think we were in our middle to late twenties.

31:00 I was thirty-one or thirty-two when I graduated after those four years because we'd all had five and six years in the services before that.

How do you think that affected their scores, why were they such good students?

Why do you think the ex service men did so well? Oh, I think it was dedication.

31:30 My brother, he was five years younger than I and he had better high school results than I did, so that he should go to the university. And he said, "I couldn't sit still long enough even to read the Courier Mail." So a lot of younger people had that problem of a little bit of instability after their war service. That would depend a bit on what sort of

32:00 horrible things that you witnessed or engaged in during the war. I know in the jungle when you were on the wire at night, not a very, a very nerve wracking situation. I think I was fortunate that in those thirty-five operations that I flew in New Guinea, New Britain over Rabaul and when we lost a lot of mates, it didn't

32:30 occur to me that I wasn't going to make it, that I wasn't going to come back. I didn't have a girlfriend at that stage, or I wasn't married. Some of them were married at age twenty, twenty-one, probably the war brought that on. And without specifically knowing, I suspect that a lot of how they reacted depended on what sort of information or letters that they got from their loved

33:00 ones back home, their girlfriends or their wives. And some of them might have been very supportive, others might have been sort of clinging ivy types of girls, I just don't know. But I can imagine that having a girlfriend, being engaged or being recently married, must have weighed on their minds a bit when they were flying. One or two of the fellows was stood

33:30 down from flying because of nervous reactions. That was because of the wonderful doctor that we had and, in the squadron, I think he could probably recognise it and suggest that they not go on operations for a few weeks or a month or two. Whereas in Britain they were particularly hard, people were described as being lacking in moral fibre.

34:00 And they probably could be demoted and cashiered out and it was extremely hard. And I can understand the need for it in some places because there might have been a rush of people suddenly deciding that they were unfit for flying. But in the nine months I think we only had one or two people that were a little bit

34:30 nervous about it all. The only occasion that I was concerned was on my birthday in 1943, eleventh of November 1943. And my mother, who had been present at my birth, says that I was born at eleven o'clock on that day and at eleven o'clock on the eleventh of November 1943 we were due to attack aerodromes in Rabaul. And that

35:00 the Courier Mail had a newspaper reporter there, I think his name was John Waters, and he had heard about this bloke, this pilot who was on this operation having been born twenty-five years previously to the minute and he wanted to get me and to make a story about it. And I was really concerned about that, so my main occupation for an hour or so before

35:30 take off was to avoid John Waters. Whenever I heard that he was somewhere there I would get myself quite away from there. Well the upshot of it all was an anti climax really. Before an operation like that we would have a weather reconnaissance aircraft flying about an hour ahead of us and it was an American P38 Lightning and he was over the target or very close

36:00 to it. And he said, “Well the target was completely obliterated by rain and storm and the attack should be abandoned.” So I can tell you that the first aircraft to do a U-turn and head for home was George Robertson, but before that or after that I wasn’t concerned really about the outcome,

36:30 even though we did get a few holes in the aeroplane at different times.

How, in what ways did the Depression impact your family?

Well I can recall

37:00 for example what were called soup kitchens. In Maryborough large quantities of soup were prepared, down in one end of Kent Street, the main street of Maryborough. And people would go along with their tin billy cans and collect billy cans of hot soup as a supplement, because there was just no work and the dole was very limited

37:30 and wasn’t available to a lot of people. And there was quite a scandal at one stage of the game about that because greyhound dog racing was very popular and some people were found to be getting their billies of soup, which would have beef in it, and for their greyhound dogs. But there was what was called relief work, which was government sponsored, and at Hervey Bay

38:00 the main relief work was to build a canal which was about ten metres wide from Pialba where the sea came in to a bit of a swamp there, right through, about six miles I suppose, five miles to Uramgan to drain that swamp, it went through our back yard actually. And

38:30 a lot of the unemployed men were employed on building this canal from Pialba to Urangan through the swamp. The only tools they had were, it was sandy country, were shovel and a wheelbarrow and six or eight inch wide boards, long boards which were laid down to wheel the sand out, so, and there was a scandal about that.

39:00 The secretary and I think the chairman of that were found to be using fictitious names and, like today they talk about dead men voting, and they were collecting the dole for these fictitious names, and jail sentences followed for one or two of them, for being involved in that. The other thing

39:30 about was what was called ‘jumping the rattler’. ‘Hoboes’ as they were known as, the ‘swaggies’, they could get a meal ticket in one town but then they would have to go on to another town before they could get more food. Popular way to go from town to town, particularly if there were railways, was get into a goods train truck, under the

40:00 tarpaulin and hope that the guard was kindly disposed towards you or hope that he didn’t see you. Of course some of them were caught and ordered off the train. When the the train pulled up at the station they would get in on the far side from the station where they wouldn’t be seen. Our trains couldn’t compare with today’s Tilt train, I think perhaps thirty miles an hour going

40:30 down hill would be a maximum. And they’d get up the top of a long slope when the train was really blowing out a lot of smoke and down to about five or ten miles an hour and jump aboard then.

Tape 2

00:32 **You were about to tell us about the school children?**

Well the Station Master at Pialba was a Mr Morrison and he had two sons who were going up on the train to high school in Maryborough. And they didn’t turn up on one occasion one day, and

01:00 they’d decided to jump the rattler and head out, they were found a couple of days later north of Maryborough near Howard, I think, rather hungry and underneath a railway bridge. But we had to try and make a little bit of money selling mangoes. Now every house at Hervey Bay had a mango tree, I’m

01:30 sure, but we had access to a couple of dozen mango trees from a distant relative of ours. And little George would have his wooden box cart with two little wheels on it and shafts full of mangoes which he would drag from door to door along the Esplanade trying to sell mangoes at threepence a dozen. And I think most I sold was only out of pity from little old

02:00 ladies who must have had threepence to spare but I used to hate that mango selling. But I notice that Rockhampton’s wealthiest men who, very successful in the car business, the used car business said in an article in the local paper once, he started out in Mount Morgan with a little hand cart selling

02:30 bottles, picking up bottles and selling them, so I haven’t risen to those financial heights but I know what he went through. And the other thing I hated was selling raffle tickets. Mother was very active in public life, she was Secretary of the Progress Association and she played bowls and her church and the school, she was

03:00 on the school committee and of course little George would have to go round trying to sell raffle tickets. Well, I'm no salesman and I hated both of those jobs I must admit. But we survived, a lot of the families, we, they had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, chickens, we liked to call them WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Grew vegetables, ate the cheapest of meats, offal,

03:30 tripe, liver, those sorts of things. And of course poultry was fairly large on our table and eggs and home grown vegetables. I can recall, we had a piano, and on two occasions an itinerant piano player, he might have been quite a well known, but I was too young,

04:00 asked mother whether she would invite some of her friends and he would give a piano recital in our lounge. So I think they would pay one shilling, which was the equivalent of ten cents to sit there for an hour or two while this pianist, or well known pianist you know... and there might have only been eight, six or eight people came, but

04:30 I guess six or eight of ten shillings was very appreciative. And Mum would've given him a cup of tea and he'd have had free use of the piano But those are the sort of things that people had to do, all sorts. Fishing, a lot of people were quite free to sell fish. If you caught them, whiting off the beach or mackerel or whatever, there were no restrictions on individuals

05:00 selling, produce like that.

So, how did you see the Depression impact on your schooling life?

My father left school he said at the age of nine to lead plough horses. I thought those Scots must have been a bit backward because I ploughed with

05:30 horses, a single furrow plough at Gatton College and we had two long rope reins from the horses' bits on their mouths back to the handles of the plough, but he had to lead the plough horses. And so he had virtually no formal education and yet he was quite clever, he become an engineer. He, although he didn't have much money,

06:00 he was insistent that we all have as high school education. So I went off to high school in Maryborough.Year or two later my two sisters followed and then my younger brother, youngest brother Jock. We all had that high school education as, to junior at least and then my sisters went nursing and Jock went on to Gatton College to do a diploma there, as

06:30 I did. So we didn't suffer as much as other people on the same sort of financial plane, as we did. They, to my knowledge I was the only one from the Torquay Primary School, to attend high school in Maryborough but there were two brothers older than I

07:00 who also went from the Torquay Primary School. I think their father was a cane farmer so he, they were a little bit on a slightly higher financial plane than we were. So there was very little opportunity for primary school children really to go on. You had to travel that hour, or over an hour in the train to get up to Maryborough and you had to have the wherewithal to pay the fees,

07:30 and to pay the railway for your ticket. I think it cost about a pound, one pound for a month for your rail travel. So it was very difficult for younger people of my age at Hervey Bay, to at least get a high, advanced education.

08:00 **So what did you do after you finished school?**

Well after I finished at Gatton College I was fortunate to get a position as a technical officer, I was aged sixteen, I think I was called a junior assistant at that time. And with

08:30 the CSIR in what is called the plant introduction section. I was the first permanent employee on the CSIRO staff in that pastures and crops section; there was one other more mature person working on apples, I think at Stanthorpe from CSIRO. But

09:00 my superior officer was a Doctor McTaggart who lived in Canberra.He would send me up packets of seed that were imported from foreign countries, packets of grasses, Rhodes grass, Buffalo grass, all the common green paddock, common Queensland grasses today. And the Gatton College made available some, perhaps ten acres of land

09:30 which I had to plough, harrow, prepare and then plant these packets of seed in little rows. Hope that they germinated and record notes on them. Interesting that the seeds were always in grams, I'd get a, packets of five grams of seed of Buffalo grass or Rhodes grass or all the other things, digitaria and pennisetum

10:00 and also legumes, dolichos, leucaina. And the standard garden, introduction garden was.. you spoke in links, a link being approximately seven inches, heaven knows what that is now in centimetres, about fifteen centimetres. So there was

10:30 twenty-five links long, I think there were a hundred links to a chain, so that made it, a link would be sixty-six feet in a chain, twenty metres in a chain. But there was to be five links which was roughly one yard between each row. And you'd have a peg, a white peg at the end of the row, with a CPI [Committee of Plant Introduction], number on it, one

11:00 thousand and thirty four and got up to... I think it was during the war they got up to ten thousand plant introductions and a bit of a party was held by the people in the staff of CSIRO then to celebrate the ten thousandth plant introduction. From Africa, India, South America, the Townsville Lucerne or the Stilo family, most of them came from

11:30 Central America. The Buffalo grasses, Buffalo grass I think came from Afghanistan in the pack saddles of camels by the Afghan camel drivers. Rhodes grass of course from Rhodesia from Africa, named after Cecil Rhodes, Green Panic and oh, lots, dozens and dozens of other different grasses that CSIRO introduced. Post war

12:00 they started to send Officers from CSIRO on expeditions overseas, looking for things that they thought would be of benefit in Australia. They were better educated, they realised that these grasses and legumes and crops grew under certain climatic conditions of altitude, temperature, rain

12:30 fall and that quite often of course you could get correlation between altitude and temperatures. You could get quite mild temperatures for example on the Atherton Tableland and get frosts up there, even though they're way up in the tropics. So quite a number of CSIRO Officers travelled overseas on expeditions

13:00 and brought back a lot of these pastures and fodder crops and grain crops. Then I would have to make notes as these things grew and harvest the seed, bulk up the seed and then we selected what we thought were the more important, more promising grasses and what have you, and conduct grazing experiments. And to do that you had to bulk

13:30 up enough seed to plant a reasonable area, perhaps half a hectare. And that involved a lot of fencing and putting sheep on, weighing the sheep to see how they gained and to shear them, to see what their wool, how they performed. And one of them, which is now a very common species in Queensland, leucaina, the early

14:00 strains of leucaina produced a break in the wool of the sheep so that the wool could be pulled off by hand. We did some experiments, hoping that they could perfect this so that you would feed the sheep quantities of leucaina and some weeks later you'd be able to just shear them, dispense with the shearers altogether, pull the wool off by hand. But then we found that the

14:30 bits of wool were on barbed wire and on sticks of shrubs and trees so they had to be coated then.But the experiment wasn't a success, but it looked as if it had possibilities at one stage of the game.

Were you working with the CSIR at the time when Menzies announced Australia's involvement in the war?

Yes.

15:00 I don't think I had any great reaction to that, it wasn't until Germany invaded Holland and the Lowlands and things that I realised that things were getting very serious. But having been in the militia at the time, when war broke out, we were sent into camp, for one

15:30 month in Brisbane at Enoggera, what is called Fraser's Paddock. And there were three battalions as I remember it, the 25th Battalion of which the Gatton College Platoons were part of, it's headquarters was in Toowoomba, still is. The 47th which was based on the Sunshine Coast and the 62nd I think it was, the Scotties anyway, in Brisbane. And those three battalions

16:00 were sent to camp together at Fraser's Paddock, late in 1939, just after the war broke out, for a month. We were foot sloggers, plenty of route marches, plenty of tinea, athlete's foot, and bathing your feet after in that orange coloured whatever it was that was supposed to cure,

16:30 and lots of drill, lots of bayonet work, lots of barbed wire. And so I decided that, "No", I thought there was a better way to fight a war than to be jumping out of a slit trench at four o'clock in the morning in the dark, screaming. Apparently you had to yell to scare the enemy or to give you some sort of impetus, with fixed bayonets and throwing yourself on coils of barbed wire.

17:00 So I decided to transfer to the air force. And of course all the people who applied for air crew, I should say ninety-nine percent of them I think, wanted to be pilots. But war couldn't be fought with a hundred percent pilots, you had to have navigators, you had to have wireless operators and air gunners. So to

17:30 my great disappointment I was classified initially as a wireless air gunner. And pilots, navigators and wireless air gunners started out at Amberley in what was called 3ITS, and Sandgate was in brackets behind it because Sandgate hadn't been developed at that stage. And towards the end of that one month or whatever it was we were all in together learning the Morse

18:00 code, signalling with a lamp, learning air force rules, being drilled, learning to... There was an ex Gatton College English teacher named Mr Sinclair, with whom I was on quite amicable relationship. He was now a ground instructor, an officer at Amberley. And he called to me one day and I went over and

18:30 he said, "Look, well you're all about to go out now to your pilot training, to your wireless air gunner

training, to your navigation training, different stations. But we're short of a couple of pilots, would you be interested to re-classify from a wireless air gunner to a pilot?" Oh dear. That was a very defining moment in my life, I'm quite sure of that. I don't know what my fate

19:00 would have been as a wireless air gunner, but we would probably have gone to Europe. So naturally I grabbed that, I could have thrown my, the way these cricketers these days, thrown my arms around his neck. But I'm very grateful to Mr Sinclair for that defining moment. And another Gatton College, an English Lecturer F.O. Bosworth, Francis Octavius Bosworth,

19:30 years later or just while the war, before I was called up in the air force I had ideas of going to the University and I hadn't matriculated and hadn't done matriculation mathematics. So I decided at night time to attend lectures on matriculation mathematics under F.O. Bosworth. And when I fronted

20:00 after the war in 1946 with the post war reconstruction people, they said, "Oh look, you're not eligible for post war reconstruction financial assistance, you were twenty-one when you enlisted. The criteria is that you had to be under twenty-one, you had to have, or been at the University or to show intention of attending the university."

20:30 I was most despondent, there was my chance of University education, gone. And then the thought came to me, by gee, I high-tailed it up to Gatton College, fortunately Bossie was still alive, he was an old man. And I said, "Bossie do you remember my attending matriculation mathematics classes that you were giving at night time before I enlisted?" And

21:00 he said, "Yes." He wrote a letter, about three lines, 'This is to certify that at the time of his enlistment Mr W.G. Robertson was attending matriculation mathematics under my tuition with the intention of attending the university.' So I took that back to post war reconstruction in Brisbane and they said, "Right, you're in." So another very defining moment in my life, that

21:30 thing. They both sort of centre around Gatton College.

Can you remember what your reasons were for joining up?

Not really, I doubt if any of us can really say why, but I mean I did realise that the war was a greater thing than I had initially

22:00 imagined it was to be. It was just Germany and France against Britain and, or Germany against France and Britain. But then when it took in the Lowlands and all the other countries, I think I decided it was a very serious situation that I should be involved in.

Why had you waited, because you were twenty-one?

I was

22:30 twenty when the war broke out, in 1939 and I was twenty-one in November '39 so, but when I enlisted in the air force I was twenty-one.

Can you tell…?

And I had, I had about a three months additional wait because I'd developed appendicitis and I had to have my appendix out before I went in to the air force. So

23:00 I was a little bit later than I had initially expected to be, being called up for training.

Can you tell me about the day that you walked in to enlist?

Into the air force?

No, into the army, can you tell me about the day that you went in to enlist?

In the army or the air force?

In the army.

Well Gatton College had

23:30 two Units, one was the Cav Mob [cavalry], mobile veterinary section. Their diploma in livestock and veterinary science, they normally joined the veterinary section, cavalry, mobile cavalry veterinary section and they wore fairly typical First [World] War Light Horse uniforms with bandoleers and

24:00 turned up hat with the emu feathers and the jodhpurs and the leggings and highly polished boots and they rode horses. They were the elite. But then there were the 'foot sloggers' and I was in what is called Don Support Company which was a Company within the 25th Battalion. And in a Machine Gun Platoon and a Trench Mortar Platoon, I have quite large photos of both of those with little George

24:30 in them in my office. The Trench Mortars, we were known disparagingly as the SS&S mob because apparently in the First World War when the Trench Mortars were required, they would race up to the trench from well back in the safe zone, with their base plate and tripod and the mortar

25:00 tube, which was a bit like a piece of stove pipe, and of course the mortars which were three inch bombs. They'd set up their mortar in a hurry, choong, choong, choong, fire half a dozen mortars and then pick it all up and race back again to safety. So we were called, disparagingly, SS&S mob, yeah, 'Shoot, Shit and Scatter'. So but it was

25:30 interesting because we didn't, I didn't have to do it in war time, it was a peace time.. And then we still used the old Vickers water cooled machine guns and, in those days, so, on the range at Enoggora. At the air force ...

Why

26:00 **didn't you apply for the air force straight up?**

Well I didn't think that the war was all that serious at that stage of the game, I mean it was, as I said, France and Britain against Germany. But then came Dunkirk and the invasion of Holland and the Lowlands and one could see that it was developing into a World War. And I thought, a

26:30 lot of pressure was put on me not to enlist by superior officers in the CSIRO. After all research was ongoing, it was important, that I should consider, I was in a reserved occupation. And as a matter of fact a fellow officer, a technical officer with me decided not to enlist,

27:00 and he was my age, had all the qualities that I had, he became a conscientious objector and he stayed, throughout the war, in the CSIRO.

But you joined up with the army...?

I was in the army before the war broke out as a peace time militia man which was a sort of part time, it's equivalent now to these peace time

27:30 units that we still have, we, in Rockhampton we've got the 2nd Battalion.

Then you went over to join the air force, tell us about your reasons, why you did that?

Well, one of the interesting things about that was in the medical examination you were tested for colour blindness. And you were taken out in to the street I think in

28:00 Creek Street in Brisbane and the officer had a booklet , he flipped the pages and there would be multi coloured dots of different colours and you had to tell him what they were. I think I had a slight colour blindness but to see two people in the footpath in Brisbane doing this, within a minute or so you would have six or eight or

28:30 ten people gathered around and wondering what the hell was going on and staring. And whenever I was a bit uncertain about a page I'd hear a whisper behind me, you know, "Blue" or you could see number seventeen or sixty-three would be woven through it so I passed that test without any difficulty. And it is possible, was possible, for example, there was a pilot

29:00 who had a glass eye. Now you sat in a room waiting for your tests and obviously what he had done, somebody else who had already passed the test had gone in to the optometrist, or ophthalmologist in his stead. Because this chap he flew for several years and managed to get through the

29:30 examinations, medical exams with a glass eye. He finally disappeared at night flying I think between Sydney and Canberra, or Sydney and Melbourne, in an American Brewster Buffalo single engine aircraft, but I wouldn't blame that on his glass eye either. But it was two or three years after he had been flying for that time.

So they weren't very thorough?

They were very

30:00 thorough but when they came out and called, there were eight or ten of us waiting for examination and the door would open somewhere down the hall way and they'd call George Robertson. Well George Robertson, it wasn't George Robertson but the fellow on this occasion had a friend with him. There was no identification when you got in for the test, you know, you weren't finger printed or didn't have to sign your

30:30 name or anything like that. He just walked in and yeah, righto passed and he went in under somebody else's name, I assume that's how it happened.

So men with all sorts of problems would have gotten through?

Yes, but we had turned up at Amberley for that first bit of training. And oh, it was

31:00 being issued with the uniforms, going from the clothing stores, issued with bedding, palliasses full of straw, blankets and then allocated to a room in the hut, those things. Then shown how to correctly make your bed, you know, they had sheet, blankets had to be folded thus and so on.

31:30 But tidiness was well to the fore in those instructions and then we'd start the drill. Those of us who'd

been in the army had a bit of an advantage I guess, but there were a lot of people who had never drilled in their life. And in those days it was “Form fours!”Now it’s in threes or after the war it was in three’s, “Fall in , tallest in on the right shortest on the left,

32:00 fall in on the marker.” But we would form fours and it could have been, unless the number was equally divisible by four there would always be a second last, we might be, only be three. But that Australian sense of humour, we always kept a blank down there, second from the end and that was for Clarrie.

32:30 Clarrie was an imaginary one of us, and all Clarrie wore was a dirty singlet but that spare space was always kept for Clarrie. And when we went marching there was always a spare place in the ranks for Clarrie and that sort of thing surfaced very often I think amongst Australians. And I noticed that

33:00 ‘Weary’ Dunlop that wonderful Doctor of the POW camps, says that the Australians had a greater survival rate than any of the other nations involved, whether they be Indians, British, whatever, and it was their sense of humour, their quirky sense of humour, of course their mate ship, the fact that predominantly they came

33:30 from rural areas and knew a bit about the bush and what have you.. That was evident even in my time.

How would you describe the sense of humour?

Oh, probably not much different to what it is today. Of course we’ve got two completely different worlds for young people today, than ours,

34:00 no television, no radio, no drugs, although I think seventy-five or eighty percent of us smoked. Stubbies [beer bottles] and alcohol, I can recall just before the war going on all day picnics, young people in their late teens, early twenties, in the back of a cream truck, from Gatton out to Marmar Creek and swimming in the hole there,

34:30 having barbecues and what have you, but no alcohol, there was no interest in it. You couldn’t go and buy a six pack of stubbies or anything like that. And that’s one of the big differences, the influence of the alcohol that I notice here. And of course we’ve just seen a very popular Test Cricketer dead as the

35:00 result of, obviously of alcohol, somewhere or other. So yes , sport was organised for us in the air force, cricket, football and, were the two main things.

What other training did you get in the early days?

35:30 After we were segregated, pilots went off to the flying schools; I was sent to Tamworth which was a Tiger Moth Initial Flying School. Wireless air gunners were sent to the appropriate schools and the navigators and at Tamworth we had two months of training.

36:00 Had to do a minimum of fifty hours flying in Tiger Moths, those little single engines that didn’t have a tail wheel, they had a skid at the back. But there was also a lot of what was called Link training, that was a mock up cabin, and it must have been on a ball and socket joint. And it reacted just as an aircraft would but

36:30 the hood was over you, you were in darkness, or you had a light inside but you had no relationship to anything outside, you had to fly on your instruments. And a small percentage of pilots were stood down from flying, what we called 'scrubbed' because they couldn’t handle that. They couldn’t rely on their instruments

37:00 and some of them would, they’d go into a spin and the Link trainer would be going round and round, typical of when your aircraft got out of control in a spin up in the air, and they’d be yelling to be let out. So, I don't know, one or two percent were scrubbed or taken into another category of being a wireless air gunner or navigator and not a pilot because they could not handle

37:30 their instrument flying. And it takes a bit of concentration and self assurance when you’re in bad weather with rain or in cloud to say, “Well I’ve got to trust those instruments, I’ve got to fly according to those.” You had what is called an artificial horizon and other things like that, and of course we had

38:00 lectures, quite a lot of lectures. After all, when you divide fifty hours into two months of flying you’re only getting about one hour’s flying a day, you might get an hour’s Link training a day, and in that Llink trainer, you could also fly cross country courses. You would have a map and you would plot your course from Tamworth to wherever, Narramine and other, Gundagai

38:30 or whereever, and then you’d know what compass bearing you had to fly, you had the compass in the Llink trainer so you would have to fly that. And you would be given an air speed, you had to calculate what your ground speed would be if you had a head wind or a side wind, all those sorts of things. And there was an instrument with a pen on the map that actually tracked where you actually

39:00 went, so just how good your navigation and your flying was. Instead of there being a straight line from Tamworth to Narramine to Wagga or wherever and back, the line that was presented to you when it was all over might have been quite a long way away from the exact.

Tape 3

00:30 **When you first went in to the RAAF and they had you doing your wireless operator training, can you remember much of that?**

Well you didn't actually do any wireless and air gunning training in that first bit, all musterings were lumped in together. And you learned the Morse Code, you did signalling with a signal lamp, learned about

01:00 air force rules and regulations, what foot to lead forward with and that, you weren't to discuss religion or sex in the mess, those sort of air force law. And so really I'm quite ignorant of what happens, or relatively ignorant anyway, for a wireless air gunner. Except that at the air gunning practice they, pilots had to fly

01:30 aircraft and they towed behind them, some hundreds of metres behind, what was called a drogue which is very similar to the aerodrome wind direction drogue. And then they'd fly parallel some distance out trying to score hits on the drogue. But no, I haven't much experience at all about a wireless nav, ah, air gunner.

02:00 **In the first instance when you went into the RAAF, how did you see the air force as being different to the army?**

Well yes it was of course. I think a lot of the army people referred to us as 'Menzies Mannequins'. You know we normally slept in a bed at night, this was in action, even in action you

02:30 got back to your base and you slept on your palliasse on a camp stretcher, whereas in the army in the jungle of course it was a completely different situation. I imagine the sailors always had a bed, a bunk, a hammock of some sort to sleep in too, so that was quite different. And the uniforms were I think a bit more up market than the army

03:00 outfit. So generally speaking, living conditions were superior to the army.

Did you find that your militia training had helped you when you'd gone in to do your rookie training in the RAAF?

Well it did help me, I knew

03:30 some of the law, the rules and regulations. I was proficient in drill, matter of fact I was selected in the 25th Battalion drill team, there was an inter battalion competitions and the 25th Battalions team won those, which I was a member. And we had rifle drill

04:00 also in the army and that stood me in good stead in the air force. So it was part of one's training and it was beneficial, there no doubt about that. One learned to respect, well not respect, but pay homage in some cases to superior, of people of superior rank.

04:30 I know that we respected most of them, there were just the occasional dog.

Was the food any better in the RAAF?

Depending, at bases in Australia it was definitely superior. And of course I was an officer for three or four years,

05:00 that was probably made an improvement too. But, no up in the front line in New Britain, New Guinea, and Borneo and Morotai, the food was nothing to get excited about. Tinned you know, bully beef was the standard meat, if you

05:30 got in an American chow line it would be Spam, which is somewhat akimbo to our camp pie. But, Sayo biscuits, condensed, evaporated milk, tinned peaches or apricots, they were about, and , what was called Tropical Spread, for butter, so they were about the four main standard foods

06:00 in the diet. But when we would get replacement aircraft back from Australia, we would lose aircraft, either shot down in action or crashed on landing or take off, damaged, and then you'd get replacement aircraft from Australia. It was incumbent on the crew bringing that aircraft up, a Beaufighter had a crew of two, a pilot and

06:30 a navigator, to bring up some food, fresh food, eggs. I took one or two aircraft up from Laverton which was quite close to Werribee and one of the test pilots with whom I was flying at Laverton, his people had a large poultry farm, they were commercial egg producers

07:00 at Werribee. So we would get cases and cases of fresh eggs and stow them in the aircraft. It was also incumbent on you to take up grog. There was whisky about in those days, cheap and nasty, called Corio which we referred to as COR-10. The Beaufighter had what are called blast tubes, was a bit like a stove pipe

07:30 underneath the pilot's feet that went back to the four canon. And we'd push a hand full of cotton waste

down then a bottle of Corio, then another hand full of cotton waste just to stop the breakage. And I think you could get about a case, about a dozen bottles of Corio in those four blast tubes.

Then a fitter would paste fabric over the holes of the blast tubes and spray a bit of camouflage paint over it and away we'd go. And you might get one of those aircraft replacements a month, or two a month. So and then that would be a time to have a sort of bash [party] in the mess with the blokes that drank. And

08:30 some of them of course produced 'jungle juice' [home brewed liquor] and the sensible ones, when the legitimate grog cut out, would go home to bed, but some of them of course would then indulge in jungle juice. And my navigator - he had his own juice, jungle juice - was twice unfit for flying the next day and I had to get another navigator to go with me.

09:00 And the navigator I chose was a wonderful, happy go lucky young fellow named Bill Yates from Gatton. I knew Bill and his family from my days as a student and working at Gatton. And sadly he lost his life while he was up there flying with somebody else. So, but the first time I was acquainted with jungle juice, Rex,

09:30 my navigator, I woke up in the middle of the night and I could hear this, plip plop, crackle, plip plop crackle. And I grabbed my torch and I thought they were hermit crabs, I thought, "My God we're being invaded by hermit crabs", so I'm shining the torch around. Finally I tracked it down, and he had a four gallon tin buried under his bed, and in that went, oh, potato peelings I think and

10:00 raisins out of a Comfort parcel, coconut and corn, we used to barter corn from the natives, all sorts of things, and I think they used to get a bit of medicinal alcohol. And it was fermenting and these bubbles were coming up and then when they got to the surface they'd plip plop. But I did never try jungle

10:30 juice, but I had to sit in on a trial on one or two occasions of blokes who were caught brewing. And one of them, this fellow had a really beautifully set up still with copper vats, and he was one of the ground staff that knew how to handle copper pipe and all those sort of things. And I was the prosecuting officer and I remember we poured a bit of this

11:00 jungle juice on the table and then lit a match, and there was just a gentle 'puff,' and almost a colourless flame that it burned with. So he was reduced in rank I think from a sergeant to a corporal and fined, lost a bit of pay, something like that. But, yes, you couldn't stop blokes surreptitiously producing jungle juice.

Can you tell us about doing your

11:30 **pilot training at Tamworth?**

Well I had a very staid pilot, he was I suppose in his thirties, perhaps approaching the forty mark, of age, instructor. And one of the first things he said to me was a very common expression that I heard many times since, "There are many old pilots in the air force, there are many bold pilots in the

12:00 air force, but there are very few old, bold pilots," and that was the theme of his teaching. So I didn't get to learn aerobatics, we were single engine aircraft and he wasn't in to teaching aerobatics. That determined my future because if you were a whiz at

12:30 aerobatics of course you went on to become a single engine pilot or fighter pilot and if you hadn't had that experience, I was categorised as a twin or multi engine or bomber pilot. And I remember the final test with the chief flying instructor and he asked me to do a slow roll or something of that nature. And I said well I hadn't done any aerobatics and he said, "Oh well, I'll

13:00 just show you." And I, my straps were fairly loose and when he rolled over on his back I fell about three inches off my seat, in the direction of the ground and, oh my God!, I was groping for my parachute cord, until I , took up the tension in the straps. But, so that's how I was categorised as a twin or multi engine

13:30 pilot and not a fighter pilot. But I did manage to get generally all through my training above average classification. And there was only one bit of a hairy [frightening] occasion, two or three of us were out and a very strong wind came up, and a Tiger Moth,

14:00 inot having any brakes, and is a bit difficult to handle in a very strong wind. And the whole of the station was out, ostensibly, as soon as we landed to run in and grab the wings and steady the aircraft, stopped it being flipped over or what ever. But each time I was coming in to approach, I'd see these

14:30 people walking in to the middle of the thing and so I'd put on power and go round again. It had me, I was non-plussed what this was all about. But finally we got down quite alright without any great problem. But Tamworth was a very good aerodrome in which to learn to fly because it was a long rectangular paddock, but one quarter of it was taken up

15:00 with the Tamworth cemetery. And there'd be occasions when you'd take off and look over the side and there'd be a long cortege of cars, obviously a burial underway. I think that was a bit salutary there. And when I first learned to ride a motor bike it was somewhat similar. A friend of mine, Cliff Wyndham had a motor bike, this was pre war,

15:30 and to teach me to ride. We went towards Brisbane, towards Ipswich to Marburg. And the Marburg Cemetery was right beside the road and it was one of the few bits of bitumen on the Brisbane to Toowoomba Road in those days. So for Saturday afternoon I was up and down this bit of bitumen on Cliff Wyndham's motor bike with a cemetery right beside you, so I think the lesson was obvious.

16:00 **In Tamworth, was that the first time you'd ever been in an aircraft?**

Yes, and I was one of those who got sick at a merry-go-round at the Show, I think I only tried it once or twice at the most. Even the things they had at side shows or town shows in those days weren't as sophisticated as some of the things you have today. But we had

16:30 the merry-go-rounds and I lost whatever meal I had had before. And strangely enough I was never ill in an aircraft, mainly I think because ninety-nine times out of a hundred I was the pilot and concentrating, and at no time did I ever feel squeamish, no matter how bad the weather, as when I was in my flying. So Tamworth was a very pleasant

17:00 place and we have been back and had a look, the aerodrome is still there beside the cemetery. Only a couple of years ago I was back there. It was winter time, we played football against Gunnedah, I can recall going to Gunnedah at weekends to Tamworth air force, playing, and cricket. But rabbit was very prominent on the menu,

17:30 this was before the days of myxomatosis [rabbit killing virus] and there were lots of rabbits about Tamworth in those days and lots of them appeared on the air force menu.

Can you recall as a young bloke ever seeing aircraft or knowing about the famous flyers of the day?

The famous flyers? Well one of them who was an instructor there, was named Gerry Pentland, there's an air strip named after him

18:00 up at Darwin. And we thought it was a remarkable feat, perhaps it wasn't so remarkable, a bit like us, as I said earlier, , throwing your leg around from a second class carriage through the window, around the partition in to the first class. But he took off and I'm not sure now whether he was in the front cockpit seat or the rear seat, on his own, and when he came down

18:30 he was in the other seat. While in mid air he'd climbed out of one and got over the partition into the other. A Tiger Moth wasn't all that stable, but I guess that as an old pilot he knew how to handle it and it might not have been a very difficult exercise. But they were very gentle aircraft, very benign and there were very few accidents or deaths with them. And

19:00 probably, like so many accidents and deaths, if there were they probably were pilot error, you know. We lost a lot of aircraft through pilot error one way and another.

Can you remember the first flight, when the instructor would have taken you up for a flight?

No, not really, it's all so long ago now. It was probably with some trepidation but I

19:30 really don't remember, it was what they call familiarisation flight. And then it took about eight hours before we were allowed to go off solo, the average was about eight, some went off in six. If you hadn't gone off after about ten I think your chances of being allowed to continue were fairly slim. The most difficult part was

20:00 judging your height above the ground when you were coming in to land at speed, you'd approach at sixty miles an hour, whatever it was, and if you were three feet too high obviously it'd hit the ground with a thud and bounce and if you were a foot or two too low you'd hit that ground very hard and bounce also, what they'd call 'kangaroo-ing' across the aerodrome. But

20:30 that aerodrome was a wide grassed area so you had plenty of room to move if the aircraft swung a little bit, you had hundreds of metres to the next nearest fence. Not, like subsequently when we got up into operations where you had an air strip no more than forty or fifty metres wide, hewn out of jungle, particularly when we were progressing and

21:00 the air strip would be used for a month or a few weeks and then you'd move on to the next one. And a lot of people who would be alive today had they been on an aerodrome with its wide open spaces, came to grief amongst the trees, jungle along the side. I had an instance when I was at Mallala in South Australia when one wheel of an Anson

21:30 wouldn't come down but fortunately it was a wide open aerodrome. And after it lost flying speed on one wing, on one wheel, the other wing dipped in to the ground and it, as we used to learn in geometry at high school, 'described an arc,' we described a few arcs in the direction of a fence, but we didn't reach

22:00 the fence, thank heavens for the aerodrome and not an air strip. But I had three crashes up in Morotai and Borneo when I was test flying. And that was a different kettle of fish [situation] because it was an air strip which had

22:30 coconut palms on either side and at the either end, or jungle. But I was a bit fortunate, apart from what

we now call whip lash in the neck and lower spine, it, I wasn't seriously hurt. But it's a bit disconcerting when you still going along at thirty or forty miles an hour and you reach the end of the strip and there's nothing but

23:00 coconut palms ahead of you. Hear expensive noises of bits of aeroplane cut, being tipped off. And the shock was to get out and away as soon as it came to a stop because you didn't know about fire. And one of them was in a Beaufighter in which an engine coughed on take off just before I became airborne, and of course that wrecked the aircraft. With one motor on full

23:30 power and the other coughed, [misfired] you'd have very little room to manoeuvre before you were amongst the rubble on the side of the air strip.

Can you recall your first solo flight in a Tiger Moth?

Not in detail, no. I had done about eight hours of dual and I probably very tense, but it was just

24:00 one, a circuit, take off and five hundred feet, a thousand feet, back along and start to descend and in. But it was trouble free and not particularly momentous occasion, that one remembers anyway.

Did you get leave at all while you were in Tamworth?

Only that weekend's off when you, I don't know what those who didn't play football did,

24:30 but I remember we went to Gunnedah on a couple of occasions. And probably otherwise went into town, I didn't drink in those days either, there was no great incentive to go into the pub in Tamworth. But on some occasions at Mallala for example I was very friendly with a family who had an orchard up in the Barossa

25:00 Valley so my weekends I'd go up there and go fox shooting and they had sheep as well as orchards.

Can you recall receiving your wings?

Yes. The, after two months at Tamworth we went back to

25:30 Amberley and we did another fifty hours at Amberley on Ansons, and some wonderful men there as instructors who later made names for themselves and some of them died of course. One of them was Reg or Butch Gordon, he was a Flight Lieutenant and a rather cherubic face, I

26:00 thought that he was younger than I was actually, he had that look about him, but he must have been a few years older and he was permanent air force because he was a flight lieutenant at that stage. After, some, a year or two later he was posted to 31 Squadron Beaufighters up in Darwin and, he very quickly, he was made a squadron leader. He very quickly won a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] because they, 31 Squadron boys had to fly

26:30 across the Timor Sea before they got to the Japanese bases, and then not long afterwards he was awarded a Bar to his DFC. But he was killed on his home aerodrome at Kamali just south of Darwin and there are conflicting stories about how it happened. One of them was that the Australian Beaufighter as distinct from the English

27:00 Beaufighter had what we call fully feathering air screw. The English Beaufighter, if your motor stopped, the ten inch wide blades, they were six feet long, three of them and ten inches wide, would be facing into the wind and offer considerable resistance. The Australian Beaufighters had what was called fully feathering and you pressed a button which the air

27:30 screw would turn, and all you had was the thin narrow edge, knife edge going into the wind. And that made the difference between being able to maintain height in the Australian Beaufighter, of which I was a test pilot at the factory, compared to the English Beaufighter that we flew in the squadron which could not maintain height on full power, if you had just one motor.

28:00 Initially the two buttons were down here somewhere that you had to press to feather it and one story I was told, I wasn't in 31Squadron, I was in 30 over in New Guinea, was that he had feathered one air screw and was seen to go to un-feather it but he pressed the wrong button and he feathered the other one instead and

28:30 course, lost both motors. Subsequently the buttons were put up on the dash where you could see them, you didn't have to feel for them. But whether that's the true story I don't know, but he crashed into the timber at the end of his own strip on a test flight and demonstration flight. So the end of a wonderful pilot and very popular character and obviously a very accomplished operational pilot, who won a DFC and a Bar

29:00 in a matter of several months. But the Anson that we were trained on didn't have a hydraulic under carriage, the pilot had a handle here beside him. A hundred and twenty-four or a hundred and thirty-two turns , when you took off, to get the wheels up and then the same number of turns of course to get them down. And

29:30 as I said earlier, occasionally that didn't work, one of the wheels wouldn't come down, so you had two

alternatives to choose from, one was to land on one wheel, and eventually you end up with one wheel and one wing tip. The other one was of course to belly land with both wheels up which caused considerable damage, not only to the air screw but to the under part of the aircraft.

30:00 So it's part of an experience to get, walk away from , when you land on one wheel. I wouldn't like to do it today's modern aircraft because at the high speeds that they land at now it'd be a lot more damage I imagine, lot more dangerous.

Would the propeller on the wing that dipped, would that

30:30 **sustain any damage?**

Yes, it would, the Anson only had a two bladed air screw, depending if it was still turning, they'd be bent, the blades on the air screw bent. I don't know just how serious the damage to the aircraft, that particular aircraft

31:00 was at the time, I was only interested in getting away from it.

When you were learning to fly the Anson, were there any other air crew in the aircraft?

On that flight?

Oh, on any of the training flights that you did at Amberley?

In the same...?

In any of the training flights in the Ansons?

Oh we always had a crew. After the Japanese came into the war they formed these squadrons of Ansons. They were at Sydney and

31:30 Melbourne and Adelaide just to patrol , what they called anti sub patrols. I did about twelve or fifteen of these. You would have a navigator and a wireless air gunner on board. Mallala it was inland so we would go from Port Lincoln or occasionally from Mallala

32:00 itself or Ceduna further west than Port Lincoln, or Kangaroo Island, there was an air strip there. And I remember one fellow, aircraft came back with a flying fish wedged between the cylinders. He was very low, near, and had caught, came back with a fish between one, the two of the cylinders of his Anson.

32:30 But, so the station had a big increase in staff, you had, from just having pilots when the Japanese came in, suddenly there was this influx of wireless air gunners and navigators for quite a while. And we had the job of instructing not only our

33:00 final training for our own pilots but a lot of people from the Dutch New Guinea and Dutch West Indies, now Indonesia, they fled to Australia. Some of them were Dutch men, some of them were Indonesians and we gave them some pilot training on Ansons, these people who hadn't completed their training. And then they went off I don't know to where,

33:30 but they were there for several months at Mallala.

Was all your training part of The Empire Air Training Scheme?

Yes, yes. I was on Number Twelve Course and it was all done under the Empire Air Training Scheme. A lot of people of course went to Canada, most, to train.

34:00 My wife's younger brother trained in Canada and from there went on to England. But I, my five years was confined to Australia and New Guinea and Borneo, all in the south, the South Pacific area.

So how long did your multi engine training go for?

Four months, the whole course took

34:30 eight months by which time we had a hundred and fifty hours of flying, fifty hours on the single engine Tiger Moth and a hundred hours on Avro Ansons. And then I was posted as a staff pilot to Mallala where I remained for about eighteen months, during which time I put up about a thousand hours on Ansons;it was all part of the

35:00 the job at the time. And but subsequently, as a test pilot, I flew about twenty-five different types from Tiger Moths, to Spitfires and from Ansons and Dragon Rapides to Mosquitos, and I flew the two Lancasters actually that came to Australia.

35:30 I think there were only two came out in the war, the first one was 'Q for Queenie' and all these aircraft eventually have to come into Laverton for a complete overhaul after they have done a thousand hours or something of that nature. So I did a couple of flights in Q for Queenie as a test pilot. It was wrecked when it overshot the end of the air strip and ended up in a ditch

36:00 at Williamtown I think. So then they brought out G for George and G for George was flown by a Rockhampton man, a Flight Lieutenant Hudson who worked for the Rockhampton City Council. It

actually landed in Rockhampton and down in the library there are photos of G for George out on the Rockhampton aerodrome with all the crew

36:30 around it. I think Eddie Hudson subsequently transferred after the war down to Bundaberg or somewhere, but it was overhauled and when it was ready to test flying he wasn't available, I don't know why. So I did three or four flights in G for George which has just recently been returned to the museum after

37:00 a substantial overhauling .So I'm probably one of the few pilots that's still alive that flew both Queenie and George, but I didn't fly them in operations, that's the only two Lancasters I have flown.

How hard was it as a pilot to have to be able to adapt to all those different types of aircraft?

Oh, it wasn't very difficult,

37:30 particularly if you read a bit about them beforehand, you were aware of their approach speed, what you had to approach at. I must say that I didn't do my reputation as a pilot, a test pilot, a lot of good on that first flight. I think it must have been in Queenie, you had to approach at, I don't know, a hundred miles an hour, and being a bit unsure I was, probably thought well I'll approach

38:00 it a bit faster than that and anyway, levelled out over the fence and over the end of the air strip, I was still about ten feet above the ground and suddenly the ground came up to meet me. And the Lancaster bounced and did a couple of these before I saved it with the throttles. The whole station, two thousand of them I suppose were out to watch this hot

38:30 test pilot flying this Lancaster for the first time. I got the thumbs down I think as a test pilot after that. But I was exonerated , during its time in the repair section, the cover had been left off the 'peto' head which operates your air speed indicator, and apparently the air speed indicator was reading low or reading high, so instead of coming in at a hundred and ten I was coming in at about ninety,

39:00 and I messed it up a bit I must admit.

Tape 4

00:31 **When you were doing your staff flying, what did that involve?**

Well the final two months you accompanied the trainee pilots, they already had fifty hours up on Ansons under what was called the instructor. And they were supposed to do most of the flying, you sat in the right hand

01:00 seat and sort of supervised their flying and of course you were always ready to take over if there were any problems. So we'd do night flying with them and then before they went off solo, cross countries, bombing and things like that, fifty hours. It was quite interesting that

01:30 one or two of the people that I trained or helped to train as pilots there at Mallala turned up in 30 Squadron. And but one of them, Ted Marron, was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross, I remember. And another one, we've just added a plaque to a memorial up on New Britain, he did, wasn't in our squadron he was in a

02:00 air sea rescue flying an antiquated sea plane called a Seagull. And he sadly, we had three members of our squadron down in a rubber dinghy, they were shot down and they landed in the sea and were in a rubber dinghy off the south of New Britain. No air sea rescue, as later became available with the

02:30 Catalina flying boats. And somebody dug up this Seagull which was a single engine sea plane, quite antiquated, it was the fore runner of the Walrus. And he, his name was Bonythan, he was a South Australian and he used our Commanding Officer's navigator and they headed off

03:00 towards, to find these three men in the dinghy, whom we had been covering. We were there when they were shot down and we took it in turns for two days to cover them from the squadron, they were never heard of again. He was supposed to land and pick up as many of these three as the aircraft would carry

03:30 and of course bring them back to base but he was never heard of again. I was instrumental in the establishment of a memorial in New Britain at a town called Kimbi on a plantation known as the San Remo and it's now the San Remo Club. San Remo was a point on the coast in this big coconut plantation, and in our raids on New Britain we used that as

04:00 very prominent navigation point. So this memorial to the twenty-nine blokes that we lost is established there, a beautiful memorial, an obelisk with the air screw of a Beaufighter mounted high above it, only fifty metres or so from the beach, set in a grove of coconut plantations. And it never occurred to

04:30 me when we were designing and building that memorial to put this, Bonythan's name on the memorial. He wasn't one of our squadron, very few people knew of him, saw him, all we knew was that a Seagull

came in, picked up the CO's navigator and away they went to find the three blokes in the dinghy.

05:00 The CO's navigator was Flying Officer Kelly, and Flying Officer Bonythan just disappeared. But at no time during the twelve months of thinking about the memorial, raising funds here in Australia to build it, designing it, having it built up there, did the name, I didn't know who the name of the pilot was, I hadn't met him.

05:30 And then eighteen months ago a pilot of 30 Squadron, Chas Harris in Adelaide phoned me and he said, "Hey I've just learned the name of that pilot that flew that Seagull is Bonythan." And it hit me, I said, "Hell, as much as anybody he lost his life trying to save three of our

06:00 men, his name should have been on that memorial." So we set about raising a few more dollars, having a plaque made here to commemorate the name of Flying Officer Bonythan and Flying Officer Kelly. Kelly's name was already on the original memorial and the expatriates, and there are quite a number of expatriates, Australians up there in New Britain around Kimbi. Kimbi is a town of about

06:30 thirty thousand people, bank managers, big business managers, plantation managers and all largely Australian expatriates, a few from New Zealand, a few from England. But since the construction of that memorial in the year 2000, it was officially unveiled on Anzac Day 2000 by a Wing Commander Hodges from Canberra. They,

07:00 the ex-patriates, hold an Anzac Day ceremony at the memorial site, up until that, they hadn't had an Anzac Day commemoration because New Guinea is a separate nation and they don't observe Anzac Day, it doesn't mean anything in their lives. So on Anzac Day last year,

07:30 2002, they unveiled this plaque to Flying Officer Bonython and Flying Officer Kelly, was added to the memorial. So I sort of feel exonerated now to some extent that to think for all those years, his name, we didn't know his name. His widow's still alive in, down in Adelaide, a wonderful

08:00 lady.

So once you finished your staff flying, how did you get selected to become a test pilot?

I guess the Air Board go through the list of pilots and they thought oh, this poor old bloke has been eighteen months out there at Mallala, we'd better give him a change of scenery. I don't know,

08:30 it just simply that the order came through, posted to Forest Hill for training on Beaufighters, and Forest Hill being just outside Wagga. And another friend of mine at Mallala was sent there with me, two of us, Lenny Hastwell, an Adelaide lad who, we trained at Forest Hill together, we both went to 30 Squadron.

09:00 So whilst I was there, this was in the beginning of '43 my wife was also at Forest Hill as a transport driver but we didn't meet, we hadn't met. It was twelve or eighteen months later that we met, so I think, oh well, it's probably just as well the way things have turned out, so .And to convert to a

09:30 Beaufighter it's only a single seat aircraft, there's no dual controls, so we did the first month of about fifty hours on Beauforts. The Beaufort is bigger, it's made by the same company, the Bristol Company, Bristol Beaufort, Bristol Beaufighter. And that's again, I met up with Reg Gordon or Butch Gordon, whom I mentioned earlier as having won

10:00 a DFC and Bar up in 31 Squadron. By now he was the Chief Flying Instructor at Forest Hill on Beauforts and I flew with him as the instructor, he would sit in the dual seat. There were several other Squadron Leaders there, one Squadron Leader Cooke, Squadron Leader Jimmy Emmerton, Squadron Leader Dave Calhoun.

10:30 And in the mess at night I can always remember Cookie and Jimmy Emmerton, their rendition of 'Chop Sticks' on the mess piano, they would play a duet of 'Chop Sticks' Jim Emmerton came to 30 Squadron a couple of years later and he was killed, he lost his life.H had been transferred over to 22 Squadron Boston's

11:00 from our Squadron when 22 lost their Commanding Officer, and he lost his life. But I'll always remember, whenever I hear Chop Sticks... Jimmy Emmerton. 22 Squadron lost Wing Commander Bill Townsend, their Commanding Officer and David

11:30 McLymont, Flying Officer David McLymont who was a friend of ours. He had a property, cattle property, first of all out near Blackall but subsequently at Dingo, not a hundred miles west of here, which he called 'Palmalmal'. And it's still Palmalmal today because Palmalmal was a plantation on the south coast of New Britain where they were shot down.

12:00 They landed in the sea, got ashore, got into the jungle, evaded the Japanese, were taken in to help by the natives, friendly natives, they were lucky to have met up with a friendly native, he was the Tultul or Chief of the tribe, Golpak,

12:30 And they eventually got word from one of our Coast Watchers that if they were at a certain spot, a mile off the coast of a certain point on the north side of the island at midnight on a certain night. So they had to traverse the island, they had to you know, avoid the enemy at all the time, and you didn't know

whether the natives, there was

13:00 a reward out on their heads, and which must have been very tempting for a lot of the natives. But they were taken out in the canoes and an American submarine, the USS Gato, which is Spanish for cat, tom cat, surfaced and took them on board, so it was quite a remarkable rescue, three months later. They had a third,

13:30 an American who was shot down with them, Fred Hargeschimer, and Fred was succoured by the tribe and he was desperately ill. And I understand that some of the nursing mothers in the tribe would express the milk and feed him on their milk and he recovered and he was rescued.

14:00 He went back to America, he was a plumber I think by trade, and he decided that they should have a memorial to Golpak, the leader of the tribe, which they collected money for. Bill Townsend came here to Rockhampton, David course didn't have far to come, David McLymont, and we contributed to the memorial. And they built a school for the village and sent the

14:30 Golpak's son to be trained as a teacher, as a memorial because of the help that they had given and rescued those three blokes. Quite a story in itself really and, well David has since died, I don't know about Bill Townsend. He ended up as Chief of the Air Star, Air Force, Air Commodore or, so. But

15:00 quite an experience, I remember David telling me, on one occasion they were hiding and they were in water, and I think there were rushes and water lilies and what have you, with just their noses out of the water, the Japanese were not far away and he could hear this noises. And when he asked Golpak what was the noise and he said, "Oh, only crocodile master."

15:30 **So at any time when you were doing your staff flying and your test flying, were you anxious to get to the front, to the battles?**

Get to the front?

Yeah.

Oh yes, I think that was everybody's wish that they could get into action. Crazy really when you think about it, if you were in a safe job down in Adelaide, why would you want to leave it and

16:00 go up and risk your life up there, but one has to be a bit young and impetuous, and I think that. So it was with great relish that we took off from Mallala to Forest Hill and then couldn't wait to get in to action. So and the same sort of situation, after I had had about twelve months as a test pilot, I had done my thirty-five operations

16:30 and nine months up in New Guinea, New Britain, sent back to Laverton as a test pilot, it started to lose its shine and I started to hanker for the squadron. And on several occasions I approached the Commanding Officer and said, "Look what are the chances of being transferred back to the squadron?" By this time they had moved up along the north coast of New Guinea.

17:00 And he said, "No, you have done a test pilot's course and," you know, "no hope mate." But eventually it was decided that they should have a test pilot up on Morotai , a lot of aircraft were being damaged by enemy fire, a lot of them were being, accidents on the strip, so I was posted up there as their test

17:30 pilot, that was, oh, early in 1945.

Can I just ask you there George, the test pilot's course that you talked about, was that simply converting to the Beauforts and Beaufighters?

Oh no you did I think it was about a month's course on flying a few different types, lectures on engines, different types of engines the you would meet. There were in-line engines like the Spitfire, radial engines like the Beaufighter

18:00 a the Beaufort, different types of quite, the Beaufighter had what they call sleeve valves which was quite different to the conventional poppet valve that you, most of the things. And breaking the sound barrier was all the talk at that time, it hadn't been broken. Yeager, the American hadn't done his

18:30 bit up to that stage and there were lots of theories about what would happen when one broke the sound barrier, the build up of this air in front of the wing, the compressed air. And, you know, but it was all airy fairy talk because nobody really knew what was going to happen when. But we were at that stage that aircraft design was getting up towards the speed of sound.

How was it for you to have

19:00 **been flying Ansons to suddenly jump in the cockpit of a Spitfire?**

Wasn't particularly difficult, you were on your own from the word go, whether it was, I flew the only Hurricane I think that came to Australia, a lot of other test pilots did too. It was a bit of an unwritten law I think that when you did a test flight, if it was an unusual aircraft, like

19:30 a Hurricane, only one of them around, you'd find something wrong with it, and so it had to be flown again. And I think, whereas really one test flight might have done, it ended up doing five or six so all

your mates had a go at it too. So it wasn't particularly difficult, some of them were quite divergent really, the Vultee Vengeance, the American dive bomber,

20:00 you couldn't relate, it was like a big pregnant pup, you couldn't relate that to a Spitfire. Interesting thing I found about the Spitfire, the torque of the motor, the left wing tended to want to dig in to the ground so that you started off with the control column over to the right to hold that wing up. And it was said that it wore out a left

20:30 hand tyre more off, quickly than it did a right hand tyre, with that torque. I didn't have any left hand tyres blow out so I can't vouch for the truth of that, but then as you gathered speed the control column gradually came back in to the middle and away you went. The Vulture Vengeance was an interesting aircraft, it was the American dive bomber

21:00 and they had dive brakes, which were large, like large flaps that came down, they had holes in it. And I don't think you could dive vertically but you could get very close to the vertical, with the dive brakes out and that stopped you building up to excessive speed. But it used to be quite a thrill to then pull the lever up and let the brakes, dive brakes come up and whoof, the bottom'd fall out and your stomach would sort of come up, into your

21:30 mouth almost. I had to deliver Santa Claus on one occasion, one Christmas Eve, in an American aircraft called a Norseman. The Norseman was a single engine and , in the north of Canada and Alaska, they used to fit them with floats or with skis for landing in the snow. But here in Australia they had wheels and I was called

22:00 upon to bundle Santa Clause, I don't know where I picked him up but probably at Para, not Parafield, one of the other air strips in Essendon, in Melbourne and fly him over to Laverton and land. And all the squad, staff out and wives and families, children for Santa Claus to alight from this Norseman.

22:30 One of the oldest aircraft I think was the Dehavilland DH-86 I think it was, Dehavilland Rapide, they were used before the war for mail and Flying Doctor and those sort of things. Kittyhawks and Boston's, American Boston's, Beauforts, Beaufighters. But the one aircraft I would love to

23:00 have flown was the P-38 or Lockheed Lightning, it captured my imagination, but I didn't get an opportunity, no matter how I tried, to get my hands on a P-38. And I was very friendly, although we had never met, but we corresponded and telephoned, with an American Ace, Corky Smith, from Carolina. Corky had about twelve or fourteen victories in his

23:30 P-38. And forty or fifty, forty-five years after the war I was able to send him a photo of his aircraft coming in to land with one motor shot out. My navigator Rex Pittman and I, were down at the edge of the air strip waiting to take off, a Japanese convoy was heading in our direction but it was out of range, so we were

24:00 on standby. And Rex had a camera and I said, "Look here's a P-38 coming in with one motor shot out." And as it drew abreast of us, Rex took a photo and on the nose of it was, in big letters, 'Corky Junior.' It was in my albums, I have a stack of albums there of war photos, operational photos, for years and years.

24:30 And a Canberra author who, my brother met him and this fellow had just published a book , called, 'Into the Dragon's Jaws,' and it was about the first massive daylight raid on Rabaul. And my brother said, "Oh my brother George was a pilot and he was in that raid." So out of that I sent him my collection of photos,

25:00 and when they came back, written on the back of 'Corky Junior,' was Colonel C. Smith, Rockbridge Road, you know, the full address. As a historian and a very good historian, you get your facts right and he knew about Corky because he was an American Ace. And so I wrote to Corky, this was forty-five years after the war,

25:30 I sent him the photo, I apologised for taking so long to get to him. I said, "Obviously the bloke flying the aircraft would have had a completely different view to what we did standing on the side of the strip." Well it's probably the nicest letter I have ever had, including love letters from my wife, when we were courting. It started off, 'Dear George, you are the greatest.'

26:00 To think that forty-five years later he should get a photo of his aircraft with him at the controls, landing on Goodenough Island with one motor, the three air blades still. And then he, of course, sent me a full description of it, which I have in there of how it all happened. They had been a fighter escort for a Liberator bombing crew over Rabaul,

26:30 they were at twenty-two thousand feet, and he blew the canopy off a Zero but at the same time he was shot in the motor and he had to stop the motor and feather the air screw, and head for home, gradually losing height. And he said they were, he was being pursued by three Zeros but they couldn't quite catch up to him. And he said he headed down the coast towards Palmalmal Plantation,

27:00 Jacquinot Bay, that I mentioned earlier with David McLymont, hoping to bail out because he knew about Australian Coast Watchers. And he was down to about a thousand feet and he sent out a May-Day call and he got an answer from a Liberator. They said, "Well we're on three motors, we're heading home,

we're in your locality, we'll turn back and look for you,"

27:30 and they met up. So Corky said he snuggled up as close as he could to this Liberator, and they were right down on the water and that stopped the Japanese from firing at them and then going down under and coming back up underneath, so he said fortunately none, neither the Liberator nor he were hit. So I think the Liberator went on, on it's three motors back to Port Moresby but Corky landed on, where we were,

28:00 on Goodenough Island. And it was repaired, his aircraft was repaired and he flew back to base a few days later. So from then on we maintained a very interesting correspondence and telephone calls to one another. He has since died but I had a Christmas email from his daughter. So it was a very interesting and such co-incidence

28:30 to find that forty-five years later that somebody recognised the aircraft that he was, at the time.

Can you tell us a little about when you did your conversion to Beauforts and Beaufighters?

The conversion? Well it was a very tense time I think that first solo in a Beaufighter because you were on your own, you did your

29:00 dual instruction in the Beaufort. And I had one interesting occasion, we were night flying and formation flying and, at night, and the, suddenly I got a rush of a hundred and twenty pound of air pressure up one, left leg of my trousers. The air pipe, your brakes were air brakes in a Beaufort and

29:30 you had a little lever on the control column that you pressed to apply the brakes. The pipe went down, it was only a thin, copper pipe, down the control column and of course to the brakes on the wheels. It had broken down at the bottom and suddenly got a hundred and twenty pound of air pressure, and here we were up at night with no brakes. Squadron Leader Dave Calhoun

30:00 was the pilot, so my job was to, as best I could, probably with a handkerchief or something, hold the two ends of the pipe together with my arm around the control column and we built up, oh, twenty pounds of pressure, which was probably better than nothing but very little really And he it, would have been a wonderful landing, except when he pulled the control column back

30:30 to sit the aircraft down, mine would hit me in the chin because I had my arms wrapped around, right down near the bottom. And I'd probably jump and push it forward, so I'm afraid we did a bit of a kangaroo-ing. But it did stop before we got to the fence at the far end, I think he ground looped it at the far end and the wing went over the top of the fence post and all was rescued.

That was in a Beaufort?

That was in a Beaufort.

31:00 But there were ten or twelve of us on that conversion course and the Beaufort, Beaufighter had a bad tendency to swing, because both motors rotated in the same direction, and the torque, it would swing on take off and tended to do that on landing. The bloke who was to be Commanding Officer of 30

31:30 Squadron in which I flew, he was on the same course, Wing Commander Clarrie Glasscock, wonderful bloke. He incidentally, was a graduate in, from Sydney University in Agricultural Science, and after the war I was to do Agricultural Science at Queensland University. But Clarrie was the first one to go off solo in the Beaufighter so the other ten of us and our navigators, twenty of us,

32:00 were out there watching this first solo in the Beaufighter. And it came in and did a beautiful landing but it swung, and Clarrie couldn't control it so it did a, like the 'poo-bar bird', a number of ever decreasing circles and I think wiped the under carriage off. And when the dust had settled, because fortunately it was on the Forest Hill aerodrome not on an air strip,

32:30 standing on the other side of the aircraft, smoking, nonchalantly smoking his pipe, was, we could discern Clarrie Glasscock. So everybody, there was a collective sigh of relief, everybody thought, well thank God it was the Wing Commander and not the Sergeant who had done that. We all felt relatively secure that if we did the same sort of thing that we wouldn't be harshly penalised, so we were indebted

33:00 to Clarrie. But nobody else managed to lose their aircraft, the one we were training on. Clarrie Glasscock was lost leading a strike on the very air strip where the memorial is now situated nearby, at Hoskins, it was a Japanese air strip, and his last words heard over

33:30 the radio, the intercom, were to his navigator. His normal Navigator Flying Officer Kelly had already been lost, Kevin Kelly as I remarked earlier, in this Seagull sea plane. So Don West, a friend of mine, a navigator, who comes from down near Newcastle, said he and John

34:00 Cain, were two navigators, they were sitting in the tent talking. And the Commanding Officer came along and said, "Well," to John Cain, "I haven't got a navigator as you know John, I need one, you'll do, what about coming with me?" And his last words heard over the Hoskins air strip was, "You'd better," to his navigator, John Cain, down the back, "You'd better come up front laddie, I've been hit." That was

34:30 the last we heard of them. And they crashed not far away from the air strip and were both killed. That

was in 1943, in 1998 my wife and I went back to New Britain for the first time and we found, with the help of one of the local indiginees, Rod Marseland, , a motor of Clarrie Glasscock's Beau-

35:00 fighter in a plantation. And it is now as part of the memorial, it's set up on a concrete block near this memorial that I spoke of. But 1943 to 1998 and we came upon the Beaufighter motor still there in the jungle.

Besides its tendency to pull to one side, what else did you think of the Beaufighter?

Oh, at the time

35:30 it was a wonderful aircraft, I think it was loved by everybody who flew it, so. It was very rugged, it wasn't a fighter in the true sense of the word, it was a fairly big aircraft, twin engine and you couldn't hope to mix it in a dog fight with a Zero. At sea level, I think it was designed as a torpedo aircraft initially and its best performance was at sea level. You could

36:00 get about two hundred and sixty knots out of it which was about three hundred miles an hour with full throttle and that might have been five to ten miles an hour faster than a Zero. So aircraft design is always a compromise and you had to take advantage of the strong points of your particular aircraft. A Beaufighter could out pace a Zero slightly, it gave its

36:30 best performance at sea level, or tree top level. So if you were jumped by Zeros the thing you did, you headed for the deck, you got right down on the water, ten feet above the water, ten feet above the jungle, flat as a strap. And so the Zero, it might get a few shots at you because it might have come down from ten thousand feet or twenty thousand and have built

37:00 up a lot of speed. But gradually it lost that advantage and if he wasn't successful with his shooting, you'd slowly pull away. But it seemed interminable that few minutes, five minutes perhaps that he was peppering away at you and you were just building up speed to get out of range. But it was a very rugged, they could stand a

37:30 lot of punishment. I have a photo in there of Flying Officer Nicholson and his navigator Ken Delbridge, standing in a hole in their plane. The tail plane that, you know, makes your aircraft rise or fall. Obviously a forty mill. canon shell had exploded and it'd blown half the tail plane away but yet he'd managed to get home with it, and

38:00 the photo is the two of them were able to fit up through the hole of the tail plane. Others came home with wing tips missing, things like that. I didn't have anything as serious as that, we had a few holes in the wings, one in a petrol tank in which we lost a bit of petrol on the way home, but I was quite fortunate really.

Did they have self-sealing fuel

38:30 **tanks?**

Yes, the drill was that you'd put both motors on that tank to use up as much as you could. The self-sealing in my case anyway wasn't a hundred percent effective but it did slow down the loss of fuel. And use up as much of the fuel as you could, before you had to, ran out of the, emptied the tank. Next day the tank was taken out and there was something

39:00 rattling around inside, and it was a high explosive shell that was a dud, made in Japan and it had failed to explode. That was Christmas Eve 1943, I think the greatest Christmas present I've ever had

Just get you to stop there, that tape's just about to end...

Tape 5

00:36 **So George if you could start off by telling us about crewing up at Forest Hill?**

For

01:00 Beaufighters you mean? Well I have my navigator's notes, he's passed on. He says that he doesn't know how we got together and neither do I really. There were about twenty-four, twelve pilots, twelve navigators went to Forest Hill in the one group. I'm not sure how many, ten crews or twelve crews, but we came from all

01:30 over. So the only person I knew was another pilot who was instructing at Mallala all the time I was there, Len Hastwell. Some of the people obviously knew one another before they got to Forest Hill and they teamed up. So I don't know whether I was the last one and Rex the last one left and we said, "Well we haven't any choice, we'd better

02:00 fly together." I really don't know how we got together. Whether I, my wife said I was the slowest boyfriend she ever had so I might have been a bit slow off the mark there too and just took what was

left over. And Rex had to do the same for a pilot, I haven't got a clue how we came together, but we got along very well. He was a Melbourne

02:30 boy engaged to a Melbourne girl so, I was heart whole and fancy free. But we shared a tent together for nine months and got on quite well together, and he was a very good navigator, we didn't have any navigation problems or radio problems. And, I don't know how he felt about his pilot but he was stuck with me anyway and had to make the best of it.

03:00 **So did you have a few flights just to get to know each other?**

No. Once, otherwise you'd have had difficulty swapping somebody else, you'd have had to find somebody else who was dissatisfied and sort of organise an exchange. So I think we all, whether we knew the navigator we had chosen or were left with,

03:30 I think we, we were all fairly young and fairly resilient, I think we just learned, thought well we can learn to live with one another. And I had, don't know of any of the twenty-four crews in the squadron when I was there all the nine months I was there, I don't know of any dissension between pilot and navigator. One navigator friend of mine was a bit disappointed

04:00 that his pilot was stood down from flying because he was getting a bit nervy about it but that's the only adverse comment I've ever heard. And it might well have saved that navigators life the fact that they were stood down for a few weeks.

What makes a good pilot and navigator relationship?

04:30 Oh, very hard to say that, to know really. I suppose you'd come from much the same social background, most of them were what you'd call middle class I suppose, people. Very few University trained people in those days, the only one I knew of was our Commanding Officer, he was about thirty, thirty-two years of age compared to an

05:00 average of about twenty-two, of the blokes under him. And but a few more had had high school to grade twelve or what we, would have been senior in those days. I had a diploma, which was the equivalent of senior or grade twelve. There was another pilot, Harold Woodruff from South Australia

05:30 and he also had a diploma from the South Australian Agricultural College, Roseworthy. His is the only aircraft or crew that we haven't located. Since 1998 I've instituted searches for those aircraft or crews that were lost that have not been found, so we know that some of them went into the sea so it was useless trying to find them. Harold Woodruff and

06:00 John Brookes, his navigator, haven't been located. We were hot on the trail up until the eleventh of September and then things fell apart of course, air force who might have assisted us from Port Moresby were required elsewhere. The few aircraft and what have you that were in New Britain are very expensive to hire, to look, this search area from the air for a start, became even

06:30 more expensive. The currency in New Guinea of course has lost a lot of its value as against the Australian dollar. And so we have done virtually nothing over the past twelve months trying to locate this last aircraft. But the qualities that brought I suppose, rather similar education levels, Rex Pittman was a grade twelve, he had trained

07:00 as a geologist. I knew a bit about geology in agriculture. Your soils all come from rocks originally, millions of years ago in most cases, so you learn a bit about geology and he was an assayist in geology, we had a bit of common ground there. And, I don't

07:30 know, his abilities seemed to be quite good as far as I was concerned, I really wasn't in a position to comment about the ability unless we failed to reach the target or failed to get home, due to bad navigation. You couldn't always, we always got home, hit it right on the nail, but the weather was so atrocious

08:00 a lot of times, big storms, wide ranging, that you had to either fly around, and you were flying over enemy territory, you had no accurate weather forecasts. So coming back, would brief the meteorologists about the weather up over target and what have you, they couldn't tell us because the equipment, we didn't have the wherewithal to know what the weather was

08:30 like. And now you can watch the television weather reports each evening and you can see New Guinea and New Britain and from the cloud, you can see the cloud, the rain, the density of rain because of the changing colour on the maps. I could give you quite a good weather report for Rabaul for example sitting in this room, watching the commercial

09:00 or ABC weather maps. We had none of that of course back in 1942-'43, so but...

How would you get...?

...in my opinion Rex was a, quite a good navigator and we had no problems. And he never complained about anything and the navigator had the worst role really, they didn't get the recognition that they should have got. The pilot

09:30 controlled the aircraft, we were engaged principally on ground strafing, strafing of ships, because we had four twenty mill. canon in the nose of the aircraft, six three-o-three machine guns out in the wing, and you flew, your sights were fixed, your guns were fixed, so you flew your aircraft at the target. So the pilot was in control and the navigator was sitting down the back, he

10:00 had a plastic cupola over the top that he could see, and one of his jobs was to face backwards keeping a lookout for enemy aircraft that might jump you from the rear. But and of course when you went on a strike with other aircraft I doubt that anybody was ever sent out singly, we used to operate in pairs at times hunting for barges and ships. So the leader,

10:30 his navigator was responsible for the navigation to get you to the target, the rest just followed along. And he had to keep the canon loaded, the breech blocks of the canon were right back near the navigator's feet, they were about three metres long, so they stretched from the front of the aircraft backwards. And if you got a blockage,

11:00 a canon stopped firing, his job would be to try and remedy that. Initially the canons were fed, the twenty mill. canon with drums of ammunition so when one drum was finished, he had a number of spares there near his feet, he would have to remove the empty one and replace it with these full ones, which were quite heavy. And if the pilot was doing some manoeuvring,

11:30 that 'G', 'G' for Gravity, they would be two or three times heavier than normal. You know, if you were pulling back from a dive or a steep turn, the poor old navigator, he had as they say, his work cut out, struggling, lifting those full drums and putting them back in position. They, over target, to try and take a bit of the

12:00 pressure off them, they were given cameras and they took about a five inch by four inch contact black and white photo. And while we were over target the navigator, they had two pistol grips and he could hold this quite heavy camera and through the cupola and be clicking away So you'd come back with a series of photos of what was going on down on the ground, how you

12:30 were shooting and things like that. So he was fairly busy and the pilot, in most cases, got the decoration, what they call the bravery award, not many of the navigators did or they would get a lesser one. For example one crew that did an excellent job, and the navigator is now the secretary of

13:00 our Beaufighter Association, the pilot got a Distinguished Flying Cross the navigator got an MID, [Mentioned in Despatches]. But they were together on all those operations and they were an integral part of a team, it's very hard to differentiate I think between who was the more valuable. I suppose the pilot really had to control the aircraft but the navigator had to give

13:30 him the correct course and tell him what was going on behind and what to expect. Or when he could see the tracers coming out of that Zero, "He's firing now," and you'd have to take evasive action. I think navigators in the squadron that I was in anyway, didn't get the recognition that they deserve.

14:00 **Can we just step back a minute and can you tell me about when you arrived at Port Moresby? When did you find out that you would be heading over to New Guinea?**

Well at the end of the course we were notified, there were only two squadrons to go to, one was 31 Squadron in Darwin and the one up in Port Moresby. And the Port Moresby one was getting

14:30 more publicity, more favourable publicity. They'd been involved in the Bismarck Sea Battle which was a very memorable battle and in which about I think twelve out of sixteen Japanese transports and naval ships were sunk. The Japanese were reinforcing in a big way, or attempting to, their people in the jungle

15:00 around Lae and that part of New Guinea. And it was a combined operation of which American Liberators bombed from height, American Mitchell's or B-25's bombed from a low level, Australian Boston's were there and the Beaufighters were there strafing, strafing the decks of the ships, and of course P-38's were acting as fighter cover.It was quite a

15:30 memorable battle really in which air power destroyed the naval power, and as I said, twelve out of sixteen ships or something of that order. It was probably a turning point in the battle for New Guinea and New Britain, the Japanese lost all of those troops that they had hoped to land. So, it's

16:00 the situation. I digress a bit as you see.

So when did you find out you were going to be heading over there?

Well immediately at the end of the course and we were still at Forest Hill. And I recall , still recall to this day, I suppose the first

16:30 time that I was drunk because I had, didn't drink up util that stage of the game and the blokes said, "Oh, we're off to the war," it's a case of, you know, "eat, drink and be merry, tomorrow we may die." Went, Saturday afternoon we were due to move off up to New Guinea on Monday, and let's go into the pub. So I tagged along and beer to me was a very bitter stuff, I couldn't take to beer at all. Somebody

17:00 suggested I have something gin, was it gin or rum? One in something or other anyway with lime and soda. So it was an alcoholic drink and drinkers will know what it was meant to be that you have with

lime and soda. Every time they'd have a glass of beer I'd have one of these Scotch lime and soda. Come dinner time that

17:30 evening, we went in and sat at the table in the hotel and the soup was put down and suddenly the soup started to, in the plate, in my eyes, started to do funny things. And George had to head for the bathroom in a hurry, and that was the evening that we were posted to New Guinea and 30 Squadron, or 31 Squadron. We went by train to Townsville

18:00 and then by German flying boats actually, 'Dorniers', from Townsville to Port Moresby. There were some very sad, misplaced judgements, for example when the squadron as a whole, I went there as a replacement, I wasn't an original squadron member, the squadron as a whole moved over there six months previously about September '42. The wharfies were on strike in Townsville,

18:30 wouldn't load us, so the squadron personnel had to load the ships themselves. This was the Communist sympathising, for the squadron to move out of Townsville over to Port Moresby. I flew over in a Dornier flying boat and the squadron was based at what was called Wards Air Strip, about

19:00 sixteen miles from the centre of the town, the squadron set up in tents was called Happy Valley. But life just went on from day to day as normal for the squadron , the arrival of new recruits. Some of the original members had, their time had expired and they were being gradually replaced, the Commanding Officer was being replaced, 'Black Jack' Walker,

19:30 and the whole twenty-four, or they wouldn't, some of the originals had been lost of course. But those who'd been there for six months it was at that stage were returned to Australia and reinforcements were coming in all the time to replace them. So there was no special welcoming, you went to the store and you drew your tropical gear.

20:00 Up until about that time people used to work without shirts and in shorts, just shorts and boots and a big hat. And but as an anti malaria control, the orders came through that particularly from sundown until sunrise when the mosquitoes were worst, you had to wear long sleeves rolled down and long slacks,

20:30 and you had mosquito repellent. And even when you went to the latrine and dropped your pants, you'd fill your hand with repellent and rub it over your rump on both sides to keep the mosquitoes at bay. I didn't get malaria, my brother in the AIF{Australian Imperial Force] did. So, then there was a sunken and still is, ship in the harbour in Rabaul

21:00 and we were given a couple of flights to strafe that ship, practise strafes under tropical conditions. And we'd just take off and fly out over the ship and then a thousand feet, which was roughly the height from which you normally started your strafing run on a ship or on an aerodrome or on whatever,

21:30 you'd nose down and you'd fly the aircraft at the target and you had a button on your control column and you'd give it just a short press, might only be a half second burst. And course going at a ship you can see whether there's any splashes out of the side or the front or the back, if the ship, there's a wreck, whether you were firing was any good, whether your aim was any good. And sadly we lost a crew

22:00 there; he, for some reason or other, hit the part of the ship, hit part of the ship's super structure and crashed into the sea. So there were too many accidents that resulted in loss of aircraft and loss of valuable trained crew members.

How would news like that affect you all?

22:30 Oh, well in the squadron for starters when you went there you didn't know many of them, you weren't close to them. So you just accepted it as part of what you had to expect, that you were going to lose crews, the squadron had lost two or three crews before we got there, some of them shot down. And one of the problems,

23:00 a couple of them were on their home strip after an operation. For example if a tyre was punctured by enemy fire, then you've got a landing on one good tyre and one that's blown out flat, and extremely difficult to control a high speed aircraft on a jungle air strip. As I mentioned earlier the difference between a narrow air strip and

23:30 an aerodrome which might be half a mile or so wide. And we lost a couple of aircraft and crews like that, they'd burst in to fire, flames, when they, all that metal scratching along the bitumen or the gravel of the air strip. And then the funeral to follow and all the air crew particularly would turn out to the funeral. I've got photos in there of some of the

24:00 funerals, so it was sad but you accepted it, you still had the job ahead of you to go ahead. In my case it never occurred to me that I might be one of those in the future.

What about the men who didn't come back that went missing?

Well one of the worst features of that, and I had to do it a couple of times, was

24:30 to notify their parents or next of kin. One of them I mentioned earlier, Bill Yates of Gatton, and it was my

job to put together, because I was a personal friend of his from pre war, put together what we thought were essential bits of his belongings and then write to his parents and tell them about it, that was fairly difficult.

25:00 How can you soften a blow that's really, they're probably half expecting it anyway, people back in Australia probably had very little idea of what life was like up there, and they probably, a lot of them would have expected the worst. Another friend of mine, whom I only got to know in the squadron was from Gainder and Colin Wyne, and his

25:30 navigator Don Kirkwood. Don was only a youngster, a real undersized Errol Flynn. I don't know if you have seen photos of Errol Flynn, but he had a little toothbrush moustache and was very handsome young boy. Married at the age of about twenty, twenty-one and had a daughter back in Australia, she's still quite active actually in the 30 Squadron

26:00 Association down in Sydney. And I had to write to Col Wyne's parents in Gatton about how they just disappeared and they , turned up in a prisoner of war camp up in Rabaul eventually. So on those occasions it was difficult to try and find words

26:30 to soften the blow if you could, and put their personal effects together and get it back to Australia to their parents. Both of them, Col Wyne's brother and sister-in-law, younger brother and this Don Kirkwood's daughter and her husband came up to New Britain to the unveiling of that memorial, in which both their

27:00 the names are on it, as having been lost. We haven't found their aircraft but not a lot of time has been spent looking for their aircraft. We know the fate of the crew, they were captured two or three days apart, they must have made a reasonable safe landing I suspect in the water, just close to the beach and got ashore. But whether they were betrayed by natives or whether the Japanese,

27:30 Don was captured first, he was a town boy and Col Wyne who was a country boy round Gainder. I often thought well probably his bush experience, he evaded them for another couple of days, whether that's correct. We do know that they were captured a couple of days apart and they were reported as eventually as being killed by bombing. But there were one or two mass graves found

28:00 and most people on our side of it anyway dispute that. I read statistics on one occasion that of all the air crew POWs taken prisoner, prisoner of war in the Pacific Zone, only four survived. And we do know that Newton VC, what happened to him, you dig your own grave, you kneel beside the grave with your hands tied behind your

28:30 back, the stick, sword comes down, you topple forward into the grave. And I think that happened to too many of our people, but when it says 'killed by allied bombing,' that's it. So both Don Kirkwood and Col Wyne were reported as having been killed

29:00 by allied bombing. We'll never know I guess.

Did you develop any superstitions or have any lucky charms …?

No, I didn't, I didn't have any superstition, except as I mentioned earlier on my birthday, on the very minute twenty-five years later the eleventh of November 195-, on eleven o'clock 1943,

29:30 I was a bit concerned about that. Not about going on the operation but about this report from one of the papers wanting to write a story about it. You know, something along the lines, 'Well here was this young man born at eleven o'clock on the eleventh of the eleventh 1918 and here he is twenty-five years later, you know, la da da da da, out bombing the enemy or

30:00 strafing the enemy.' I thought, yeah, my God, it might be the beginning and the end of him too. But once that was out of the way, no, I didn't have any superstitions and I didn't have any rabbit's feet, foot or anything like that to protect me and I didn't have any girlfriend or wife to worry me with, 'Oh darling, what am I gonna do if you don't come back?' sort of thing. I don't

30:30 know whether some wives, but I assume that there would have been a few wives that wrote along those lines. So, and I don't know of any others, you know, I have read of people who wore good luck charms but whether they were a hundred percent effective or not, I don't know, but I didn't have any and that didn't worry me.

31:00 **So was your base camp at Port Moresby?**

For a start but the fight was moving away, I mean the Kokoda Track was history, became history, the Buna Gona campaign with the AIF became history, the troops were moving further away, the targets were getting

31:30 further away way out of range. So we were, after a month or so at Port Moresby the squadron was moved down to the eastern tip of Papua New Guinea to Milne Bay. There were two air strips there, one named Turnbull after an Australian P-40 or Kittyhawk pilot who lost his life, and one named Gernie, I think who was an American. And we were

32:00 bivouacked, we were only to be there for about a month and , although we had our own tents in the coconut plantations, we were bivouacked for our food in the mess of Number 6 Squadron which flew Lockheed Hudson's. And the Commanding Officer was a Wing Commander, Bill Lear, and he had red hair and a handle bar moustache, and Fiery

32:30 Red, they were known as the Fiery Red Squadron and, to us anyway. But we were told that an order had been issued by the Commanding Officer that the Sergeants and non commissioned pilots and navigators and air gunners, all the air crew messed together. But he'd issued an order

33:00 that no man in the Officer's mess should could shave his upper lip. Well you can imagine a nineteen year old blonde trying to grow a moustache, and sometimes you'd get them against the light, oh yes, you just could see a few hairs there. That didn't apply to us, we were a bit of an unkempt rabble, I think we were regarded as such. But one quite interesting

33:30 thing, flying foxes would come in at dusk over the tops of the palm trees and one brave soul got out with his 38 revolver and fired a shot or two at a flying fox. The next night there were two or three of the blokes out and by the end of the week there were dozens of blokes out with their 38s or their .303s. And then somebody foolishly put up a communique on the CO's notice board

34:00 at the mess, 'The enemy came from the north east in, flying in loose formation, flying at a low altitude and they were met by intense light ack-ack [anti-aircraft] fire.' And, you know, 'One was seen fast disappearing in the direction of the CO's tent,' and this sort of thing. So the CO didn't take very kindly to that so there was no more shooting at flying foxes after that. But the strip

34:30 that we operated on ended at the sea, it was at right angles to the beach in Milne Bay and it went straight out. And, so if you didn't get off the end of the strip you ended up in the sea, and fortunately while we were there everybody managed, nobody ended up in the sea. It was made of that steel matting, Marsden matting, which was oh, about three metre long strips and about thirty

35:00 centimetres or a bit more, forty centimetres wide with holes in it and they inter-locked. And you put down thousands of these steel Marsden mattings on top of the swamps or the soft ground too, so that aircraft could take off and land. They made a lot of noise, the rattle of those going over them.

Did you have to fly over the Owen Stanley

35:30 **Ranges much?**

Well when they were based in Port Moresby yes, to get to the targets, every flight was over the Owen Stanley's and that presented a problem at times with cloud. You see, fairly typically up there the weather is, might be clear in the morning but by eleven o'clock the cloud starts to build up on the tops of the mountains and then by later in the afternoon

36:00 the cloud is quite dense and you'd get rain, particularly on the northern side of the Owen Stanley's, less on the Port Moresby side. And the same happened at Milne Bay. Milne Bay is two long arms with high mountains on each side and this long, narrow bay and we were stationed up in the top. And I think that's the first time I tried to write a poem, it rained incessantly for about the

36:30 month that we were at Milne Bay and looking out from my tent I could see this mountain but , all the time we were there I never ever saw the top of it, because it was always shrouded. And of course they do have seasons when they get a lot more rain than others so I, the main occupation while we were there under those conditions was playing Patience [cards].

37:00 **This is where you started writing poetry?**

Oh yes, but it wasn't very successful, and I didn't start up again until oh, four or five years ago. The Waltzing Matilda Centenary out at Winton and having listened for four or five days over Easter to all these budding poets performing all sorts, the number of times I heard The Man from

37:30 Snowy River recited, oh dear. But then on the way home, the drive home, I thought, "Yeah I could write, I think I could write those sort of things" so in the next three or four years I rattled off about forty or fifty poems and that one I showed you about Hara Kari was one of them. The most recent one was called, 'We Are the

38:00 Few,' and it was written about two years ago after I read that the Commonwealth Government had decided, after all these years to record the names of all Australian ex service people who'd fought in World War II And I thought, my goodness, after fifty-five or fifty-six years, we're going to now record the names of the people who fought in that war. And I guess this is part of, that's what, you're doing now,

38:30 part of that situation, better late than never I suppose. So I wrote a poem about that called, 'We Are the Few".

Do you remember your poems?

Most of them, sometimes there's a bit of a blank. I guess you've pored over them for quite a while and I can certainly remember that Hari Kari one, We Are the Few, there might be a few missing things in that. I wrote

39:00 another one at the same time called The Eagles Have Landed ... that was inspired by the Air Force Memorial given to Malta because of the role it played in the war, of a column, cement column about oh, thirty or forty feet high, about six feet in diameter, and on the top there is a big bronze

39:30 eagle. And the eagle was synonymous really with aircraft and so I wrote a poem called, 'The Eagles Have Landed' in which I tried to pay tribute to those Eagles. The Hurricane initially, which doesn't get the recognition it deserved in the Battle of Britain, it bore the brunt of the first part of the war and then it was superseded gradually by the Spitfire and the Mosquito

40:00 and the Lancaster and the Beaufighter, were just a few of the aircraft, but they've all folded their wings now.

Tape 6

00:33 **George can you recite any of your poems now for us?**

Well would Hari Kari be appropriate do you think?

Yeah, that's a good one.

\n[Verse follows]\n He was an Air Force pilot in New Guinea years ago\n And he won the DFC for doing what, he did not know\n An insensitive

01:00 young lady said, "How come you won that gong?"\n

He winked at me as though to say, 'This won't take very long.'\n "My navigator's name was Carey," was what the pilot said\n "We were on a last light strike, an operation that I dread\n Where we crossed the coast, a cliff reached towards the sky\n And the breakers pounding on the rocks were more than ten feet high."\n

01:30 "The jungle was as black as pitch and ack-ack was whizzing by\n

Until it blew off half a wing and I reckoned we would die."\n So I yelled to Harry Carey, "You'd better hit the silk old man\n I'll be right behind you, I'll try to find you if I can."\n "A Battalion of Jap soldiers was down below somewhere\n But in the dark they couldn't shoot us, hanging in mid air\n I

02:00 crashed down through the jungle through the tree tops of those mighty jungle trees\n

And I landed on New Guinea soil but I damaged both my knees."\n I knew that Harry Carey was between me and the cliff\n So I crawled towards the roaring surf on knees now growing stiff\n And I started calling softly, "Harry Carey, can you hear?"\n But I didn't get an answer so I knew he

02:30 wasn't near.\n

I could hear Jap soldiers coming from not very far away\n And I started then to panic, thinking man, you've had your day\n So I screamed for Harry Carey a dozen times or more I guess\n "Harry Carey! Harry Carey!" I sure was a psycho mess\n Then that battalion of Jap soldiers put on quite a show\n They flung themselves over the cliff onto the rocks below\n They committed Hari

03:00 Kari, four hundred Japs I'll swear\n

"And that," dear girl, "is how I won this medal that I wear."\n

Wonderful, fantastic. Are there any others that you'd like to recite?

Oh I'd have to get, We Were the Few, it's probably the better one of them all. It's close at hand if you can spare...

I have a copy here.

a minute, I'll have to get my...

Oh yeah, where are they?

03:30 **Don't walk too far away.**

Oh, I keep forgetting about that... 2002, after I read that the Federal Government is to produce a roll of the names of all persons who joined the Australian Armed Services during the '39–'45 war.

\n[Verse follows]\n We were the few who flew in hostile sky\n To keep this

04:00 land of ours forever free\n

While mates below tramped on foreign soil\n Or sailed their ships on the unforgiving sea\n We were the few who strafed the aerodromes\n Or dropped our bombs on ships and distant lands\n While mates

below shipped in our supplies\n Or spilled their blood on shifting desert sands\n We were the few who watched the tracer lights\n To find the

04:30 path of death and swiftly pass\n

While mates below bombarded foreign shores\n Or fought in jungle swamp and Kunai grass\n And when the guns were stilled across the sky\n The doves of peace once more safely flew\n Record our names beside the names of mates who fought below\n

05:00 Together, we were the few\n

The one about Whispering Death is on the memorial up there at Kimbi in the San Remo Club grounds on New Britain.

\n[Verse follows]\n We flew where few were\n

05:30 privileged to fly\n

Twisting and turning across New Britain sky\n At times so low we made the palm trees sway\n Or rippled the calm blue waters of Kimbi Bay\n And death, disguised in tracer lights and lead passed us close by\n And as each turned his head to watch it pass\n Mates went to their last sleep\n on the jungle floor or

06:00 in the ocean deep\n

Then like some mythical dragon belching flame\n Our plane roared at a foe who knew no shame\n We felt it shudder and sensed its acrid breath\n As it left behind destruction and vile death\n

Well those are all war related but then the other forty or so are just about life in general, around the

06:30 place. For example we've, as I've said, we've been sixteen times across the Nullabor Plain and I wrote one after our twelfth crossing about all the interesting things that we had seen in those crossings. I wrote one to my wife as a WAAAF up there.

07:00 An interesting little thing that when the air raid sirens went they had to, you know, get dressed, get into their overalls and what have you and get out into the slit trenches. And on one occasion they were all out in the slit trenches and there was still a commotion in the dormitory and it was discovered that one of the girls was trying to, still trying to get into her blue kit bag, she couldn't find her overalls.

07:30 **So she was trying to get in to her kit bag?**

Mmm?

So she was trying to put that on?

We were all both, both sexes were issued with those blue kit bags, canvas kit bags.

What else were you issued with, did you have emergency kits that you were issued with?

Yes that you carried on your belt, you carried a machete and you had to be a bit careful about

08:00 that, it was generally strapped to your leg, which was an overgrown knife in a leather scabbard because sometimes the steel, it would affect your compass, the magnetism. And then you had a pouch that you wore on your belt and I think horribly inefficient, really we weren't prepared at all to live off the land or to live in the jungle if

08:30 we were shot down. There was a bar of chocolates or something in that kit, might have been a silk map. But I think the things that one needed, for example if you were going to trade with friendly natives, razor blades, those safety razor blades were highly, were very valuable, but fishing line and some fishing hooks might have been very valuable.

09:00 But we weren't given any jungle training , we were very unprepared really to live, if you were shot down into the jungle, and were able to move about.

Did you have those compass buttons?

Oh, there might have been a small compass

09:30 in the kit, yeah, I don't know whether it was much use to you anyway, you knew where north, south, east and west were from the sun, when you saw the sun. You knew where the coast was, in that particular instance anyway. New Britain was that long, sausage shaped island a couple of hundred kilometres long or more, off the main

10:00 island of New Guinea. But really I'd never investigated in detail what the emergency pack did contain. And we carried a 38 Revolver, a Webley, I don't think any of us could hit a barn if we were inside it, because we didn't get any practise with it.

10:30 **Can you tell me about, was there a big aircraft attack on Rabaul?**

Yes.

Can you step us through that entire day?

Well I think it was about the tenth of October 1943. We were treated rather poorly, see the Beaufighters, one of its strong

11:00 points was its silence approach. First of all the motors were comparatively silent, they were sleeve valve motors, compared to the traditional normal aircraft motors. Secondly we always approached at tree top height or wave height and that was very effective against radar,

11:30 the radar couldn't pick you up, any undulations or hills would block the radar from picking you up. And also the jungles tend to deaden the sound so that we were often on the target before the enemy realised it. Now on the occasion of that particular raid

12:00 there was supposed to be a thousand aircraft raid, not only from the mainland from, of Liberators and Mitchell's but also of Naval aircraft from carriers and from Naval bases in the Solomon's of the Corsairs and those type of aircraft. And I've always thought that the logical, the more logical thing

12:30 to do was to send the Beaufighters in first, because almost surely we'd have caught a lot of those Japanese aircraft still on the ground, and that was one of our fortes of the Beaufighter. Silent approach just over the tops of the trees, when you were about a mile back, kilometres back from the target, you'd pull up to a thousand feet, then nose over and fly your aircraft and you had a time to pick your target, whether it was trucks or ammunition dumps or

13:00 duty aircraft control towers or aircraft on the ground. But we were last. It's said that there were a thousand aircraft, well if there were a thousand, we started at nine hundred and ninety-eight, no, nine hundred and eighty-eight and we took up the last twelve. So there was another problem, we were sent to an American air strip at Dobodura

13:30 which was gravel and by the time all these big bombers had taken off and the fighter cover, it was extremely dusty. And you weren't game to take off close behind the other person in case they didn't get off the ground and so we were longer than usual in getting off the ground and getting into formation. We arrived over

14:00 the target and the American people were coming home and their aircraft recognition of any aircraft that weren't American was very poor. So I know the B-25's, they were about five hundred feet up, we were only about ten or twenty feet above the water going into Rabaul Harbour and those places. And they opened fire on us, they thought we were Japanese aircraft

14:30 and we were supposed to maintain radio silence but everybody hit the button at once to yell. We only lost one aircraft on that occasion and so I doubt that the return, the fire caused any damage, but it was a bit psychologically upsetting to be greeted with that before you even got to the target. And we did lose one aircraft

15:00 flown by a pilot named Dick Stone, and his daughter was at the unveiling of the memorial. And it's a bit uncertain as to what happened to Dick but two or three years ago the crash was discovered, it was a few kilometres from the air strip that we were attacking. And I was invited by the RAAF

15:30 to go up to Rabaul to the burial, after all those years, fifty-seven years, his skeleton was still intact. He'd been shot, he'd lost one motor and obviously he was trying to get out to sea to, much easier to belly land in the sea, in the water just off the beach, than into the jungle.

16:00 But he didn't make it by about a hundred metres and it crashed into jungle about a hundred metres from the beach. And the pilot was obviously thrown through the windscreen and the body was found with the head crushed in, covered with about two inches of soil, now that would have been fifty-seven years of jungle leaf fall. We were on the island or Kirawina

16:30 and it had a very shallow soil over coral, so, but fifty-seven years of leaf fall, the leaves had decomposed and formed about two inches of soil over him, but the skeleton was still complete. The navigator, his remains, bits of bone and a few of his items were found but they were between the motors, the aircraft burned when it

17:00 crashed. He would have been standing behind the pilot, that was, I think the pilot would've called him up, "You'd better come up," the same as I said our Wing Commander Glasscock, before that, called up his navigator, "You'd better come up front laddie, I've been hit." So I think Dick would've called up his navigator to look for a possible crash landing site or to direct him to the shortest

17:30 route to the beach and he would've been standing behind the pilot seat, so his few charred bones that were found were with the aircraft, between the two motors. But the motors were still there, most of the rest of the aircraft, the natives of course could use the aluminium, it's quite precious to them up there, of which the aircraft was made. Even the air screws were made of a type of aluminium

18:00 and they would be, that's the propeller, air screw, they were cut off at the base and carried away but the

motors weigh a tonne each so they were still intact. And that's what we look for when we're looking for a crash like that in those sorts of places. About the one thing to look for that you're pretty sure would still be there is that one tonne motor. So but

18:30 I believe that they were hit by ground fire, we don't have any record in the squadron of any Beaufighter being shot down by a Zero, it was all ground fire that we had to compete against. Because I've noticed that, that amongst the squadrons the losses got progressively heavier the closer you operated to the ground. Spitfire and Kittyhawk Squadrons didn't lose any aircraft from

19:00 enemy action, they lost one, four of them flew into a cloud and only three came out the other side and we found his aircraft quite near where our memorial is. The Boston's lost, they , and Beauforts, operate about ten thousand feet or lower, they lost a few more but I think the Beaufighters lost the most aircraft and

19:30 that was because they were operating so low. Even rifle fire was a danger to you because a rifle man can traverse so quickly, compared to a forty mill. or twenty mill. canon, if you're flying across there at two hundred plus miles an hour, a rifle man can follow you but the anti aircraft fire can't follow you as quickly. So

20:00 we were always wary of light machine guns on the barges and ships and from the ground and it's quite possible that that did contribute to the higher losses that the squadron had because all our flying was done at, as I said, wave height, tree top height. So I went to the funeral of those two boys and they're buried in Rabaul, and a

20:30 plaque is set in concrete at the crash site. Whether the natives have been, or whether that would be part of the [Commonwealth] War Graves [Commission] now to keep that site cleared, it wasn't in the cemetery at Rabaul, it was some distance away.

So what were your impressions of the Americans?

Oh well sheer weight of numbers,

21:00 it was really their war. But it's interesting that it was the Australians that stopped the Japanese, turned them around for the first time on the Kokoda Trail and at Milne Bay. I think Milne Bay was actually the first defeat, the first time the Japanese were turned back and that was by Australians. And some of those were militia people and they were from the

21:30 very battalion to which I belonged, the 25th Battalion, friends of mine were there that stopped the Japanese at Milne Bay and turned them back. And only a few days or weeks later they were turned back at Kokoda, again by Australians. So I don't know whether that's generally appreciated that it was Australian troops that stopped the Japanese advance and turned

22:00 them back for the first time and then the Americans came in and with their vastly superior numbers and vastly superior aircraft numbers. I don't know the proportion of losses that they had but they had the big four engine Liberators, bombers, and the other aircraft, P-38 fighters and later the P-47, the Thunderbolt

22:30 fighters.

What about their attitudes?

Oh I didn't have a lot of association with them but I think their attitude was quite alright. The only thing that we were concerned about was their aircraft recognition because the Beaufighter was nothing like anything the Americans flew. And talking about that time they fired on us when that first big daylight raid on

23:00 Rabaul, on the next flight to Rabaul we were again sent over to their air strip at Dobudura and we went into a mess and there was a pile of wooden Beaufighters, model Beaufighters in a corner, there must, several dozen of them in the mess. My navigator said to me, "Gee, the Americans must have a high opinion of the Beaufighter to carve all those

23:30 models out of wood." And I said, "I don't think that's the reason Rex, I think they were probably ordered that they had to do that to improve their aircraft recognition." So but apart from that I think they were every, much the equal, their training wasn't as good initially anyway as ours. Some of them were sent in to action very light on training

24:00 and their navigation was very poor. One hears lots of stories about the, even when I was fly, in charge of night flying at Mallala I had a fifth aircraft in the circuit area came in and landed, this was at night. And fellow got out and walked over and said, "Say guy, is this Mal-boorne?" We were north of Adelaide and I said, "No,

24:30 this isn't Mal-boorne," I said, "this is...." And he said, "Well where's Melbourne?" And I started to try and give him detailed instructions. And he said, "Oh just point man, what direction is it?" And I said, "Well I suspect it's probably due east of here." So, "Thanks guy," and away he went. But that was early days, not long after Pearl Harbor, but a lot of those boys flying those Air Cobras, P-39's,

25:00 at Port Moresby, were short on training.

But can you remember your reaction to the attack you did on Rabaul and then you lost one of them due to their negligence, can you remember your reaction?

No, I wouldn't say we lost one due to their negligence. We all arrived at the target a minute or two later, there

25:30 was no doubt about that, I think that one we lost was from ground fire. But it was discomforting, there's no doubt about that, to find, I think when we saw them we thought, oh there go the Yanks, lucky so-and-so's they've done their job and they're on the way home and ours is still ahead of us. But then to find that they were firing at us, and you could see these zips in the water, cause we were right down at sea level . It's possible that they

26:00 might have put a shot or two through some of the wings but nobody reported any serious damage. But it was discomforting, there's no doubt about that, to think that has happened and that's part of the story of war. Of course one hears that in Iraq for example, I think that while the war was on there were just as many people lost through friendly fire as there were from

26:30 the enemy. We were on the same fighter wavelength with our radio as the Americans, and on one occasion suddenly it burst through on the radio, "God Damn, I've just shot down a P-40." A bloke in a Thunderbolt a P-47, a P-40 had shot across his bows and he'd pressed the trigger. And there was a fellow there who had,

27:00 he was asked, "Homer, how many victories have you had?" "Oh," he said, "I've had five as said and one Boomerang that I don't count." That was a Australian reconnaissance aircraft, the Boomerang, or it was considered a front line aircraft in the peace, but it was out of date. It was used for generally skimming over the tree tops, spying for troop movements and things like that and apparently it suddenly shot across his bows and he pressed the trigger.

27:30 But whether he was telling the truth or whether it made a good story, but Homer claimed that he'd had five victories and one Australian Boomerang that he didn't count. And I don't doubt that some of our people, you see we had recognition against, with our ships with the

28:00 signalling lamp, the aldus lamp and what was called the 'letter of the day.' Now you might start off from six until twelve in the morning, oh six hundred hours until twelve hundred hours, you'd challenge with 'A' da-da, and when challenged with 'A' you had to reply with another letter. So if you were on a ship or a boat,

28:30 torpedo boats or anything, and an aircraft signalled with his lamp at you 'A', you had to reply with whatever the other letter was up until midday. From then, you changed, the letter changed. I was told the story of this American torpedo boat that didn't respond with the correct letter and was attacked by an Australian aircraft.

29:00 So I'm fairly sure that there were cases on both sides, ours and theirs, for faulty recognition of one way or another and attacking your ally. But I was involved in one such incident anyway, of being attacked, not attacking.

By who?

29:30 I didn't speak to any of the Americans, they didn't operate from our air strips or us from theirs, except combined, big combined operation like that. It was deemed better that we go to their big air strip and overnight there on the mainland and start from there, rather than try and rendezvous with them somewhere out in the sky. And

30:00 another occasion we had a retiring officer in charge for the whole of the air force in the South Pacific, Air Commodore Hewitt and he was being replaced by Air Commodore Lucas, and I was given the job of taking the two of them around all the forward air strips. And

30:30 that was Lae and up the Markham, Ramu Valleys, Nadzab, Gusap, Dumpu, and somewhere along the track. I could hear two American P-38 pilots discussing us. They were somewhere up there, they were trying to work out what we were doing and who we were and I had to advise them very, you know,

31:00 quickly, that we were an Australian Beaufighter and, "For God's sake, leave us alone."

Can you tell me about the swirling funnels that you'd get when crossing over seas?Those

31:30 **sea spouts, ocean spouts?**

Oh yes, yes, sea spouts, sorry, mmm. Yes they're, you get dense, low, black cloud and very violent, and the cloud actually starts this swirling motion and then the sea, you can see the sea taking up, this swirl and the white caps and the water is

32:00 sucked up and drawn up from the sea into the cloud, but they're only a couple of hundred feet high at the most. And on one occasion I saw about six, and not having any experience with them or knowing

much about them we just gave them a very wide berth. But there have been instances of them along our Pacific Coast here, there was one at Hervey Bay,

32:30 at Urangan. And people found small fish at Dayman Point at Hervey Bay, this water spout, and then it hit the land and it collapsed and all this water fell on to the sports ground and park area there at Dayman Point. And my sister was living there at the time and she said that there were fish on the ground there that'd been sucked, you could expect that

33:00 that would happen. There were two, well a bit like an egg timer, quite wide at the top below the cloud and then down into this narrow funnel, only a few feet, and then out again on the sea. But one reads stories from the Boys' Own Annual of the early sailors having to fire their canons into them to break them. But we avoided them

33:30 like the plague, but I did see six at one occasion in the Solomon Sea below, south of New Britain.

You'd just fly high above them?

No, cloud over, complete, ten tenths cloud, so we just flew away from them, get as far away as you could from them.

What about night flying, did you have to do much night flying?

Yes,

34:00 you see quite often we'd have first light strike, or it might be a last light strike. We preferred a first light strike because if you had any problems with your aircraft at least you had daylight ahead of you to get home. You'd take off, you might have to fly, I think we were about four hundred kilometres to the nearest base Kirawina, three to four hundred kilometres south of New Britain, so you

34:30 had three to four hundred kilometres of water to fly over before you got to the target. And it wasn't easy, trying to fly in formation at night, so you've got the navigational lights of course of the aircraft And with the weather so poor, if they flew into a bit of even wispy cloud you'd tend to lose sight of them. And

35:00 last light strikes weren't popular because you'd strike just before dark and then if you got in to trouble with your aircraft, you had to make it home in the dark, and that's wasn't very pleasant. But most of the bombing, the British bombing of Germany of course was all night time bombing, a lot of, most of it was

35:30 night time bombing. The day time bombing was left to the American Flying Fortresses, so. But we did night flying and training and it was just a matter of learning to, you could also pick up the exhaust flame from a lot of the aircraft so that sometimes was better than their navigation lights, at

36:00 night time. You wouldn't see it in the day time but at night it would show up, the exhaust flame might be nine inches or twelve inches long out of the exhaust, out of the sides of the motors.

Were you able to communicate with each other via radio?

Yes, but depending on the operation that you were on, the mission, whatever you like to call it, the Americans call them missions, we call them operations.

36:30 Often you were supposed to maintain radio silence, so that you wouldn't give your position away or what you were up to, to the enemy who would be listening in, he would be on your frequency and listening in. That's how we picked up that message from Clarrie Glasscock, that I mentioned earlier, back at base, they were listening in on his radio frequency and heard him

37:00 yell to his navigator. The Americans tended to talk a lot more on the radio than we did. And, you know, "I say Homer, do you know you've got a Zero on your tail?" and things like this. And probably a help, psychologically if you could

37:30 get it off your chest a bit, instead of sitting there in silence wondering what was going on. But it would depend on your location how close you were to, you know, whether alerting the enemy was significant or not.

Were the flights very long?

Oh, four hours perhaps, depending on the nearest Japanese.In the

38:00 central coast of New Britain would be Gasmata, which was about three hundred kilometres. The furthest was in New Ireland which was east, further east from Rabaul, which would have been four hours or more. And people, mostly the children, asked whether I was wounded and I had to tell them that

38:30 the only part of me that required medical attention during those nine months was my posterior. You were sitting on your aircraft dinghy, inflatable dinghy and then your parachute was under that and there was a compressed air bottle that blew up your dinghy. Well going out to the target, an hour and a half or two hours, whatever, that was alright, over the target, you were too busy and for those minute or two that

39:00 you were over target. But then the grind home and perspiration, you know. We were right up in the equator country, and the dinghy and the compressed air bottle. And I'd start to lean over on this side and fly so, then after a while I'd lean back over on my other cheek, you might call it, and fly, then I'd ease forward and fly like this and then back as far

39:30 as I could. And it was a bit of a joke with the ambulance, there was always an ambulance down at the strip when we returned, they'd be there rubbing their hands together, they knew that they'd have one patient anyway. As soon as, if there was anything to tell the Intelligence people, I'd be into the ambulance and down with my tweeds and over on the table. And the only remedy for my two raw patches on my

40:00 rump was methylated spirits, so they'd delight in slapping the methylated spirits on my backside amidst wails of anguish from me. So, not like Shakespeare said, "Then he will strip his sleeves and show his scars and say these wounds I had on Crispian's Day." I can't do that.

Tape 7

00:32 **So on flights, on the night flights, were you ever given any kind of stimulants to keep you awake?**

No. No I had never heard of any stimulants being used in those days.

So when you'd come back from an operation

01:00 **what would happen?**

You'd be de-briefed by the Intelligence people, I mean you were briefed before you went with maps of the target area, you might have been distributed with a map of the particular aerodrome, pointing out where all the ack-ack was, the heavy ack-ack, the light ack-ack. And then, all from aerial photos taken

01:30 largely by American pilots in P-38's the high flying and very fast, the P-38 would be stripped down, that's the Lockheed Lightning, of it's guns and cameras, fittings so it was quite fast for that era. And it'd be taken from quite high, twenty-five thousand feet or more and they were useful, if you

02:00 could remember, you were given a copy of it to take with you if you wanted it, to where the different ack-ack was, and what to look for at the target store rooms and things like that, ammunition dumps, what have you. But there were no, to my knowledge, I wasn't aware of any stimulants ever being used, either legally or illegally.

02:30 **Was there ever any worry about getting tired or, how would you keep yourself awake if you were getting tired?**

No the flights weren't really long enough really, you know, four hours, something like that. The Sunderland Flying Boats and the Catalina Flying boats would go out perhaps for twenty hours or more, so I assume that they had two pilots, they had somewhere where they could bunk while that was

03:00 going on. And I don't know about the people flying you know, into the far, the eastern side of Germany from Britain. But I hadn't heard of that, it's a question, I have of a friend who was a pilot in the European theatre, we meet every Wednesday for an hour's chat, I'll ask him if I think of it, whether

03:30 he encountered that in the UK United Kingdom], the use of stimulants. I don't know whether any of them wanted or needed alcohol to give them a bit of courage either. Certainly alcohol wasn't very freely available with us anyway except on these occasions where I said earlier when a new aircraft would arrive.

04:00 **So would you be flying, how many times in a week say?**

An operation would only work out about once a week. It was a bit more frequently, see they changed the timetable. At the end of, or towards the end of 1943 a tour of operations was six months up until that time,

04:30 it was judged in months not the number of operations. Then whether it was shortage of crews and aircraft or why, I don't know, it was extended and I got caught up with this, to nine months. But we were given jobs that

05:00 would, could not really be regarded as operation flights. Like I mentioned taking the two commanding officers for the whole of the South West Pacific Air Force - one departing, one coming in as the new one, taking them around the front air ports, so that might have taken three or four days to do. And might have to fly over to Port Moresby to pick up parts or

05:30 stores or something of that nature. So you got a couple of that; you'd have to test flight your aircraft if there were any problems, so you got two or three flights a week. But it would've worked out over the nine months as only really one operation a week, cause I did thirty-five operations in that time.

So what would you do in that down time?

06:00 Well lots of various activities, there were of course in that rainfall, there were plenty of little creeks with swimming facilities, holes to swim in. Some people just went exploring around the different native villages. I was appointed as the trader for the squadron, I was given cartons of

06:30 Raleigh stick tobacco, which looked like sticks of liquorice, which was very popular with the natives, for chewing, I think they chewed it. They chewed betel nut of course. So I would have to trade and barter with them for paw paws, bananas, were the two fruit that we might get. Plantain, which is a very large

07:00 banana, paw paws were often green, I don't remember seeing a ripe one that we could've eaten, and they were used as a squash, you know, boiled up to use as squash, and corn, they were about the three crops that were grown. It was always the women folk who had their bilums, that's their knitted

07:30 bag, bilumg, some people call them bilum bags . And outside my tent on Kirawina Island there was a large log, oh, might have been nearly a metre in diameter and I'd be awakened at break of day by this chatter. And they'd be squatting on this log, three or four of them with their bilums with

08:00 a few cobs of corn, a green paw paw or two and some plantains, and then the, we soon worked out a currency with the stick tobacco. Which sort of augmented the bully beef and the Sayo biscuits, the evaporated milk, the tropical spread, which replaced the butter and probably the tinned peaches or tinned

08:30 apricots, which were about the four or five staple diets there. It was a bit of a privilege to get into an American chow line which we would do for example when I said we moved over to Dobodura to be overnighted with the Americans. With their eggs and, for breakfast and maple syrup and those sorts of thing.

Did they have ice cream?

09:00 Ice cream. I don't remember getting any ice cream no but they well could of, I mean we were only there one breakfast a month something of that nature.

09:30 . But on the, just on the way out to the target, on the return trip you'd go to your own home base. But generally, it was generally accepted I think that the American people, with their tremendous wealth, lived a bit better than we did with people back home

10:00 looking after them. They were certainly, whether the clothing was more serviceable for those conditions I don't know, but they certainly looked a bit smarter than most of the, our people did.

The trading that you did with the natives, what would you trade for?

Trading? Well there were only those three or four staple things that we

10:30 traded for, all I had as currency was the stick tobacco. Oh, about twenty centimetres long I suppose, twenty to, the sticks of tobacco, but a bit like a stick of liquorice, many children know what liquorice is like. And I've forgotten now what, how many one needed for a paw-paw or

11:00 three or four bananas or the corn, but it was certainly sought after.

What kind of interaction did you have with them?

Well we didn't, they used to wander fairly freely through our tent, camp, camp sites but I don't know that there was a lot of interaction.

11:30 We saw more of the children than the adults. Whether the children were sent by the adults to try and cadge a packet of biscuits or something from us; we saw a bit more of them and they had a few words of English. But a woman or girlfriend or wife, the blokes would have photos

12:00 on a case of some sort in their tent and they would, it was always a 'Meri,' "Your Meri?" The woman was always referred to as a meri, that's the white woman, so they'd ask, they'd say, "Your Meri?" But, well I certainly didn't and I don't think any of the others, they might have gone to the villages to try and

12:30 trade for something else. Trinkets, shelled necklaces, those sorts of things, in which case they'd, might have a packet of biscuits or something like that to exchange.

Were they curious about the planes?

13:00 No we didn't see many of them down at the air strip. The aircraft was called a balus. I remember making a bit of a fool of myself on one occasion that this native was near my aircraft and I tried in my worst Pidgin English to tell him about the balus,

13:30 the aircraft. And he said, "Yes, certainly a wonderful aircraft the Beaufighter isn't it?" But there weren't many of them that we encountered anyway that spoke English. During the month I was at Port Moresby I didn't get in to the city so, in to the town, perhaps the English was more readily spoken in there. But at

14:00 Milne Bay and Goodenough Island, Kirawina Island, no.

Did you ever take them up in the plane?

Yes, I got quite a fright, it was in 1945 and I was test flying. And an aircraft was put down, belly landed or something on an island over near Borneo and the repair crew was sent over to repair it. They'd jack it

14:30 up and get the wheels down and do a bit of panel beating and get it ready, and to put new air screws on it. And then I was sent over to test fly it and to bring it back , my navigator and myself. And these, the fitters, ground crew generally had been there for several weeks and become friendly with the natives. And on the test flight they asked me, would I take up a couple of the

15:00 natives. And I said, "Oh yes, that'd be alright," so they stood behind me and the navigator was further down, about three metres down the back in his seat. And unthinkingly I flew into a cloud during this test flight and suddenly, you know, the girls were looking out the windows on each side at the villages and the island and chattering and pointing.

15:30 But suddenly everything disappeared and we were in a cloud and the next thing, screams and I had an arm around my neck and it was panic stations for a short time there. Managed to get the arm away from under my neck and quite unthinkingly and a foolish thing to do I guess for somebody on their first flight. But that was the only occasion that I'd

16:00 ever taken any of them, anybody up, any of the natives. But there was always somebody at the air strip of our own squadron ground staff people, and visitors, American visitors, you know, wanting to go up for a flight, and we would accommodate them. But I spoke about landing on one wheel at Mallala in an Anson, on

16:30 that occasion I had two people, army people. I'd had the job of flying around, looking for, just checking up on army search light establishments. And they had their map and they were making notes, recording about these searchlight establishments that the army had, and their anti aircraft batteries around Adelaide and what have you. And then when we got back one wheel wouldn't

17:00 come down. And they'd been quite impressed with the flying and they were going to come back and go flying with us again, but after that incident well I never ever saw them again, they thought that flying in Ansons wasn't all that it was cracked up to be.

Was there any fraternisation between any of the men and the local women?

No, no.

17:30 Whether there was with the American Negroes or not I don't know, but I'm not aware of any fraternisation at all from our squadron anyway. Because the only time that we saw the women anyway was when they came to the tent to trade with their few vegetables,

18:00 then they would disappear. But the young children might have only been six, seven, eight, ten years old at the most that would, came around, so I can't speak really for anybody on that subject.

Did any entertainment Units come through?

Yes, when we were in

18:30 Moresby I think, but they were mostly American, John Wayne had a troupe in Port Moresby. But we would go along with our little folding seat and our rain cape and our tin hat. There were movies and I remember, particularly I remember one of them called Hurricane and Dorothy Lamour and Stirling Hayden I think were the stars.

19:00 And it was in a coconut plantation and the hurricane was blowing and it was raining like hell on us anyway and the coconut palms on the movie, this wide screen were, and our coconut palms were doing the same. So except for the two, the actor and actress, really you didn't know where the film started or ended. And occasionally there would be a

19:30 a red alert, which is the alert to enemy bombers coming and the standard warning was three shots from a Bofors anti aircraft gun. And you'd see, choof, choof, choof and three tracers would go up into the sky wherever this gun was, it might have been over there or over there or behind the screen. And then there'd be quite a panic

20:00 amongst a lot of people anyway, to get the hell out of there to the nearest slit trench. I remember my first first bombing raid I was in at Moresby, and I think I was probably the first one, only a night or two after I'd arrived, to get to the slit trench. But the old hands they would just look around for where the searchlights

20:30 were and say, "Oh well they're not going to drop their bombs anywhere near us," but they'd slowly stroll over. And some of them might sit on the top, the edge of the slit trench, with their feet down in the trench. But some of them wouldn't bother even to do that, they could tell where the aircraft, could see

where the aircraft were from the searchlights and know from the direction of flight whether the bombs were going to be, come anywhere near us.

21:00 But there was somebody in the squadron had a saxophone and he would get down when there was a red alert on, a bomb raid on in the trench, and the popular song that he would play, and you know that a saxophone can sound quite mournful, was, 'There's no Place Like Home.' So the bombs would be coming down with their whoi, whoi, whoi, and you'd hear this,

21:30 'There's no-oo place like ho-ome.' It was a bit of a tradition for a while in the squadron to hear that. But after we moved from Moresby I didn't hear that again, so I don't know what happened. But Kirawina Island was built on coral, it was a coral atoll and quite large jungle trees on it over the centuries. And there was only about

22:00 twenty-five or thirty centimetres of soil that'd accumulated over the years from the leaf fall. And the first thing you did when you moved to a new location was to dig a slit trench just outside your tent. So on this occasion we went down through that twenty-five or thirty centimetres without any trouble and then struck this coral. So we thought, oh,

22:30 perhaps they won't come over this full moon, they like to come, bomb over in, on the full moon. So that's where the trench stopped but we got a shock anyway and they did come over. And both my navigator and I, and he used to sleep in the nude, dived out of our bunks and into this slit trench of only as I said, twenty-five or thirty centimetres, not nearly deep

23:00 enough, and I was snuggling up to his bare backside trying to keep as low as possible. And I can tell you, next day, coral or no coral, we put that trench down considerably deeper than that. He had a bit of gravel rash on his body and various places from laying there and the coral. But I don't know of our

23:30 camp site ever being hit, the air strip was hit and that's what happened to 22 Squadron with their Boston's. They lost quite a number of aircraft in a raid one night from bomb splinters and what have you. And because they were difficult to get replacements from the Americans, they changed 22 Squadron over to Beaufighters which wasn't very popular with the squadron people. They knew their aircraft, they

24:00 were a very good aircraft and the Beaufighter was a little bit hard to handle on the ground and wasn't very stable in the air but it was a wonderful aircraft nevertheless. So that's the situation, 22 Squadron people flew both Boston's in the earlier days and Beaufighters in the latter days. So the Queensland Association is called the Beaufighter

24:30 Boston Association because the people who are eligible to join the association had flown both aircraft, Boston's and Beaufighters.

Did you get much leave?

No, no such thing as leave but you had days off between flying of course in which you could please yourself what you did. Whether you

25:00 played Patience or played Poker or went wandering or went swimming, and went fishing with a few hand grenades, things like that, but there was no such thing as leave during that six months. Although as compensation, for those of us who were there and they suddenly upped the anti from

25:30 six months service to nine months service, was considerable disappointment, people expecting to be home for Christmas and suddenly they were told that they had another three months to serve, they thought they had done their last operation. We were given a week or so's leave, got a flight, hitch hiked back to Townsville and my parents lived at Hervey Bay,

26:00 down to Hervey Bay. But whether subsequent crews, I doubt it, they had to stay their full nine months. The squadron moved from Kiriwina Island up to Aitape up on the north coast of New Guinea and then gradually as the war progressed, they moved west wards to the Birds Head Island end of New Guinea,

26:30 Vogelkop to Biak Island and then Morotai and then the attacks on Borneo. Morotai was, and part of the Halmaheera Islands are there, just off, you can see them from Morotai. There is an Australian Company, gold mining company, Newcrest

27:00 having a lot of problems with squatters now on their mining leases and there has been the death of one of the squatters. Not from the company employees but they were, the Indonesian army was being employed to keep law and order on these leases, these gold leases. So that's from Halmaheera, and it was the Halmaheera Islands where

27:30 there was a base for the Australians. And that's where I met my brother for the first time in years, he being in the AIF, they staged at Morotai Island, and pushed off from there in their LST's Landing Ships Tanks, and for Borneo, Balikpapan and Tarakan and those places. And he knew that I was on Morotai and probably

28:00 letter from my mother, his mother. And he found me there, I was able to take him on a test flight.

How was it seeing him there?

Oh well it was a wonderful occasion as you can imagine. He had come in on one of these ships and the

28:30 LST's, they would go up on to shallow draft and beach and then drop the front, open the doors and the tanks could drive out, sometimes in a bit of water, onto the beach. I think I was in the shower when he found me, with soap in my eyes, and I got a smack across the backside, and here, when I had stopped swearing and cleared the soap out of my eyes that there it was.

29:00 Saw him on a couple of occasions of course, he came down to the air strip then and I took him for a flight in a Beaufighter. I don't know whether it was his first flight and whether he remembers it now, probably does. And then they took off. I have a wonderful photo taken from my aircraft coming back from one of the test flights, looking down on top of that line up of about six or eight of these

29:30 LST's. I have distributed a lot of them to blokes who said they were there.

Did you get posted back to Melbourne?

Yes, that was from Kirawina Island back in 1944, the beginning of '44. I was given some leave at

30:00 home at Hervey Bay and then on to Melbourne so it was quite a contrast as you can imagine. By the time I'd had my leave it was probably April or May, to go from the tropics to Melbourne at that time of year. And my first breakfast in the mess, there was a rather overweight, what we called a shiny bum, a bloke who was a clerical or Administrative Officer

30:30 who kept the seat shiny... And he was complaining that there was no marmalade and that really upset me. Coming from the iron rations that we were on to first breakfast in the mess at Laverton to somebody complaining about that there was no marmalade for the toast.

31:00 But once you signed, for all service men, once you sign on that dotted line to enlist, you're no longer master of your own destiny, I mean you go where you're sent. They say, 'you're posted,' so I was posted to Mallala and then nothing I could do could shift that, for eighteen months later suddenly I'm posted to

31:30 Forest Hill, then I'm posted to 30 Squadron. I'm posted down to Laverton and only a bit of worrying the Commanding Officer in the need that they decided that they really wanted a test pilot up on Morotai, I was posted up to Morotai. And I was left up there for three or four or five months after the war ended, after the big bomb was dropped,

32:00 to test all these Australian aircraft wrecks and whatever's that were rebuilt. You see it was a very uncertain period, the Indonesians were uneasy and they were subsequently to take over from the Dutch. And the fact that the peace had been signed, it was still a very uneasy period. The Australian

32:30 Government, Australians being as poor as we were, decided that any aircraft that could possibly be repaired and flown, should be brought back to Australia. So I was left there, peace was declared on the VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day, what we call Victory in the Pacific or VJ Day, Victory over Japan on the fifteenth of August 1945. But I didn't get back until

33:00 Christmas, about Christmas time and then I wasn't discharged until some time in January '46. So I had to test fly various aircraft, Beaufighters mostly, Mosquitoes, Boomerangs, and that's how I met my fate. I flew a Mosquito down and the fact that my parents lived at

33:30 Hervey Bay, I landed at Maryborough which is only twenty-five or thirty kilometres from Hervey Bay. I needed transport because when I would take a break from test flying and say, "Oh well I'll fly one of these things down myself, ferry flight, for a bit of a break." So I would announce over the Unit loud speaker system

34:00 that a Beaufighter or a Mosquito would be leaving for the mainland at daylight, anybody that had parcels or mail they wanted posted should you know, have them down there at the strip and they should be properly parcelled and addressed and stamped and I would deliver them to a Post Office. So the war was over so there was no censorship of

34:30 the mail, and the things that were quite obvious from the parcels that the fellows were raiding the tools store and there were lots of tools parcelled up, you know, electric drills. You could tell that, what it was, because it was wrapped with paper round an electric drill or something like that. But a lot of them were genuine, I think a lot of them were sending comforts from the front line back to their parents at home, it was reverse trade.

35:00 And so when I landed at Maryborough in this Mosquito I had quite a swag of parcels to post and I walked over to the transport section which I could see the sign up, 'Transport'. And there was a gorgeous brunette Sergeant at the desk and I asked whether I might have a transport to cart these parcels to the Post Office, and she said that was no trouble. So I walked back and an even

35:30 more gorgeous tall, slim blonde drove up and that's the girl that I married that's sitting behind you over there now.. But we were friendly with the other girl, she was Val Evans, a Rockhampton girl, and we've stayed friendly the rest of our lives. We used to visit them out at Dingo on their property, she became Val Acton, married

36:00 people who are quite prominent, their sons, now, in the cattle world. They're amongst, in the first seven or eight leading cattle men in Queensland, the Acton brothers, but the mother has died several years ago, and the father died. And only this morning Pat I think it was, that Pat, we had a call

36:30 from another WAAAF who was in Townsville with them, driving, and she is also out on a cattle property out at Dingo, Connie Acton, who was Connie Chamberlain from Wagga,, her parents had a property at Wagga.

So did you communicate whilst you went back to Morotai?

Well I used to

37:00 have to find my own way back after, this Mosquito, well I would arrange it so that I'd arrive at Maryborough on Friday afternoon and there'd be one overnight stop at Charters Towers. We avoided Townsville which was the logical place to land and spend the night because the service police were likely to go through you and anything you shouldn't have you were likely to lose.

37:30 So there was an air strip at Charters Towers called Breddon and there was an FS Unit there. So I'd land at Breddon and spend the night and then go on unmolested next morning and land in Maryborough and then go down to Hervey Bay to my parents. Turn up at Maryborough again on Monday, take the aircraft, deliver it to wherever it had to go, Mascot or somewhere in Richmond, down in New South Wales. And then hitch hike

38:00 back, generally one could get a ride in a Liberator, an American Liberator across country to Darwin. And they preferred to fly at night because it was less, or more comfortable flying at night across the Centre, you know, across Alice Springs and that way. And then I'd pick up another aircraft going from Darwin, there was a lot of traffic backwards and

38:30 forwards once the war ended, from Darwin over to Morotai, in time to organise another flight. Perhaps two weeks later I'd decide to bring a Beaufighter down or something of that nature. My last flight was actually from Morotai to Maryborough and I had another pilot with me, a Beaufighter pilot. So when we got to Maryborough I said, "Well, I've had it

39:00 and, I've had enough, I've had three air crashes, after VP Day," I said, "I've run out of luck, I'm going home, you can take it from here." Which he did, he took over the aircraft and flew to, Sydney where he lived, where it had to be delivered anyway to Richmond. So that was the last time I was at the

39:30 controls of an aircraft and that was quite late in 1945.

What was your reaction on VP Day?

Hollow. I think, I think that a lot of people, for years your life had been regimented, you were told what to do in the broad sense, you knew what you had to do,

40:00 and it, I suppose became routine. I guess for the actual combatants like my brother who was on the wire at night in Borneo, it was a great relief. Certainly it was a relief to all of us but there was a great unknown ahead of us. I had already initiated

40:30 correspondence with the University but that wasn't to start for another twelve months anyway. But I think a lot of people had this hollow feeling, well what now, what do we do? They were untrained, hadn't finished apprenticeships, had no particular skills, there weren't a lot of very highly educated people amongst us. So

41:00 most of them found their feet fairly quickly. We married in 1946, I went back to CSIRO as a Technical Officer because that's what I was five or six years previously, a bit more mature Technical Officer. But then after those four years at University I was reclassified of course, having got a degree in

41:30 Agricultural Science as a Research Scientist. And I was sent back as OIC, Officer in Charge of the Cooper Laboratory at Gatton College where previously I had been the small boy, I'd started out as a small sixteen year old with a chipping hoe, planting five gram packets of seed. I've already mentioned my brother, although he had a better

42:00 brain than I.

Tape 8

00:30 I suggested he go the University also. And he said that he just couldn't sit still long enough even to read the daily paper. But he got a job with the CSIRO in Canberra in Agronomy as a Technical Officer and he spent the rest of his working life with the CSIRO. I think he has

01:00 trouble spending his superannuation and those sort of things now, but he's quite happy, a very happy disposition sort of bloke. But I think ninety percent of them, ex service men settled down alright, there

were post war reconstruction schemes of all sorts, they could become apprentices and all the trades. And there was a big need of course

01:30 for rebuilding Australia, a lot of work that had to be put aside during those years. There were a tremendous lot of women in employment during the war, who, a lot of them, were only too happy to go back to their homes, to marry, to, raise families. They were in munitions, they were building aircraft, I know I had to do a radio broadcast with a lady who was

02:00 a riveter, building Beaufighters, at one stage. When I'd go to the Beaufighter factory there were more women there than men. The men were older of course, they were too old for service.

Can you tell me a bit about that factory?

The factory?

Yeah, seeing it.

Well, they started out, to my knowledge at the war building Wirraways which,

02:30 and they tried to defend Rabaul in Wirraways, but they were out of date, they were only a training aircraft really, terribly out of date, and all of those blokes that flew in those Wirraways at Rabaul should have been given VC's, Victoria Crosses. And then the Wirraways were phased out and they produced Boomerangs. The Boomerang was an Australian

03:00 design roughly on the American called a Brewster Buffalo, the Wirraway was somewhat very similar to what the American training aircraft, the Harvard. The Wirraway was out of date before it came off the production line, we weren't producing our own motors, you see, we had to rely on the import of engines from Britain or United States. Well then they

03:30 produced the Beaufort, again it was a British aircraft, and the Beaufort was phased out and the Beaufighter was produced. And then finally and I wasn't there, I think the Mustang, the American Mustang was produced. The Beaufighter, there were constraints

04:00 on the importation of those Bristol Hercules motors. And I remember test flying, they tried American motors, the Wright Cyclone I think they were called that they tried, they fitted to them. But fortunately the supply of Hercules motors continued and we didn't have to use the American, the Wright

04:30 Cyclone. But oh, they turned out hundreds of each type of aircraft, hundreds of Beaufighter and Beauforts. I think I test flew most of the first eighty or ninety of the Beaufighters before I was transferred up to Morotai. But the

05:00 test squadron or test flight rather at Laverton, they had quite a number of other pilots. They introduced a test pilot's course and the there could have been ten or twelve or more pilots in the squadron, in the test flight at Laverton. And then they also had them over at Richmond in Sydney where the Beaufighters and Mosquitoes

05:30 were produced.

When you look back on flying a brand new Beaufighter off the production line and then flying one that'd seen plenty of service, was there much difference in the two?

No, the maintenance was always extremely good, even up in the tropics. I remained friendly until he died a year or two ago, with a mechanic that worked was on my air

06:00 craft in those islands, John Rawlinson, a wonderful bloke and quite a smart bloke, he trained after he was discharged as an accountant. So there wasn't really any noticeable difference between the two. And sometimes the brand new one could be more risky to fly.

06:30 One of them that I flew and there was an old saying, that five minutes of care on the ground was, extra care, attention, was worth quite often worth your life, but to do your proper drill. We had a crew that was lost and I think the conclusion was, this wasn't test flying but this was

07:00 in the squadron, sloppy cockpit drill. It was found that the pitch, when you took off you had to change the pitch of your air screws and the aircraft wouldn't get off if it was in coarse pitch. At Milne Bay the same, he almost did the same thing, he was only within a hundred metres of the end of the strip and looked like going into the sea when suddenly you could hear the change

07:30 of note of the motors. He'd suddenly became aware, you know, he was a gung ho sort of bloke , and he pushed the pitch levers forward and changed the pitch and got off. And he was found, we took off in the dark for a first light strike and he was found off the end of the air strip in the sea, a couple of hundred metres out in the sea. And I think the

08:00 conclusion was again that he hadn't done his cockpit drill and that he'd forgotten to put it into fine pitch. So care on the ground and I, it happened to me on one occasion, you check your ailerons, which, as you know are the lateral of your aircraft, and when you move

08:30 the control column down the aileron went in the opposite direction to what it should have. The wires had been crossed, the wires that run out, down from the control column into the floor and out to the wings to the aileron, and there were signatures in the book to say that it'd been checked and was okay. So you had to be careful when you were test flying

09:00 to do your cockpit drill and do all the checks, but that was the only occasion that I ever encountered any problem.

What was the relationship like generally between air crew and ground crew?

Oh very good, I mean we, our lives depended on them, their dependability and their ability. There were quite a number of them, you see, you had

09:30 Fitter 2A who was air frames, a Fitter 2E who was engines, an armourer who was responsible for seeing your guns were all serviceable and they were armed. And then you had instrument makers, responsible for all the instruments, although we only got a fraction of the instruments in those days that they have now. And as well as a lot of other

10:00 support staff as you can imagine, clerical staff, medical staff, catering staff, transport staff, so it took about fifteen to twenty people on the ground to keep one bloke in the air. But certainly I think the relationship was very good always. They were genuine sort of people and they were interested in their job.

10:30 I don't know how they felt if their crew didn't come back, I can't answer that question, but I imagine they felt it very badly, if their aircraft didn't return from the operation.

When you were doing your leap-frogging up in the islands, was it annoying or rewarding?

, I think it was

11:00 interesting,You'd be a month or six weeks, two months perhaps , in one location. You got to know it and yes, you got comfortable with it but then the next one was different, completely different. I don't think any of us were sorry to leave Milne Bay because of the incessant rain and the problem of flying operations in the rain and coming home in the rain

11:30 to Goodenough Island, it was quite different. And then the Kirawina Island was different again so I was in, actually in four different locations in that nine months. But we'd had to wait for the army to clear the island of the enemy and then

12:00 build an air strip, construct an air strip. The air strip construction, Air Field Construction Corp. and then move in, we would fly in, the ground staff would go in by ship generally, although we could take two or three in our aircraft. They'd go in ahead of us, might be a few days ahead of us and set up the camp, the mess, the kitchens and those sort of things set up before the rest of us

12:30 moved in.

Would you have to set up your own tents?

Yes, yes. But the equipment was all there for you to, you didn't have to go cutting poles and things like that. But the messes were made of Kunai grass and the natives, they would get the natives to build those, they were wizards at using the bamboo and the Kunai grass and

13:00 how you could make that water proof just using grass, but of course it was fairly thick. And there'd be sides about a metre high and then it'd be open from there up to the eaves of the roof. Reasonably cool compared to being out in your tent.

13:30 **You talked earlier about how the Beaufighter got its name the Whispering Death, do you know when you first heard of that term?**

Well I hadn't heard of Beaufighters really until we were posted to Forest Hill, on a station like that you didn't get any daily newspaper's accounts of the war very much. And it wasn't until, I think it got

14:00 that name in Burma originally, but it was well known when I got to the squadron then and it was apparently given to it by the Japanese when they were used in Burma, before we got them, in the Burma Campaign.

Of all the aircraft you flew, were the Beaufighters the noisiest?

14:30 No, no, but they were about seventeen hundred and fifty horse power motors and after all they were only a metre away from you on both sides, so it was quite a din. And your ear protection, we're talking about sixty years ago wasn't that, very good. So I think a lot of pilots have my problem which is hearing problem and wearing, and I do get,

15:00 thanks to the Department of Veterans Affairs, a small pension for my hearing loss. But I don't know what were regarded as the loudest of the aircraft, I know the American Vulture Vengeance was a big, lumbering thing and it made a hell of a lot of noise. But they were all quite noisy and you were sitting so close to those motors for,

15:30 particularly the bombers, for hours on end, the single engine fighter didn't have that much range I suppose. But a lot of pilots I'm sure have hearing problems down the track because of their close proximity to that noise and the poor noise abatement that was offered by the

16:00 ear phones of that era.

In the unique position that you had in being able to fly different aircraft, what were your favourite aircraft?

Oh I think three favourites were all British, perhaps I didn't fly enough American aircraft. My favourite, but I can only speak from wishful thinking was the P-38 the Lockheed

16:30 Lightning, which I didn't fly. But the Spitfire was a beautiful aircraft to fly, the, because of its manoeuvrability. The Mosquito, it was a twin engine, very sleek, very fast. And of course the Beaufighter that I had about five hundred hours of flying in the Beaufighters, a little bit tricky but very

17:00 reliable. And perhaps the fact I was a bit disposed towards it, kindly disposed towards it because it had carried me safely through on that thirty-five operations.

On the Beaufighter you've got the four canon and the eight machine guns, were they separate firing buttons for those?

No. There were six machine guns, in the British Beaufighter - four canon, twenty mill. canon and six point three-o-threes.

17:30 The Australian Beaufighter, I guess it was a matter of supply, they switched from six .303 Brownings from the UK to four .5s, two in each wing, American .5s. So but you just had, you had a button at the top of your, the control column oh, a bit like a pair of spectacles and you had a button

18:00 there under your thumb. I don't know how, if there was anybody that was minus that first joint in his thumb would've got on, they probably might be able to put it over on the left hand side, and you talk about a one second burst. But the ammunition would be varied, depending to some extent on the target that you anticipated, but you had armour piercing, they were all different colours,

18:30 you had ball, incendiary and then tracer, perhaps one in ten would be tracer. It was a double edged sword the tracer, it could give you an indication of where you were firing, where your shooting was going, but it could also give the enemy an indication. And I can recall

19:00 one attack on Gasmata and one of my first strikes, and in my ignorance I thought that you went down on to the target and fired and then you pulled away and then you went round and you went down again and you kept doing this until you ran out of ammunition. But it depended how hot the target was, sometimes you'd be just

19:30 told to just do the one strike, the one pass, there'd be others to follow you. They would have to be a safe distance behind you so that their ricochets, you weren't hit with their ricochets. And as soon as you finished firing and you scooted across the strip, you'd turn either left or right so that you were out of the danger of the next fellow's ricochets. But on this occasion I could see these tracer's coming up

20:00 at me, and although that might have helped the enemy aircraft gunner to see how close he was to me, it helped me to see where they were coming from, where they were going to, and to try and take evasive action.

You spoke to us off camera about bombing the paravane of the ship, do you want to tell us that story again so we can get it?

Well

20:30 we were operating from Port Lincoln.You see most of Australia's shipping came across the Great Australian Bight , at that time it was from Britain and to the big two ports were Sydney and Melbourne. And so these Ansons were fitted with two two-hundred and fifty pound bombs. And

21:00 we would do a couple of, several hours sea patrol out across the sea lanes, either from Ceduna or Port Lincoln or Kangaroo Island or Mallala, ostensibly looking for Japanese submarines, and they were about but I don't know whether any were actually found there. And as a youngster, twenty-one or twenty-two, I had no idea

21:30 apart from what I had seen in the movies, what a periscope looked like or a paravane. And so I saw this thing some distance back, behind the ship, and I assumed it was a periscope so I unloaded my bombs in its direction. I missed it too but put a bit of a scare into the minesweeper, I

22:00 think they thought that perhaps it was a submarine that I was chasing, so they started to do quite a bit of zig zagging, but no harm was done, bit of valuable experience for me. And I don't know that anybody actually sighted any of our people with that, that operated for quite a few months, they also had them in Sydney and probably in Melbourne, so I

22:30 don't know whether, Sydney did have it's miniature submarines in the harbour. And there certainly were

big submarines out because they sunk a few of our ships and that Centaur, hospital ship was sunk by a Japanese submarine.

Did anybody say anything to you about that incident?

No, it was all put down to experience and lack of experience, but what

23:00 they might have said in private, I don't know, the superior officers, but perhaps didn't know either the difference because after all we hadn't been subjected to submarines and mine sweepers up until that time.

What about the comment that was made to you in regards to the uselessness of the two-fifty pound bombs?

Yes the Group Captain was

23:30 a man of considerable experience in chasing U-Boats [Unterseeboots – German submarine] in the Atlantic and he was probably right. That, as he said, "We might just as well have pissed on it and waited for the rivets to rust." But we felt that we were doing a job and it was valuable training anyway, for all concerned, for the wireless air gunners, the navigators.

You must

24:00 **have become quite adept at low level flying, what was the knack to it?**

Quick reaction, and it depended how low, if you're at a hundred feet well you were fairly safe, there was no objects to worry about. You followed, if you were over the jungle you followed the contour of the land, might be up slightly and down into

24:30 gullies, but you kept fairly close to those trees, five feet would be an exaggeration, but fifty feet. And when we were barge hunting around the coast of New Britain and New Guinea we flew in pairs, the leader would be about fifty feet off the water and about a hundred metres out, oh I'm mixing up the feet and the metres,

25:00 but from the shore, and you'd follow the coast, we might do a hundred kilometres or more of this tracking along the coast. And then when there was a river you'd fly up the river as far as it was navigable and back, and then your number two would be a couple of thousand feet up and about a kilometres or mile back behind you, ostensibly to

25:30 protect your tail and warn you if there were any enemy fighters, about to pounce on you. If you found barges, which we frequently did, I think in the month of September '43 we destroyed about ninety-six Japanese barges and small ships. And I remember there was a bit of a race on to try and get the century but like many a good Test Cricketer we were bowled out or went out at ninety-nine

26:00 or, I know Stuart Law yesterday when dismissed on ninety-nine, I think we got about ninety-six barges and small ships that month. You would then make a number of passes, each barge was loaded, had a one fifty mill. gun, machine gun on the front of it. And if there were six or eight barges pulled up side by side

26:30 which they did, they were afraid of the Beaufighter in the daylight, so come daylight they would beach them underneath overhanging trees. If you've been to New Guinea as we have three times, I have three times in the last few years, I've particularly interested to see how those trees go out over the sea water, ten or fifteen metres. So that, I can appreciate they would beach the nose of their barges

27:00 and the trees would overhang, and the bit that was protruding they would cut branches and camouflage it by draping these branches over it. So it's possible that we missed a few, but as soon as you saw them you'd fire at them, go around, number two would go down. Each time you went around

27:30 you'd pull up to about a thousand feet, three hundred metres and dive with your guns firing. They carried fuel as well as provisions and ammunition, so quite often or more often than not you had incendiaries amongst your mixture of canon and machine guns and you'd set them on fire , and then you'd move on further down the coast.

28:00 Always, if you were very near Rabaul or Hoskins on the north side, conscious of the fact that radio warning might have gone out and there might be some Japanese fighters on the way to look for you, but we didn't encounter that. One of the little thrills I had when I went back for the unveiling of that memorial in the year 2000,

28:30 one of the expatriates had a Zone aircraft and it was on the Hoskins air strip, which we had attacked from, I think it was Christmas Eve that I did an attack on, in '43 on Hoskins. So he said, "Well I'll take you on a barge hunt," this was the year 2000. And we did, we went down along the coast for half

29:00 an hour or more flying, just as we used to back in 1943, weaving in and out looking for barges. And some of the buildings that I have photos of from 1943 were still there, just as they were then. They were mission buildings, churches and mission buildings that were used alternatively by the Japanese and I think by our invading forces later on.

29:30 So that was quite a thrill, and I took photos of them and brought them back to compare with the photos that we had taken in 1943.

Would you say that you got to enjoy what you did?

Oh no, no, it was a wonderful experience having survived it but there's so many, even the POW's say, "Well it was, having survived, it

30:00 was a fantastic experience, it's not something that you'd want to go through again, and it's something that money can't buy," and that it true, but I wouldn't say you enjoy it.

But would you say you got a buzz out of low level flying?

Oh yes, you had to be alert, depending how low you were. And in, down the ravine, up hill and around mountains and those sorts of

30:30 things. It was probably the most interesting of all flying and we did that, started that at Forest Hill and you know, you'd get so low over those wide open plains, down on the wheat fields that you more or less had to lift it up a bit to go over the fences, and you could see the rabbits scurrying into their burrows. That was probably illegal but you were away from the prying eyes of the instructors and what have you.

31:00 But yes I imagine, and when you got up to altitude then things just move so slowly, but when you were down on the tree tops or the waves, things went past at two hundred and fifty miles an hour which is four hundred kilometres an hour, they were really zipping past. And then when you'd pull up to five thousand feet or whatever, it

31:30 took such a long time for that mountain or whatever to disappear under the wing. Our wind speed and direction we picked up from over the sea - from wind caps, the wave caps, the white caps, the more the white caps the stronger the wind and the direction of movement of the white caps. And then over the land, you look for smoke, from fires from smoke and those sorts of things,

32:00 a lot of little, they were standard tricks I think that you learned.

With the strafing of barges, would you actually slow down or would you be at full throttle for those?

Well we never flew at full throttle unless you had a Zero on your tail. And there were two bits of copper wire, your throttles moved in a groove, each on a separate groove and then

32:30 about two centimetres back from the end of those grooves there was a piece of copper wire across. And normally that's as far as you opened the throttles, for take off and all performance, unless you were in a desperate situation. And those two wires were called the gate, so you'd open the throttle right up to the gate. And I'm sorry but I don't know the full song now but

33:00 there was a song, it might have been prepared in the U.K., I don't know where, about when you got an enemy fighter on your tail...

\n[Verse follows]\n Don't let your British blood boil\n Just open the throttle right up to the gate\n And blind the poor bastards with oil\n

But you could bust through that wire and that gave you an extra boost, extra power.

33:30 But if you held that for more that a minute, the motors were supposed to be pulled down and examined, inspected, because of the possible damage from that extra boost that you gave them.

Did you ever have to do that, crash the gate?

No, I should've in retrospect, I mean we had Zero's on our tail even in that Rabaul raid for quite a while.

34:00 But being right down only a few feet off the water was an advantage because they couldn't dive at you, and then they'd have to start to pull out when they were a couple of hundred metres up from you. And then they couldn't go on down past you which was a common practice and come up underneath you. But I didn't, and I don't know why I didn't, because my navigator would be yelling

34:30 at me, he was watching and seeing the tracers coming. And we'd skid sideways, what we call, yaw. You push on your left foot or your right foot rudder and the aircraft would sort of, instead of going directly ahead would be, still going ahead but it would give the impression that you were turning, and they might make allowance for that and fire off.

Can you

35:00 **tell us about, anything about your crashes, your three crashes?**

Well one of them in a Boomerang and the tail wheel locked, broke, and I couldn't control it on the ground. And it was on an air strip on Morotai and it ended up running off to the side and standing on its nose like a dart, but fortunately didn't tip right over

35:30 in the rubble beside the air strip. Another one was a Boomerang and the brakes failed and if you touch down at sixty miles an hour, which is what, ninety kilometres an hour, I've forgotten what the touch down speed was, but you don't know that the brakes aren't functioning until you come to apply them. They just run forever,

36:00 your air screw is wind-milling, I don't know if you've ever been on a level road at sixty miles an hour or a hundred k's an hour and put it out of gear and see how far it'll roll, but they roll forever. I ended up in the coconut palms at the end of the strip, still doing, I don't know, thirty or forty kilometres an hour. And parts

36:30 of the aircraft started to disappear, it was on its belly amongst logs and things, and you don't wait, you get out as quickly as you possibly can. So the Beaufighter, I was fairly lucky there , the motor coughed for some reason or other, and lost power and it swung me, I wasn't

37:00 quick enough to straighten it up and it, well, lost its undercarriage as soon as it got in the rough. But there were no trees, it was right alongside the shore, that particular air strip on Morotai, and there were no trees, there was just rubble, lumps, heaps of mullock and stuff that they had dozed off, perhaps a few logs. I don't think you endeared yourself

37:30 with the ground crew when these things happened because they'd just repaired those aircraft and got them back in flying shape and then you come and mess up the whole show. And if you don't do a good enough job, they've got to pick yourself up, brush yourself off and start all over again. But again I was lucky that injury wasn't serious, as I said, whip

38:00 lash, they call it cervical spondalosis and lumbar spondalosis. Veteran's Affairs don't accept the lumbar spondalosis, apparently your neck isn't connected to your lumbar part, but I don't think you can have a crash like that without your whole spine suffers a bit, you do have safety harness on but you come to a fairly abrupt stop. But I do get a

38:30 pension from lumbar spondalosis, no, cervical spondalosis and so, but I'm quite happy with the treatment, very happy with the treatment that we get from Veterans Affairs. That Gold Card, my wife has a Gold Card in her own right having been in Townsville, which gives us free medical attention, so one can't complain.

The instance where the

39:00 **Boomerang sat on its nose, did they have to correct that before you got out .?**

No, I got out very quickly on to the wing and slid down the wing and got away but I didn't wait to see what they did to recover it, they'd have to get a rope around the tail and pull it back down again. Obviously the air screw would've been bent, have to acquire a new air screw.

Tape 9

00:31 **Of your entire flying career during the war, what was the hairiest moment?**

The hairiest? Oh, I think to have that leaking petrol tank was a worry, but having that unbeknown, this high explosive shell inside the tank.

01:00 I couldn't see it, the navigator could see it and he told me we'd obviously been hit, we were leaking fuel. And we had about three hundred kilometres of ocean to go, to get across to get home; and then you were concerned about your fuel, whether you had sufficient to get you home, that was quite a worry. But as I

01:30 have said earlier, I didn't seem to be terribly concerned about it all, perhaps I was very fortunate in that respect. We lost one crew on their first operation and a friend of mine, I mentioned Don West down at Newcastle, he was having a

02:00 cup, these crew was briefed late in the afternoon or at night, for a first light take off, strike the next day. And but my friend Don, said he was having a cup of coffee with this chap in his tent after they'd been briefed and he made the comment that he didn't expect to come back from tomorrow's operation.

02:30 Imagine, fancy going on an operation, on your first operation, and you had that attitude, that you didn't expect to come back. And the fact that they didn't come back had nothing to do with him, he was the navigator, they were hit and by anti aircraft fire and lost one motor and they struggled back along the shore to

03:00 quite close to where we have the memorial as I said. And their wreck has been found and I wrote a story, I have a book in there that I wrote the story about it and photos. It was found up in very inhospitable country in the mountains. We had to get a couple of natives who'd found it, they thought there were three or four motors.

03:30 And the two expatriates who walked in, took them a couple of days to walk in to this, to look at it, thought it must have been an American aircraft, a Liberator, and it turned out there were only two motors and it was a Beaufighter. So they were paid eighty dollars to clear on top of the ridge, the Beaufighter was down in a ravine but its tail plane was on top

04:00 of the ridge. They were paid I think eighty dollars to clear the jungle on the top of that ridge, sufficient to allow a helicopter to get in there. And that's what happened and I have excellent photos taken from the air as we flew in, in the helicopter, of the clearing on the ridge, you can see the tail plane there. Then of the helicopter sitting on top of the ridge, and it was so narrow that skids of the helicopter were

04:30 protruding over the edge of the ridge about a foot or two, pretty good flying I think by the helicopter pilot. And then we had to scramble down about a hundred vertical feet. I couldn't, my age and my arthritic knees, I had to take a long walk around slowly down the side and then turn and come back. But that is one of the air screws we recovered and

05:00 that sits on top of the memorial at San Remo Club in Kimbi, slightly damaged. To recover that, one of the expatriates, Frank Lewis, took a team of natives in and they worked and got the air screw off the motor and then they had to clear the jungle up the side of the cliff.

05:30 And it took I think six of them, two of them on each of the three blades to lump it up, up on top, it was hooked on to the helicopter, and the helicopter lifted up and took the strain. And the air screw propeller was lifted up and I have a wonderful photo of it in the air, and it looks for all the world like an eagle,

06:00 an eagle hawk, the air screw, just the way it was, the photo taken, about to strike the soft underbelly of the helicopter, it's a beautiful photo. And it was taken back like that and landed back near Kimbi, and it now sits on top of the cairn that we built, the obelisk and then there's a square, three inch square pipe

06:30 out and the air screw sits on the top. It's about twelve feet six inches in diameter, the Beaufighter air screw so that's what, well over three metres in diameter.

Most of the crashes that you've spoken about with Beaufighters were all ditched, was it possible to bail out from a Beaufighter?

Yes, some people,

07:00 none on operations the time I was there. But a Beaufighter was being flown from Darwin south for repairs and they ran into a bad front at Mount Isa or Cloncurry and couldn't land, they headed south to Longreach, the front still defeated them. They headed on down to

07:30 Charleville and they still couldn't land. By this time it was dark, one of the motors had caught fire, the fire was extinguished. Kevin Kelly was the navigator, no, not Kevin, the other Kelly, he'd be annoyed with me if he heard that. He was able to give Amberley I think, a fix of where they were but they were out of fuel and they had a

08:00 couple of passengers so all four of them bailed out, the pilot would be the last one to bail out. And it was on Durry Station down in the far south west corner of Queensland and night time, but at daylight everybody landed safely and they found their way to the homestead, and an aircraft came looking for them, and it

08:30 eventually did land and take them on board. But the fact that the navigator or wireless operator was able to give them a fix on just where they were and where they were bailing out, they had a fairly good fix on the location of where to look for them.

I guess it was the fact that you're flying low level flights on operations that most of them actually did land?

Well that's right, you wouldn't have time to bail out,

09:00 you'd want at least a thousand feet under you to bail out and you just didn't have time.

That Beaufighter that you just mentioned that was carrying passengers, how much area was there inside the fuselage for that?

Well there was oh, two or three metres, it would be about a metre and a half wide, my guess, inside, or at least a metre wide.

09:30 It was called the well because the pilot, when you stood behind the pilot in the well, your shoulders and head were about on the same level as the pilot, he was up on a bit of a platform. So you could carry, oh I suppose if you wanted to half a dozen people in there because it was a very powerful aircraft and the load wouldn't worry it. The navigator was about three metres back and he had a table and the radio and his maps and navigation

10:00 equipment there.But the pilot had a trap door behind there in the well and the navigator had a trap door and you pulled a cord, the pilot had a cord up above his head and you yanked on that. And the slip stream, the air, once the lock was released would slam the thing open, and then you had about two steps

10:30 to go down or you could either just drop down through the hole, but that called for the Beaufighter to be upright you know in a normal, flying position for you to get out. The Spitfire was quite different, they wound the trim forward which meant that the aircraft tended to nose down, they would hold that back and open the canopy above them then let the

11:00 control column forward and the aircraft would flip nose down tail up and throw them out over the top of the air screw, which was the standard procedure I understand. But each aircraft had its own particular type of escape but nowadays of course they've got the ejector seats.

11:30 **What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?**

Well last Anzac Day I delivered the oration I suppose one would call it, to the citizens of Rockhampton, so I don't know whether you want a copy of that. It was down on the river bank, quite a big crowd there. And I think, only yesterday we were down at the shopping centre and an old soldier came

12:00 along, here we are nine or ten months later and he congratulated me on the speech that I gave, I hadn't seen him in the interim. But, my wife's brother was in the AIF, taken a prisoner of war and he was on a prison ship on the way to Japan towards the latter part of the incarceration. Obviously he was in better health than most of them, because he was being

12:30 sent to Japan like all the others as a labourer, to work He was lost, the prison ship wasn't marked, Japan didn't recognise the Geneva Convention and it was torpedoed by an American submarine. And I have the book in there called Thunder Below, written by the Chief of that submarine, Flotilla, and that

13:00 actually sank that ship and then they went back four or five days later rescuing the survivors who were still in very bad way, clinging to bits of wreckage and what have you. So my wife lost her older brother there, her father was badly wounded at Gallipoli, he had a, what we'd call a 'wingy' arm for the rest of his life.

13:30 So one can't help thinking of those sort of things on Anzac Day, of the mates, even though we knew some of them for only a comparatively short period in the squadron that were knocked off. That's probably what drove me to more or less as the sole operator here in Australia to, with that memorial,

14:00 and it is a beautiful memorial. But of course I must give credit for that to the expatriate Australians up there in the locality who did all the work to erect it. My main interest was to keep their interest going and to raise funds for it. And I had some funny experiences asking people to raise, for

14:30 donations. We had a bit of a set back you see, I understood that all Australian War Memorials received a Government subsidy, fifty percent subsidy, so we proceeded to draw up plans and specifications and make arrangements, thinking that we were going to get fifty percent. Then when we applied to the War Graves or whoever it was

15:00 now, we were informed that it was outside the territorial limit and it wasn't an approved Australian Government Memorial or Australian Memorial and we weren't eligible for that fifty percent subsidy. So I had to turn around then and find twelve or fifteen thousand dollars to pay for all the work, the,

15:30 lot of printing and lot of photos, lot of designs, had to get a local man who designed it. And somebody commented the amount of steel and concrete that went into it would've done justice to Fort Knox in America. And it is faced with a black glass-like volcanic stone, obsidian, which is relatively common in

16:00 New Britain because it's a very volcanic island. And it's rather unique in that respect that this cairn, which stands about two metres high is faced with obsidian and then the bronze plaques are set in to that, there are four bronze plaques. Now there's another one as I said earlier for Flying Officer Bonythan and Kelly who were the crew of that missing Seagull.

16:30 But what else does one think of? I have some fairly wide ranging thoughts , some of it not from personal experience anyway, from one's readings. Shocking waste of life and yet we believe it's necessary to, when an aggressor

17:00 starts up as happened almost without warning, to defend your homeland, defend your own nest.

When you learned in latter years about the atomic bomb that was dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, what were your thoughts on that?

It couldn't have happened quick enough.

17:30 Oh look there were hundreds of thousands of allied troops up there, and the final thing would've had to be an invasion of the Japanese islands. They were very ingenious people, they had hundreds of miniature submarines, suicide submarines under construction, then we had the Kamikaze bombers, of course, bomber pilots.

18:00 And the, they would've dug in, caves in all that land as they did in Rabaul. Rabaul has got about three hundred kilometres of tunnels all through it, through the volcanic ash. They had hospitals in those tunnels, workshops, railway lines up from the beach where damaged small ships and submarines could be put on

18:30 wheels on dolly's and dragged up on the railway lines into the tunnels and worked on. In one tunnel that we looked at there were five barges, the sort that we used to go looking for, still inside the tunnel on the rails. So the whole of the Japanese islands would've been really like rabbit warrens with tunnels, there would've been a tremendous loss of life. Aerial bombing alone without the

19:00 atomic bomb would not have won the war for us there. Troops would've had to go ashore and it would have been a shocking loss of life. So I doubt that there was any front line service man up there at the time that regretted or has since regretted the dropping of the atomic bomb. I have read, you know, a lot of the things against it, I've read that there were more people killed in the

19:30 British bombing of Dresden than there were, in those fire bombings that were conducted in Berlin in those, than there were in Hiroshima or Nagasaki from the atomic bombs. It's sad that we had to come to that of course and it has put the whole world on a knife edge, as we know now with all the threats of people developing atomic bombs. But

20:00 no, I believe it, in that particular atomic bomb.

How did going back to some of those places, how did that affect you?

Oh there was a sadness when the commercial air liner touched down on Hoskins air strip. I hadn't been closer to it than ten or fifteen feet, for example on that Christmas Eve I spoke about, we zoomed across it

20:30 at right angles to the air strip. But I had been there previously, we had found barges, I've got excellent photos of barges pulled up on a little jetty that they had at the end of the strip, and we set them alight on another occasion. But to actually land there and know that our Commanding Officer and his navigator had lost their lives there, they were the only two on that,

21:00 that was rather sad. And a rather momentous occasion after all those years, it was 1998, from, take away forty-three, you're left with fifty-five years afterwards to go back and land and to step out and to look around. And the Japanese aerodrome control tower that I shot up was missing, had

21:30 long since been removed and it was a bitumen air strip, and they had a terminal there and with native totem poles in the front of it, quite artistic. But it was, course intensely interesting, tinged with a bit of sadness about it all. The town of Kimbi did not exist, Kimbi was

22:00 established because of the deep water at San Remo and the coconut industry has given way there to oil palm. Oil palm is a very big business and they have large oil storage tankers, not tankers, tanks and a deep water port.. And I was informed by the manager of one of the supermarkets that there are thirty thousand people

22:30 in Kimbi or its environs, in the little, people move in to the city in to the, during the day, as happens in Cairo. I think Cairo's population increases by a couple of million by the middle of the day, people streaming into the city. So, and all the coconut palms that we knew or most of them have been disappeared and given way to oil palms. It's a very big

23:00 industry and it's in your margarine and a lot of those things, oil palm.

You mentioned having to fly that operation on Christmas Eve, how was Christmas Day spent up there?

It was more or less like any other, there was no poultry or ham that I remember. There used to be a saying on occasions, 'Oh curse the expense let's open another coconut,' you know.

23:30 We did have a piano in the mess and we had an ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] pianist named Bill Davis who was an excellent pianist, so we used to have sing songs and quite a bit of entertainment in that regard. I don't remember anybody with a guitar but the pianist, the piano in the mess was a great boon,

24:00 as was Bill Davis, and he survived. His pilot was awarded a DFC.

Was there a 30 Squadron song?

Yes, there was one, bit rude in places.

Can you recall how it goes? Don't mind the language, that's fine, we've heard it all before?

24:30 Well we had been to Rabaul and Palmalmal Plantation was a fairly hot spot, we'd attacked that. It was, I don't know who the composer of it was, I think it's my, our present Secretary, Peter White, probably had a hand in it, but it was to the tune of Take It Off, Take It Off, you know the, Queenie, the leader of the burlesque show.

\n[Verse follows]\n Oh we're Beau-

25:00 fighter bastards\n And we've been to Rabaul\n And we've shot the shitter out of Palmalmal\n But when we burn their barges\n It sure burns up the Japs\n And they send up their Zeros and their haps\n "Pour

it on, pour it on," yells a voice from the rear\n "Pour it on, pour it on," they're too bloody near!\n

And I've forgotten the final words of it. There were a lot of war songs,

25:30 some of them quite clever and I tried with a fellow, who had a very good repertoire of war songs, to get together with him and to record them. But he said, "Oh I'm too ill," and he died of cancer before we were able to do that. But I'm hoping that somewhere in the archives there is a collection of original war songs.

26:00 I know I have a WAAAF song book but that's got most of the war time songs in it, they're very, not many, or any original songs.

Now when asked about your DFC you usually recite your poem to people, can you tell us about receiving that?

Oh, I think the only time I have recited that to a group of people

26:30 was, we were invited to the aero club presentation of certificates of competency, blokes who'd learned to go off solo, which was only a year or two ago. And there were a couple of, two or three dozen Rockhampton Aero Club blokes there and I recited that. I wasn't present at the presentation, it wasn't my cup of

27:00 tea, so I delegated my mother. The Governor was Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, at the time, and she went to Government House. And her sister went with her, and her, one of her sons, they were both quite distinguished service men. One of them was Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel in charge of the force in Timor that force of guerrillas,

27:30 Alan Spence, and he was awarded the DSO [Distinguished Service Order] on that day. So two sisters were there, one to receive her son's DSO and my mother to receive my DFC. And the younger son of Aunty Lou, Louis Spence, was awarded the DFC, he was with 3 Squadron in the desert campaign. He lost his life in Korea, I think it was on his last operational flight and he was a

28:00 Wing Commander in charge of the squadron in Korea and he didn't return from that trip. So it really was no big deal for me and I wasn't there, I was up in Morotai, I missed out on a good trip back home and an appearance at Government House. But no , mother got quite a kick out of it and a bit of publicity, and she was the correspondent for The Maryborough Chronicle during the

28:30 war so she gave herself and me quite a good write up about it all.

Did you get care packages and mail, particularly like around Christmas time ?

Well there were comforts parcels and which oh, might be a cake or some

29:00 dried fruit, something of that nature. Mail was quite intermittent but I think I would write a couple of times a week home. I still have one of the letters that after mother died that I got, I wrote to her, and it was about when we were on Kirawina Island. Because I mentioned some of these children looking at Rex my navigator's, the

29:30 photo of his fiancé and saying, "Your Meri?"[wife] asking him, "Is that your Meri?" And we were in the back of the truck going down to the air strip to go on a strike. There were what we call the brown pheasants, which were a common native bird here, the pheasant kuw-kuhl, they were quite common, and they'd be, we'd see them twenty-five metres

30:00 off beside the road flying from tree to tree. So we'd have our thirty-eight's trying to do a bit of aerial shooting at these pheasants, I doubt that we ever got within feet of them because of the moving truck and the moving bird. And as I said earlier, most of us couldn't hit a barn if we were in side it. But they were a comfort

30:30 those comfort parcels, to know that people were thinking about you and trying to make life a little bit more pleasant by sending you up those things.

How good was it when you first got home to see mum and dad?

Very emotional I guess, the fact that I had survived. You see Hervey Bay was only thirty kilometres from

31:00 Maryborough and the war was over so we stretched the rules and regulations quite a bit. So each time that I flew down to Maryborough on a ferry flight delivering an aircraft I would do a circle of our home at Torquay at about a thousand feet, and I could see people immediately would recognise what it was.

31:30 Dad and Mum out in the back yard frantically waving a towel or something and then I'd go off and within five minutes I'd be at Maryborough and land and go home for the weekend. So it wasn't quite as dramatic perhaps as if one hadn't been getting home, but I had two or three weekends before I was finally discharged or posted,

32:00 at home for the weekend because of those ferry flights of Mosquitoes or Beaufighters down to Mascot or, not Mascot, Richmond or wherever they had to go, Archerfield.

The first time you come home, you must have dreamed up a pretty good meal for yourself on the way home, what did you eat?

No, it's, I don't remember that but there were no refrigerators

32:30 in those days and a lot of people didn't have an ice box, we had an ice box, they had the old Coolgardie safe with the hessian bags down the side and the water. So no, life was fairly spartan because you had to have ration tickets for clothing and ration tickets for butter and other food like that. And we

33:00 were not well to do by any means so food was fairly basic. But yes it was a great relief when it was all over and it left a lot of people as I said, feeling a bit uncertain, quite a lot uncertain about what lay ahead of them, what to do. And post war reconstruction as far as I'm concerned, was a wonderful thing because it allowed me to

33:30 go to the University which I wouldn't have been able to do. We got five pounds a week as a married couple living allowance for the first three years so that was a great boon and free tuition and we got a book allowance. And then the fourth year, I think all University students, ex service people had this,

34:00 you had to sign an agreement that you would repay, which is available of course under the HEC Scheme today. I think a lot of students feel that they're badly done by that they have to repay but I can tell you, we accepted it with open arms. The fact that we and, medical students for example would have three years of that subsidy to repay,

34:30 once they got a job. But I was fortunate, I had the CSIRO position to go back to when I graduated and I think only, apart from my wife who acquiesced when I said, my name came out of the barrel in the Lands Department and I drew a soldier settlement block at Wandawin. The only person who ever congratulated me for leaving the CSIRO

35:00 and going out on a soldier settlement block was the former Principal of the college. He was then Sir Jack Keith Murray, he was Professor Murray, Professor of Agriculture at the University and Principal of the College. "Oh well Robertson," he said, "I think you're doing a wonderful thing," he said, "the bush and primary industry needs people like you," and he was most enthusiastic. And Trop Tommerup, the lecturer

35:30 in agriculture, his motto was, when you graduate, "Go west young man and take a good woman with you." So that's what we did.

How do you think your war experience affected the rest of your life?

Oh, it's hard for me to put a figure on that but there is a bond between

36:00 ex service men, you feel that it's something you've shared, even if you were on the ground or on the sea or in the air. It's something that people who didn't experience it, cannot buy and cannot know. I mean there was only a certain age group, so that you could have been too young or too old,

36:30 even if you were alive in those days, you can't hold that against people. But there is that bond, between them, between you all. I am fairly easily turned to tears at times, it involves the Australian flag, it involves

37:00 the war and another thing, occasionally I have shed a tear over the horrible things that've happened to small children. So as you can see I'm... I've sometimes burst out crying on the telephone in a

37:30 telephone conversation. I don't know, I don't think I ever shed a tear apart from some chastisement that I received as a child until I was probably in my fifties or sixties. And it's gradually crept up on me with old age, I think it's something to do with age as well.

38:00 So there was a song when I was a boy about dry those tears, '...from your eyes and try and realise...' So, is that about it?

That was...

Unless you have any other questions, I'm alright again now.

INTERVIEW ENDS