Australians at War Film Archive

Frederick Barnes - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **Okay, we'll start with the overview that I spoke to you about. So I'll get you to take me through where you were born, where you grew up, these details.**

Fine. I was born in Melbourne on 19th November 1924. Went to school in Thornbury and

01:00 then Northcote High School. Then joined the Postmaster General's Department. In those days it was the Depression period and there was a great feeling that to be safe you should get into some sort of public service type life. So although I had ideas on a profession, the advice was get into the public service. So I did the telegraph messengers' examination and got appointed as a telegraph messenger.

01:30 Then there was another examination in those days. I think it was called 'Entry To The Third Division'. And I became a clerk in the Postmaster General's Department in Melbourne, in the stores branch. Then of course the war had come along and I was interested. I joined the air training corps and spent some enjoyable days with the air training corps, although my first experience of flying down at Sale in a Fairey Battle wasn't too exciting because they were doing

02:00 gunnery type attacks and very quick movements and I was a little still on that and I was a bit worried then. But never mind. By that time, this is 1942 period, there was an excess of air crew and it wasn't long after that Britain said, "We've got all the Australian air crew we need now," so there was delay and I couldn't get into the air force when I turned 18 in 1942.

02:30 I had to wait until April 43 and joined the air force as an air crew trainee, went through the usual thing of by train from Melbourne up to Sydney to go to Bradfield Park, initial training school, then to Narrandera for elementary flying training, then to Uranquinty near Wagga for service flying training. Then to Mildura for the OTU [operational training unit] which was on Kittyhawks. And then to my utter horror I was told I

03:00 had to go and do some other flying, they didn't need us in the squadrons. So I ended up at Maryborough flying wireless air gunner trainees around to get some air experience using their radios half the day. The other half the day was driving the same trainees around in a pack of Ford panel vans where they also operated radios around that area. And the next step was a course at Deniliquin

03:30 which had the unofficial title of the 'strut school'. But again it was a course to weed out numbers. But I was successful there. Back at OTU at Williamtown then up to 77 Squadron in the Halmaheras at Morotai, very close to the end of the war. I didn't serve on any operations at Morotai, but I joined 77 Squadron on Kittyhawks.

04:00 Then over till the invasion of Borneo and we landed at Labuan Island. I didn't fly over. I went in an American landing ship tanker. LST, as they call them. And had to wade ashore on the island of Labuan and then got into operations there but again it was towards the end of the war. One experience I remember well was flying over a prison camp where there were Australians,

04:30 whilst our army went in to release these people from the prison camp. They had a sign on the roof of this prison camp which was something like "Get your finger out" or words to that effect. Come and release us, in other words. And then the end of the war came along and at that stage we went from the Kittyhawks to the Mustangs. The Australian fighter squadrons had been transferring to Mustangs. So it was a conversion to Mustangs at Labuan Island. Then the

05:00 occupation of Japan came along and those of us who were interested in staying in the air force volunteered for the occupation force. We were a mixed bunch. Some youngsters like me who hadn't seen much. Some pretty rugged old timers who didn't want to let go of the air force. But we went to Japan in early 1946. Landed originally at a place called Bofu where among other things we saw a small earthquake.

05:30 It was a wooden building and they had 44 gallon drums full of water along the corridors for fire work. About a foot of water slopped out of each of those tanks, but no serious damage. And then as the

occupation went on I got involved in some interesting things. One was to help supervise the first Japanese elections. I had a car, a

06:00 driver and an interpreter and went around and toured all the election spots supposedly to make sure that there was no pressure being brought on the people. But what we saw seemed to be all very fair. And by that stage the occupation force started to wind down. The Indian air force had gone home, the RAF [Royal Air Force] had gone home, Bofu was overcrowded so we moved to another Japanese spot – Iwakuni – a bit further east, but still

06:30 on the Inland Sea. The New Zealanders moved down to Bofu. But it was enjoyable flying the Mustang. Then the next step was a trip up to Tokyo with a bunch of airmen to take part in what was

07:00 called the Tokyo Guard. It was a matter of showing the flag I suppose and the Australian army battalions went up in rotation, spent a month in Tokyo putting on cards around the Imperial Palace and such places. I had what amounted to a company of airmen to go with one of the army battalions and that's where I met my wife. She

07:30 was living in Tokyo with her parents. Her mother was Australian, her step-father was American and we met there. About six months later I did another Tokyo Guard and we got engaged and were married up there in January 1950. Not long afterwards it was time to go home. The occupation was wound up. And we went back

08:00 to Melbourne and I went to the Citizens' Air Force Squadron, number 21 Squadron in Laverton where I enjoyed flying again. There was some pretty experienced pilots there who were hanging on in the air force and enjoyed flying with them. And I was then posted to Sale to undergo the Flying Instructors' Course. And on arrival down at Sale – I'd left my wife at home temporarily

08:30 because we were in the process of trying to build a house in Melbourne – I was met by the orderly officer who I knew very well. He said, "You're posted." I said, in effect, "That's why I'm here." "No you're not. You're posted back to Japan for the Korean War," which I'd never heard of. So three days later I was on my way back to Japan to join 77 Squadron again for the Korean War. We got there only a week after the war started. There were 12 war pilots and 26 war experienced air men

09:00 went up. And there I was for the next 9 months flying out of Japan originally and then on Korea itself. I managed to survive that. Got home and unlike the sorts of thing that happens these days when people come back from war there was no publicity, no nothing. My wife met me at the airport and that was that.

09:30 And this time I was posted to what was called ARDU, the Aircraft Research and Development Unit at Laverton to undergo an Australian test pilot's course with three other fellows. That was an interesting experience too. Just for interest, one of the instructors was the then squadron leader, Jim Rowland, who later became the Governor of New South Wales

10:00 and Chief of the Air Staff. Was proceeding along doing some minor test flying at Laverton, picking up new Mustangs at the factory from Fishermen's Bend and things like that when I was asked to go to Woomera to take on the test flying of the Jindivick Pika Aircraft project. Pika was the piloted [prototype] version of the Jindivick pilotless aircraft. And that

10:30 was a pretty exciting experience too. So my wife – and by this time child – were up in Woomera in the area that's come in for some disrepute in more recent times, but we found it a liveable place, where we had tennis courts and shops and quite comfortable life. Another child was born up there whilst we were at Woomera.

11:00 I spent some two and a half years there. We were able to get down to Adelaide for annual holidays. Then from Woomera I was posted to America to be an exchange pilot with the American air force, and there's some interesting aspects to that I could enlarge on but I won't bother now. But it was flying originally the F86F – the American Sabre

11:30 for about the first six months or so. Then it was the new F100 American aircraft which I then transferred to. The Americans were very good. They gave me an appointment as operations officer in the squadron. And then it was back to Australia for more routine work. I formed the reformed

12:00 3 Squadron which was getting its Sabres. They were the first Sabre squadron. So I flew with them there, introducing the Sabre. Then it was the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Staff College down at Point Cook. A one years college and then from college into firstly Victoria Barracks down in Melbourne as a staff officer working on personnel. Then we moved to Canberra in

12:30 1959, and worked there for another year and a half. And then out of the blue I was asked to do a French language course down at Point Cook and got involved in the procurement of the new Mirage aircraft from France, which a team had been over to select. And away I went by myself this time

13:00 again for four and a half months in France learning to fly the Mirage and all its aspects. Then back to Williamtown. I was originally going to be 75 Squadron. I was posted as CO [commanding officer] of 75 Squadron, but by the time we got back they'd changed their minds and we were the OCU. The operational conversional unit. So I flew the Mirage there and we taught the other pilots from the F86

squadrons to fly the

13:30 Mirage. Then it was back into the personnel world in the Department of Air [Department of Air and Civil Aviation]. Then having had a year or so at that, I was posted as the air attaché to France.

14:00 Spent two years in France, which was an enjoyable period. We made good friends over there. Not only among the French people but also some of the other foreign attachés. Some contacts we still have. And that was the start of a long period of six years overseas, which had an impact on the family, particularly the children growing up. By this time we had four children at school. We were able to take the girls with us. And as I remember they were

14:30 fluent in French after about six weeks. But from France it was back to Butterworth in Malaysia to be what was called the – oh dear, operations officer? Forgotten now. Used to be called the wing commander and the wing was disposed of. But I was 2IC [second in command] on the base. Three years of that. Thinking, well that's it, this time we'll get home. We used to be able to get the kids up

15:00 for holidays. But, no, I was posted in 1972 to the Royal College of Defence Studies in London. So I had a year in London on the Royal College of Defence Studies. Then back to Australia and into the operations world, deputy chief of operations. And eventually became deputy chief of air staff in 79, 80, 81.

15:30 And I retired on age – the retiring age in those days, still is I think, 57 for an air vice marshal. We retired to Canberra. Then I worked for about four or five years for the Department of Veterans' Affairs in the Appeals Board for veterans who didn't get what they wanted. And then we decided to move north. We'd got sick of the cold in Canberra and moved up to the

16:00 Tweed area and have been here now for 15 years.

That was perfect. That was very well done. So going right back from the beginning, talking about your childhood, tell me a little bit about your father?

Yes. My father was orphaned as a very young child. Had a stepmother. So he had a largish family of associated people.

16:30 Some of them were called Bone, and he as a young man got into horse driving and apparently became a capable person, even though he was brought up in the city of Melbourne, capable person driving teams of horses. He worked on around Victoria out in the west and also got involved

17:00 in dam building. I can't think of the names of some of the dams now, but he got involved in those. And then I think he met my mother and started working for what used to be called the Fred Walker Cheese Company in Melbourne, which later became Kraft Cheese. He spent the rest of his working life with Kraft Cheese in Melbourne. I had just one brother and we lived in Thornbury as I mentioned

17:30 earlier for some years. Dad got into bowls as he got older. We used to visit a lot of relatives including my mother's sister and her husband who lived up at Staghorn Flat out of Wodonga up near the New South Wales border almost. Had a lot of visits up there.

18:00 **How many brothers and sisters did you have?**

I just had one brother. Two years younger than me.

What was your relationship like with him?

Fine. We still communicate. He still lives in Melbourne.

And tell me what the area you grew up in those early years was like at the time.

We lived in a tiny little street called Francis Grove in Thornbury. It was opposite the Wales Street State School.

18:30 And I think it was 16 houses in the street, and they all became friends. It was interesting. There was a lovely old lady at number one, called Gran Cullen. We all called her Gran. The next house at number three was a friend of mine, Rex Vagg, who I spent a lot of time with. We were great buddies. He also joined the air force and unfortunately was lost during the war. I didn't know the story too well.

19:00 But he was shot down as part of the crew of an RAF aeroplane over Hue in Vietnam during World War II. I didn't know the RAF were out there even. But some people called Seabeck were up at number five I think. There were two daughters. I saw one of the Seabeck girls at Mildura only a year or so ago when I was invited to

19:30 the ceremony over there. They were good friends. Right opposite there was a lady called Ma Stick. She was always Ma. Who was a nursing sister and by that stage had semi-retired but she was running a little care place there at her home. There was a tennis court there. It was a nice little settlement.

And what sort of an area was Thornbury?

Thornbury's

20:00 working class really.

What was the physical environment of the area like?

Not too bad. In those days only less than a mile away going over towards Ivanhoe there were flats unbuilt on, creeks running through. I've been down there as a kid catching tadpoles and things like that so it was not a bad area.

And what sort of things would you get up to as a kid with the kids that

20:30 **you played with in the street?**

Oh dear. Now you want to hear some things. Rex Vagg and I got up to mischief several times. On one occasion we decided we'd like to find out how to make gunpowder. And we found out that you needed sulphur – ooh dear – something else, can't think what it was now. Anyway there were three items and after blending them for a while we found we had

21:00 an explosive mixture and Rex Vagg's father had an old shotgun with a flint lock igniter for the thing. So we found we could put some of our own gunpowder down the barrel of the shotgun and put a little cap that kids used for cap guns in those days to ignite the thing. And we were doing some shooting with it, until one day we were ramming the powder down and the wad on the top of it,

21:30 cause you had to, to make it go. And the darned thing exploded and the rod went through poor old Gran Cullen's fence. So we got into a bit of a bother about that one. And then later on – oh yes – Rex and I were out riding our bikes around and we found some money on the side of the street. So we shot around to the local shops and bought up some firecrackers cause it was firecracker night coming up.

22:00 Then Rex's father and my father grabbed the crackers and took them back to the shop and got the money back because what had happened was, the milkman had come around, and in those days milkmen came round and you left your billy out and they poured the milk into the billy for you. Gran Cullen had put her money in the billy for the week and the milkie hadn't noticed it and just tipped it out on the street. So we had to get the money back for the milkman. But apart from that there was all sorts of

22:30 things. Horse riding. We used to go to Ivanhoe. It was cheap to hire horses those days. We'd go riding or swimming or canoeing on the river at Ivanhoe which was only two or three miles away. Skating became a big thing. Originally roller-skating – first of all on the street where we lived, on Francis Grove. Then we found you could do much better if you bolted your skates to a pair of old

23:00 boots, so we did that. Then we were roller-skating down at the Exhibition Buildings. Down towards Melbourne. Then that was a bit dull and we went on to ice skating. And we were ice skating at the Glacierium just across the river from the town of Melbourne. That was fun. Then it was down to the Saint Moritz, the ice skating further down. And enjoyable activities. And camping.

23:30 **Where would you go camping?**

Up out of Melbourne. I can't think of the name of the place now but it was twenty odd miles out of Melbourne and we could go up and take our own food and fishing and that sort of thing, groups of five or six of us. So we had busy lives.

And what did you think of school at primary school age?

Yes. I got on quite well. I can remember

24:00 that we held our teachers in great respect. Never heard them referred to other than Miss so and so or Mister so and so. I enjoyed school. I tied with another old chum, a chap called Vern Watson, in fourth year at primary school and the headmaster invited us both in to give us a

24:30 verbal test, I think to say, which one of you is going to be dux of the class. And I thought Vernon had won so I was congratulating him and the headmaster said, "No, that's all right." So he made us both dux of the class. So I got on fairly well at school. No trouble reading at the required standard in those days for high school.

And you mentioned that it was Depression time. What ways did the Depression

25:00 **affect your family?**

Although my father was never out of work, he was always employed – in those days like most women my mother didn't work – so we found apparently the going a bit tough. And at one stage our house was divided into two and we had tenants come in and use part of the house in order to make enough money to live comfortably. That went on for two or three

25:30 years. My brother and I in fact slept out on the front veranda – in behind screens, but on the front veranda.

Was that a little cold?

In hindsight I don't remember it being cold but it must have been at times. But it was the necessity of the day.

And what would your parents tell you about why they needed to divide up the house or … ?

Just as simple as that. We need the

26:00 money.

And what sort of things did you notice around the general area of the way the Depression was affecting people?

Not too much. There was not much in the way of social activity if I can put it that way. People just didn't have the money to socialise or occasionally Rex and I would go to one of the local movie theatres. That was about the end of it.

26:30 There wasn't much spare cash around.

Would you see anyone obviously on the road looking for work?

Occasionally we'd get someone come by seeking money or food or something, but not often, no.

And do you have memories apart from obviously dividing up the house of ways – for example with food or clothes that your mother would try and save money?

I can remember at one stage

27:00 a particular sort of raincoat had become popular. And I sought a raincoat and the answer was, "Uh uh sorry. Can't do that."

What was the raincoat like?

It was pretty ordinary I suppose these days. It was dark, just a waterproof raincoat. Later on when I started high school, the high school was -

27:30 I don't know off the top of my head now – ten kilometres away. And originally I used to walk down to the main road going through the Northcote Thornbury area called High Street. A good ten minute walk down, catch the tram up to the top of the hill in Northcote and walk down another kilometre to the high school. And then I started to agitate for a bike, so I could ride to school.

28:00 I had my eyes on some prestige bike of the day or something and I was a little bit disappointed when I got the bike. It was a cheap Coles variety or something – Woollies or Myers or somewhere – however I rode that then happily for another two or three years down to the high school and back each day.

And when you were at high school, what sort of ambitions or plans did you have for the future?

28:30 When I first went to the high school I was put in the third of the four classes in the initial form or year. And at the end of first term I got promoted up to the top level. I think the high school didn't have a high opinion of the Wales Street School I'd been at as a junior. And I was heading to – the profession I had medicine in my mind.

29:00 And I thought I was going along pretty well until after the second year and my parents decided the best thing I could do was leave and join the public service at the age of 14. And the headmaster had my mother and I in for an interview when this had been suggested and tried to talk me into continuing with a professional education of some sort, but my mother was adamant saying, "No.

29:30 He's got to get into the public service." So that was the end of that. So I only had the two years at high school.

Was this a common … ?

Yes.

Do you wish that you'd stayed, or … ?

If I hadn't had my air force career, probably, but occasionally it enters my mind.

And tell me about the ways that you went about getting into the public service.

There was this

30:00 examination for entry as a telegraph messenger – a public examination. And one of my neighbours, a fellow called Jack Goodridge, was already working for the Postmaster General's Department. He gave me some tutoring for the examination. But it was a public examination you had to pass to get in as a telegraph messenger.

What sort of questions in the examination?

I think it was just English, Maths and something else.

30:30 Pretty straight forward.

And you took the exam and … ?

Yes. Got in.

And where were you to be working, and where were you going to be based … ?

For a start, while I was waiting entry – and it was a matter of having passed the examination, then you were invited to come and join them – I did get a temporary job as a telegraph

31:00 messenger at Russell Street in the northern edge of Melbourne – a little post office there. And we delivered telegrams out around East Melbourne and the northern side of the city on bicycles and I can remember being a little naive, because when I first started riding a bicycle around the city of Melbourne there were no traffic lights in those days – there were policemen on the corners – stop and go. And I thought it was appropriate to turn

31:30 left and go with the traffic when the policeman had the traffic going across and the policeman just let me do it until one of the other messengers saw me and said, "Uh, uh, you can't do that. You've got to wait until the traffic's going straight ahead to turn left." But that worked out all right.

And so tell me about this work that you were doing at Russell Street.

It was a matter of the telegrams

32:00 being received by the staff of the post office. They came through in a morse code system – the sounding morse code, a little bit different to the later ones. It was a clickety clackety sort of morse code. Then they were sorted out into sorter districts and I think there were three or four telegraph messengers there. We'd go out sometimes with four or five telegrams and just find our way around delivering them.

32:30 Nothing else too exciting there.

Would you know what the content of the telegrams were?

Yes. We'd see most of them.

What sort of things at Russell Street?

It was just routine business those days. Sometimes they'd be relating to business or the businesses around the northern end of Melbourne. Sometimes just cheery greetings. Telegrams were in frequent use in those days.

And what would

33:00 **someone's reaction be when you knocked on the door with a telegram?**

Politeness. No trouble.

Any sort of excitement or surprise?

No. Not at that stage. I suppose I should say that it was part of Melbourne in those days – maybe it still has – was not a very good area. I suppose I'll be frank and say there were brothels in the area. And that was a bit upsetting for me.

33:30 But never mind.

What sort of changes – having a job and not being at school any more – did this bring into the way you lived your life?

Not too much. I don't think there was any significant changes. I used to meet my same friends at weekends and skating and camping and so on.

34:00 But after less than a year of being at Russell Street – only six months, I think – I got my appointment to the Postmaster General's Department and became a telegraph messenger over at Ivanhoe, a northern suburb of Melbourne. By this time, the war had started and that's when I did get a shock because there were casualty telegrams going out which

34:30 which we delivered to families. And that was a bit of a shock for a little telegraph messenger to go along to some family and say their son was killed or badly wounded. I thought there must have been a better way of doing it than that.

Tell me about when you heard the declaration of war?

I'm afraid, to be honest, it didn't really impact on me too much then as a kid.

Do you remember any sort of discussion in the family or at work?

35:00 Only about which service are you going to enter? Which one are you going to go for? And I suppose

that's when I made up my mind about the air force.

Did you have an interest? What was your interest in flying or the air force?

I suppose it started where we lived in Thornbury, in that

35:30 an older brother of one of our group was already a cadet at Point Cook. This was pre-war. And he used to come home and tell stories about his experiences in the air force. I can remember at one stage he bought home machine gun rounds that had been fired into the stop huts they had there and things like that. Although

36:00 one story I've told in more recent times was along these lines, that he said that as a cadet he had to travel first class on trains and he wasn't allowed to travel on trams because they didn't have a first class. But I don't know. I think he might have been kidding us a bit. And then there was – I know, my father for some reason, I don't remember, he took me over to Essendon

36:30 in days just about pre-war to look at the aircraft flying and so on and I can remember I think it was an early version of the Dakota, the DC2, being taxied around in the mud there and I reached the conclusion that there's no way you could drive a car through there but this aircraft was being taxied through it. But it was little things like that I found interesting.

And your job

37:00 **was changing at the time as well, but do you remember any changes around Melbourne in general to the lifestyle once the war started in the early years?**

Clothing was one. Rationing. We just couldn't go and buy clothes. We had to have ration coupons to go and get clothes. Some foods were scarce. I think there was a limit on meat if I remember rightly. So there was rationing, that had a little bit of

37:30 impact.

And what did you feel about who Australia was fighting, what Australia was fighting for?

I'd have to be honest and say, no, it's not something that entered my mind.

And was it – you mentioned that you'd say, what force are you going to join – was it just a given that when you were old enough you'd ... ?

Yes.

38:00 There was a call up system into the army and if you wanted to join the air force you had to take your own initiative and set about it.

And do you remember the first time that you had to deliver a telegram with bad news?

Yes I do. In Ivanhoe.

Can you tell me about it?

Not really. It was a look of horror on the faces of the people.

38:30 There was nothing we could say or do to help. But it was just a bit of a shock.

Do you remember what the telegram said?

Formally worded thing. You know, it's with deep regret that we the so and so have to inform you that your son, Richard, was killed in action, or something like that.

So what would you do when you knocked on the door? How would you ... ?

39:00 Just hand the telegram over quietly I think.

Did you have any sort of thing that you'd, anything you'd say?

No not really.

Did anyone ever react badly to you?

No. Not in my hearing.

Tape 2

00:36 **Naomi [interviewer] was talking about the telegraph delivery. Were you ever briefed by any bosses on what to say in these circumstances?**

No. Not that I recall. No.

So how did you work out what to do as a young man yourself?

Just used our own initiative I think.

01:00 **Did you learn things yourself about handling these kind of situations?**

No. Not really. No, didn't ever get emotional about it.

Did you ever feel like vulnerable or inadequate because you had to do this to them?

Yes there was a little bit of that. I think I mentioned earlier I was surprised that there was not a better way of doing it than having a young telegraph messenger deliver such messages.

01:30 **Would any of the families suspect bad news as they saw you come up?**

Yes. The sight of a telegraph messenger wasn't a good thing.

Describe how you noticed this?

A look of horror on the face of the people who answered the door.

And you just had to hand it to them.

Yes.

02:00 **Naomi asked you, but I think you just didn't want to answer or something but I'm just asking again, I couldn't follow, were there any particular memories that stand out for you of this work?**

No. I don't think so. One thing I remember I suppose is that when I started working there at Ivanhoe down at the end of

02:30 one street was a farm. I think it was called Waterdale Road. And before very long the farm disappeared and it became the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital built in a hurry. Also in that period – not related to the war – what had been an old fashioned telephone exchange was replaced by an automatic telephone system. But no, not too much else.

03:00 **While you were doing this job, how were you following the war? Were you following it closely?**

Not particularly closely. But following it. Just reading the papers, seeing what was happening.

Did you think the war would go on to the point where you'd be old enough?

Yes, that's a possibility I suppose.

03:30 **You were also talking about how you developed your interest in flying. Tell us how this developed into a realistic thing?**

Again, I suppose reading the papers hearing what the exploits were of the early efforts. Joining the air training corps was the next step of course and learning much more about the air force.

04:00 **Tell us about joining the air training corps. What did you have to do and what made you do that?**

There was no particular passing entry thing to do. It was a bit like joining the boy scouts, just join the air training corps. We used to do a bit of study for the air training corps. I became a corporal in the air training corps.

04:30 **How old were the boys in this?**

They were all about the same age. They were 14, 15, 16, maybe 17.

What kind of things were you learning?

Morse code among other things. Some histories of the air force. That was about it I suppose. And drills.

05:00 **Who was instructing?**

Volunteer staff. One chap I remember was in the motor car selling business up at Preston was one of the instructors at the air training corps.

Where would they hold their lessons?

There was a church hall down the junction of Northcote Thornbury on High Street, which was the basis where we met.

05:30 **How did this equip you for the future – this air training corps?**

Apart from morse code, I don't think much else.

How was the war developing at this stage?

It was mostly

06:00 North Africa, of course, and Europe. The Battle of Britain, those sorts of things were happening.

How did these stories affect you as a teenager back in Australia?

Just getting anxious to be in it was the biggest impact.

What did it seem like when you'd read a story about the Middle East or Battle of Britain?

06:30 **How did it spark your imagination? What did you think about?**

'I'd like to be in it' sort of feeling.

What do you think war's like at that age?

In those days World War I was only 20 years away. It was almost a part of life. It was the way the nations operated.

07:00 **So what other things were you noticing about wartime Australia? You talked briefly about rationing, that kind of thing, but just tell us more about life.**

There were restrictions because of the rationing, because of the shortage of money. I mentioned camping. On one occasion Rex Vagg who I mentioned – my old mate – and two other people and I were up camping up north of Melbourne there and the weather turned nasty.

07:30 It really was pretty messy. And Mr Bag, Rex's father and my parents talked and said, "We'd better go and rescue them. They'll be in a mess." But then he didn't have enough petrol to drive his car up and pick us up because of rationing. So he went around the local hardware stores and bought up pint bottles of cleaning fluid and was able to use that to go up and pick us up. Of course he found us sitting around the camp fire singing.

08:00 There was no real problem. But that was part of the impact of wartime rationing. No petrol to be had.

What about wartime entertainment?

I wasn't familiar with it, apart from our skating trips into Melbourne city and the movies occasionally, nothing much.

What about the movies?

I can't remember any

08:30 in particular. It was just half a day's entertainment, go to the movies.

Tell us about your attempts to get into the air force and how that went.

Having been in the air training corps and been successful there, and got to be a corporal and then turned 18. I submitted my application.

09:00 But nothing was happening so I developed a habit of going into the air force recruiting centre in Melbourne on a Saturday morning and talking to the staff there thinking I might be able to talk my way in. But it didn't work. I had to wait five months. November through till April.

Why did you have to wait?

Because they had too many people already being trained.

09:30 And the demand for new aircrew was dropping off.

How did your mum and dad feel about you wanting to join up?

They didn't object. No. They went along with it.

So tell us about receiving the news that you were going to be a part of the air force.

That was great. The instructions were, 'report into Russell Street in Melbourne'.

10:00 We were given medical examinations there. Then put on trucks to go down to the railway station at Flinders Street because I think I mentioned already we were sent to Sydney to Bradfield Park and it was rumoured that the people who enlisted in Sydney got on a train and went down to Melbourne. That's the way it was in those days. And we used to see one another – allegedly – you'd

10:30 see one another in Albury because those days the train gauge changed at Albury so you had to change trains at Albury. It was alleged that you saw the Sydney people going south as you were going north.

Why would they do that?

I don't know.

Tell us how did you feel about receiving the news that you'd got in?

I was pleased. Oh yes. By this time I had an interest in becoming a pilot.

Did you have any mates joining up with you?

Yes.

11:00 Different times. I neglected earlier to mention that for a brief period before I got into the air force where I was working as a clerk in at the stores branch in Melbourne I was in fact sent to way up north of Thornbury – Preston – to do a job as a postman because they were short of postmen. The postmen had all been joining the military.

11:30 So I had a short period there as a postman up in Preston.

What was that job like?

A bit hard work. Riding a bicycle again out into the outer parts. One thing I can remember in particular, those days the postmen were required to blow a whistle when they put letters in the box. That used to make the dogs angry. So sometimes we were chased by angry dogs because we'd blown a whistle.

12:00 But no real problem.

What was the suburb of Preston like in those days?

Preston was outer north again, more a working class suburb.

So you're on the train going to Sydney. Take us through what happened next, where you went?

Off the train in Sydney

12:30 on to trucks again. On to Bradfield Park. By this time it was April. It was cold. I can remember walking around – in those days we wore overalls and boots and I had on an overcoat, overalls and a bottle of Buckley's Canadiol Mixture. Cough mixture in my pocket. Because I'd also picked up a nasty cold. But

13:00 among the academic parts of it and also exercising we – one of the exercises was a group of five or six of us tried to lift up and down and great big long log was one of the exercises we had to do. But there was a toughening up or a hardening process they called it. Part of the scheme.

Did anyone ever

13:30 **question why we were lifting this log?**

No. In those days I think I mentioned – one of the group I was with had been an equipment NCO [non commissioned officer] in the air force and then he got into air crew. He was a corporal, so he was the boss among this group of young people. He was all of two or three years older, but never mind. And then

14:00 there was staff from the training school who directed us. What we did, where we went and how fast we did and etcetera. We had to – those days we lived on the floor on what was called a palliasse, you know, a hessian bag with straw in it. Each day we had to fold our blankets around the pillow very carefully.

14:30 Tie it neatly. Then once a week we had to move everything out and wash the floor with water and then use a squeegee to clean it out was part of the deal. Food wasn't bad. But glad to get out of that after a while.

How long did that initial period take?

Three months, I think. It was reputed that – during that phase we were also

15:00 given aptitude tests to determine whether you were going to be a gunner or a navigator or a pilot. And the gunners were on their way to gunnery training after only about a month or so at Bradfield. The navigators and pilots stayed on for another two months doing navigation training and things like that.

Do you remember these aptitude tests?

15:30 Not really. I guess they were psychs [psychologists] of some sort that used to get us in and fire questions at us.

So how do you think they made their choices?

One of my navigator friends has thanked me for it – I've written a biography. Those going to wireless gunner school had the – and there were tests for your

16:00 flying possible aptitude with a simulator thing – and shown that they were a bit left footed, wouldn't steer too well, maybe a bit doubtful to train for pilots. Then the navigator pilot group I think the academically smarter ones were navigators very often. And the potential pilots had demonstrated some

skills in controlling their feet and hands.

16:30 **So how did you receive the news of where you were going to … ?**

They published I think in what we call routine orders. They came out at least once a week and things like that were listed. “Those going to pilot training are so and so.”

So do you remember yourself on a list?

Yes.

What happened?

17:00 A bit of excitement, not too much. It was a matter of packing up and getting moving again. It was off this time by train down to Narrandera in New South Wales. I can tell you a story about that. We arrived at Narrandera, shown into our quarters. This time we had iron frames for our beds, which was a great

17:30 advantage having been on the floor. And there was a great big fellow wandering around in the dormitory when we got there. “How are you?” “Where’d you come in? You weren’t on our course.” “No. I was on the previous course, but I’m on your course.” “Oh what’s your name?” “Arthur Beard.” “Oh, Arthur Beard. Okay.” And then it came out that Arthur Beard had been on a previous course and in a Tiger Moth he had

18:00 done some illegal low flying over Leeton I think it was. Of course a Tiger Moth is painted bright yellow with great big black numbers on it three or four feet long so it was pretty easy to identify. And the air force sent him to the army – not a prison, I forget what they’re called – for 28 days. And then forgave him and put him back on the next course again. But Arthur Beard was in those days

18:30 a very high level surf swimmer competitor. And he was allowed to go down to Sydney from time to time to compete in surf swimming. And only about two years ago I suppose I was driving with my wife one Sunday morning and Macca on a Sunday Morning was on the air and he started talking about the life saving and swimming demonstration

19:00 in Wales during the war by Australians and one of those who participated was Arthur Beard, and I’ve just tried to call him on the phone, but his wife was there and she said, “No Arthur’s not here, he’s down in the surf swimming.” He would have been all of 78 by then. But a great big jovial chap.

Tell us about your first moments at this section of training?

19:30 Learning to fly?

Yeah. When you arrived.

We were nominated to various instructors and I had an instructor who was a heck of a fine chap. I’ve met him since on reunions. And pretty simple. The Tiger Moth was a very simple aeroplane. You had to swing the propeller to start it. Part of the starting apparatus was – I think they call it

20:00 impulse magneto. And the thing was set up so it had a spring in it. After half a turn – it held for half a turn and then the next half it flicked across quickly and gave a bigger, better spark for starting, but they used to slow down after a while so you’d try to start the darn thing and if it didn’t start you had a little tapper to tap on the side of the thing to make it go again. But no, I enjoyed the experience. The instructor was very good. I can remember my first

20:30 flight with him. It was just a couple of men, we’ll have a look around kind of thing, air experience. And among other things you did an inverted descent. So you rolled the aeroplane over and went down inverted. We had shoulder harness and waist harness on of course. And my legs floated up underneath the top of the cockpit and I wondered how on earth I was going to cope with this.

21:00 But it worked out all right.

I was going to ask you, those initial flights, was there ever any fear or sickness or anything like this on your behalf.

Oh yes. It was some people that didn’t make it because of those sorts of things. One chap I remember rightly – I don’t remember his name – but he knew one of the grape growers, wine people, down at Leeton.

21:30 He invited some of us to go down and have a look at the winery. In those days – wasn’t McWilliams, I don’t think – they were using the grapes to make power alcohol. They weren’t going to wine at all. But that chap, although the instructors tried very hard, they couldn’t get him through. He just didn’t have the co-ordination there.

What about yourself? How did you cope initially

22:00 **with all the danger and that of flying?**

I didn’t feel there was any danger involved. I enjoyed the flying. There was one instance perhaps worth

reporting. The students – half – not all airborne at the same time – half

22:30 in the air, half on the ground and a line squall came through – very heavy wind. Dust was blowing strongly. And the instructors had the student pilots go out on to the – and this was at the satellite, not at the main airfield – and there were two or three satellites round Narrandera so that much more flying could be done. And we had to wait out on the airfield until the incoming aircraft touched down and then race up and grab their wing tips and hold them from being pulled over

23:00 because of the wind. And it sounds silly, but it wasn't because the Tiger Moths pretty slow and the winds were at 30 or 40 miles an hour so they were only doing 15, 20 miles an hour at the most when they touched down. But it was an interesting experience because of this strong gusty wind. No. That was an episode. Another episode I have mentioned was we students used to get driven out to the satellite aerodromes by trucks

23:30 and instructor pilots would fly backwards and forwards in the Tiger Moths. And on one occasion as we were leaving this little satellite, one of the Tiger Moths did a buzz over the top of us in our truck going – and went through some small telephone wires which didn't do any damage to the aircraft really. But the story I told was, and one of the pilots in that aeroplane was Air Chief Marshall Sir Neville McNamara,

24:00 as he became. He was then a flight sergeant instructor. But to be truthful also, Nev McNamara wasn't flying the aeroplane, he was sitting in the back seat.

What about yourself? How were you developing your skills from not flying at all to being able to fly? Take us through how you developed.

Under the guidance of the instructors, that's all we could do, and of course the simulators too. But

24:30 no it was being told how, then being shown how, then being supervised as you did it, directed if necessary.

Take us through first take off and first landing.

I don't think I could. I don't really remember it, I'm sorry, no.

Do you remember anything about the feeling of being able to fly yourself?

Yes. One another thing I remember is late in the

25:00 instructional period having been taught to do slow rolls. The same instructor that was with me most of the way said, "All right, I want you to go up and do a slow roll for me over the top here," over the satellite. So I went up and did a slow roll to the left and then came back and did a slow roll to the right. I was congratulated when I got on the ground and I didn't understand why, and apparently a slow roll to the right is considered to be much more difficult than one to the left. But I

25:30 didn't know about it.

Why is that?

Don't know. It's something to do with co-ordination I think. I don't really know.

You mentioned simulators, what were they and what did they look like?

They were called a link simulator earlier on. They were a simulated cockpit with a hood over it which could be closed down so you were locked out from seeing outside and they were mounted on flexible

26:00 I suppose they were oil pump things. And the instruments in the cockpit – the so called blind flying instruments – were operated and you flew these things as if they were an aeroplane. And it taught you both flying and also what's called instrument flying – flying in cloud.

And what would you see in front of you in the simulator?

26:30 In those early ones, nothing. Just the cockpit itself, the instruments in the cockpit.

And how would you be judged and tested on your performances?

There'd be a link instructor sitting out at the main panel watching. He had duplicate instruments. He'd be watching those.

Tell us about the aircraft you were flying on, the Tiger Moths? How did you feel about them?

Oh fine. I didn't know any better. They were light aircraft. They had no

27:00 lighting as such. For night flying, it was necessary to install a battery in them and put some elementary lighting in. They didn't have radio communications at all. There was no voice control between the cockpits electrically. It was what used to be in World War I called a Gosport tube. In other words, they were just tubes and you funnel to yell down and they went up into

27:30 earpieces. That was the communication. Another story was that some of the instructors used to get a bit

noisy, loud, particularly when a student wasn't doing so well and coming into night flying, on a night flying night, one particular instructor could be heard screeching at his student as they came in over the camp. But

28:00 that's the way it was.

And did you enjoy flying the Tiger Moth?

Yes I did.

What was good about it?

It's a little bit like riding a bicycle, riding a motor bike, it's a bit of a thrill.

And what about the Tiger Moth particularly, what things did you like about the Tiger Moth as opposed to other planes?

I suppose you were in the open. You weren't enclosed in any way. You were sitting in an open cockpit.

28:30 So you were enjoying the air too.

Can you remember the first time you ever flew solo?

Yes. And it was a fixed routine, you were told exactly what to do. Yeah, no problem.

Take us through that.

Oh goodness me now, it's a long while ago. No it was just as if there was an instructor there. I just went ahead, flew it.

29:00 Which we'd been doing any way. At that stage the instructors were very – touching the controls very seldom, not often at all.

Was there a sense of achievement you had?

Oh yes, the first solo was an achievement.

Were there any celebrations that you had after you … ?

No. Not in those days, no.

Take us through the non-flying kind of life. What would you get up to at the training base?

29:30 Not much at Narrandera. Pretty quiet. We worked six days a week. I don't think we even visited town much. No. It was pretty quiet.

What about the other men on the base?

They were all the same.

Were there any good

30:00 **mates of yours?**

Apart from Nev McNamara who's still a friend, no. One chap I did know there left went finished up in England during the war and he ended up at Tambar Springs, a little town in New South Wales where he had a property. He also owned a pub at Queanbeyan down near Canberra. Visited

30:30 me when I was at Williamtown years later. Then ended up running an art gallery in Sydney. But they're about the only two I've had contact with since.

So where did you go? Where was the next stop?

Next one was Uranquinty near Wagga for flying the Wirraway, what's called service flying training. And just going back for a moment, from elementary flying training, there were two ways to go. One way was multi-engine aircraft.

31:00 One way was single engine aircraft. Again they picked you on some sort of aptitude. I didn't know. So I was single engine aircraft and went to Uranquinty for the Wirraway conversion and flying. A bit more social there. We could get into town in fact. This same chap I mentioned who owned the property at Tambar Springs and I and another chap bought a car which we paid 28 pounds for in those days.

31:30 And used to be able to commute into Wagga, have a drink or two at the pub and drive back down. Did a little bit of touring the country. Met some marvellous people from down south at The Rock. Farmer. And in those days some of the local people used to let the air force or whatever it was, the military base, know: "We'd be pleased to entertain some of your students,"

32:00 and used to drive down and have a nice time with these people at The Rock. Yes. On one occasion our car broke down out near Junee. And we were late back and got into a little bit of bother about that. But no that was about it.

Tell us about what you were learning here?

It was deeper into mathematics and armament.

32:30 The science of flying, aeronautics. That's about it. All military sort of stuff.

And what were Wirraways like?

More advanced. The Wirraway had been the Australian development of the American Harvard originally used as a fighter reconnaissance aircraft in New Guinea.

33:00 And then as better aircraft came along it reverted back to being a trainer, but it was a more complete aeroplane than the Tiger Moth of course with retractable under carriage and full electrics and so on.

What did you think of it yourself?

I quite enjoyed flying it again. There were some accidents at that stage. We lost a couple of pilots on my course, I think.

33:30 On one occasion the aircraft I was flying in with an instructor, the engine stalled, broke down and the instructor immediately took over and landed us 'dead stick' as we call it – no power – back in the aerodrome at Uranquinty without any trouble at all. And at that stage I think the Wirraways were getting a bit aged and it was the period after we'd been through practice dive bombing. Dropping little 11 pound bombs I think,

34:00 practice bombs. And I thought afterwards that the effect on the Wirraway of the steep dive and then the very steep pull out of the dive possibly had some impact on these engines which were getting a little worn. So we had two or three engine failures in that period.

Take us through this exercise. What height would you go to and what angle?

The Wirraway was probably about six or eight thousand feet. To enter the dive

34:30 you'd dive at about 60 degrees and use just the gun sight to aim the bomb, but of course you had to allow for the diversion of the bomb, so you had to allow so many radii of the gun sight to deliver the bomb where you wanted it.

When would you go back up in your dive?

You'd drop the bomb at about – I'm guessing now – 3000 feet and

35:00 you'd be out of it by 2000 feet ,climbing up again.

And how did you go on these exercises?

Not too bad.

Tell us about what happened next – actually no, you mentioned accidents. How did you deal with hearing the news of these?

It was accepted that there was a loss rate.

35:30 That was about the measure of it I think. It was no great emotional issue.

But was it hard to see someone you talked to suddenly gone?

Yes and no. The large impact was, well there's a bit of a risk there. No great emotional show.

36:00 **Take us through where you went next?**

From Narrandera it was – sorry, we're in Uranquinty. Just up to Mildura for the conversion to the Kittyhawks. And that was a bit tougher and I was – the first stage of the flying at Mildura was back onto the Wirraway. But it was

36:30 related to fighter tactics. I thought I'd got through that stage very well. The chief flying instructor of the day was a well known flying instructor called Bobby Gibbs. Called me in and said – no I'd been – my training had ceased – I forget how he broached it, suspended or something. I was sent out to flying this aircraft flying wireless gunners around. But it was as I

37:00 subsequently discovered – there's been a book written about it – that the demand for air crew was just dropping down and the rate of training was way above what was needed so they were just sending us off.

Tell us about this next stage?

Up north flying these Wackett trainers. I was trying to think of the name of them before. They were built as an Australian

37:30 substitution for the Wirraway I think but they were nowhere near the performers. Just a little single engine aircraft. Fairly light aircraft, lighter than the Wirraway, and we would take these wireless air

gunner trainees out in the morning and fly them around while they did their radio. We didn't interfere with that. The only thing we had to watch was it was a long trailing aerial that went out which

38:00 they put out after we were airborne. Then we had to make darned sure they wound it in again before we landed. But no that was all right. No problems there.

What would happen if this aerial wasn't wound in?

It'd tangle up and anything it hit – into a fence or anything on the ground it'd make a mess.

And what kind of things would they be doing on their radio?

First of all tuning the things, that was part of it.

38:30 To be able to tune into the various stations they want. And then they'd have some sort of routine messages to sent to demonstrate the fact that they could use a radio in the air.

And you mentioned it wasn't as good as the Wirraway, but what were some of the unique aspects of the Wackett?

No. It had simulated landing gear bits in it, but its undercarriage didn't come up

39:00 But it was there as a trainer so they put these things in it that were just nothing. The little engine, it was called a Warner Scarab engine, had a nasty habit of letting oil out which got over the windscreen among other things so it was almost a routine coming back from a flight in this aircraft to undo your straps, undo the canopy, lean up, clean some of the grease off so you could see enough to land.

39:30 So it wasn't a great aeroplane.

Tape 3

00:39 **Talking about getting your wings, can you tell me about what kind of a ceremony or something involved was involved in that?**

Yes. There was a ceremony on the parade ground at Uranquinty. The officer commanding the base conducted it. And there's one episode I can tell you about that that was amusing too. One of our fellow course

01:00 members was Morrie Burnett. Morrie Burnett was one of our group, a little bit wild but not much. And he insisted that his occupation had been studying for the priesthood. But that concerned us a little bit. It didn't sound right. So when wings parade came along the group captain commanding the base in his little introductory talk said, "And

01:30 Group Captain Brierley from Western Australia has come over to help me in this and to see his son get his wings." We looked at one another and said, "There's no Brierley on our course." Turned out to be this Morrie Burnett and the background to it was he was already highly qualified academically and wasn't able to be released from his occupation. So he changed his name and joined the air force. And the air force were very good about it. Again they just simply

02:00 changed his name and he continued on and did a tour as a fighter pilot with me up in Borneo and those places. And then resigned from the air force and went back into his occupation and became something of a propeller specialist with de Havilland if I remember rightly. But then when I was in Melbourne in the 1968 period he was the professor of science at the Air Force Academy at Point Cook.

02:30 But – odd story.

And he wasn't in the priesthood?

No. Not at all. That was his joke.

What sort of an achievement for you was it, getting your wings?

The sign of graduating as a pilot. It was the culmination of your basic flying training.

What did it mean to you in terms of achievement?

Oh yes. Pleased to be through. There'd been some wastage. People being

03:00 scrubbed as we call it. People being removed from course because they weren't reaching the required standards. But also as I've indicated earlier to some extent that was also related to there were too many aircrew being trained.

And who from your family came to your ceremony?

No. Oh no. They lived in Melbourne. This was up in middle of New South Wales. Bit far to come. No. Not involved.

Were you keeping in touch with them much?

Yes.

03:30 I used to visit. Whenever I could get to Melbourne, I'd go and visit my family.

How did you find the levels of hierarchy in the air force?

That stage I had no problems at all. They were pretty good. I can remember some characters. One was an older man, a pilot who had apparently been flying civil before coming back to the air force and he was a keen

04:00 instructor pilot to the extent that he used to get saddled with a lot of the night flying. So when it was time for night flying training, this chap was very involved. But no, they were a good bunch.

And what sort of ways did the air force keep you informed about the progress of the war?

No direct way. There was no information coming through the air force.

And so how did you feel about

04:30 **being – I guess obviously the training process was important, but going from place to place, was there a feeling of, I want to get into it?**

More a feeling, "I wonder what's going to happen to me next," rather than anything else.

Given the level of training that you'd had, what would you say your expectations were of a fighter pilot's job during the conflict?

05:00 Just expected to join one of the Australian squadrons up in the Pacific. Some people after the gaining the wings again some people were posted overseas, some people were posted to Australian squadrons. I was quite happy to be posted to an Australian squadron.

What sort of things did you know about where other Australian pilots or air crew were operating?

Only through my personal contact with them -

05:30 a friend I mentioned earlier, Rex Vagg, we used to communicate.

Were you aware of the Australians that were operating in the UK?

No. Only sometimes mentioned in one of the glossy little magazines they used to circulate in those days with some information about activities, but nothing much.

What were the magazines?

I've been trying to think of the name of it now. I can't. No. Just an eight or

06:00 ten page thing of interest to airmen.

What sort of information would it have in it?

Particular episodes that had happened. Maybe a graduation parade would get a mention. Someone of note was decorated. That sort of thing.

Are there any particular events in the war that stand out in your mind as you remember hearing about them?

The Battle Of Britain certainly did.

06:30 And the loss rates over Berlin for example. Very high casualty rates. But no, nothing else.

And what was your general feeling towards the Japanese at the time?

Didn't really know during the war.

07:00 The first person I ever saw dead was a Japanese soldier when we landed in that LST at Labuan Island. There'd been a fight. It was quite early in the landing. But no apart from that no. But once I got to Japan, it was a different story altogether. Quite frankly we found the Japanese to be easy to get along with.

07:30 To some extent they were trying hard to be just that and occasionally, only occasionally, an older man would say something not quite nice. And immediately there'd be a comment from other people, "Don't take any notice of him. He's silly in war. He's been drinking." But the rest of the time they were very good.

I guess also being in Australia at the time

08:00 **and in the armed services, was there any sort of – during the war what was the general opinion of what the Japanese were like as enemies? Even if it was almost a propaganda … ?**

The treatment of prisoners of war was the main thing. And the very harsh severe treatment that the Australian prisoners of war suffered, yes, that was pretty nasty stuff.

08:30 **What about just general day to day talk? How would you refer to the Japanese around the base and stuff?**

No. Not much. The only big important thing was the prisoners of war treatment.

What were you aware of, I guess that fear of possible Japanese invasion, how real was that to you?

Yes.

09:00 In fact it's come back to my mind with the recent opening of the railway line to Darwin, in that for some of us it was a concern that if Darwin were attacked – there were air raids of course – it would be very difficult to get ammunition, bombs, fuel in the required quantities up to Darwin because of the lack of a railway line. But no, apart from that.

09:30 **So do you think that the railway is a good thing?**

I do. For that reason. It gives the capability if needed to be able to get heavy equipment and supplies up to Darwin.

Do you think it works the opposite way? In that it connects Darwin more …

To the south? I don't think so. I'd think the people who want to commute south would fly. Maybe they'd take the train, I don't know.

10:00 **On the air force bases what was – I'm not sure if there were any at all – but what was the interaction with WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force]?**

Fine. No, there were a lot of marriages between WAAAF and aircrew particularly. Six or eight of my friends married WAAAF. No, that worked out well.

How would you socialise

10:30 **with them?**

Occasionally there'd be a social function of some sort – maybe a dance. But otherwise we were all busy.

Was there any need to make sure that not too much socialising happened?

Yes. Some of the WAAAF officers used to control things a bit.

What were they like?

In the main

11:00 pretty good, but the WAAAF were required to stay in headquarters sort of thing.

And what was the segregation like on base? Would you eat together?

Yes. In the messes we'd eat together.

What was it like – given the time – having women that you were working side by side with and what was this experience

11:30 **like?**

No problem. Not as far as I was concerned.

Was it an – on the bases what kind of work were they doing for you?

Mostly, I suppose, administrative type work, but there were some technicians.

What sort of respect or opinion did the men have of the

12:00 **WAAAFs?**

Fine. If they were a corporal they got corporal, if they were a sergeant they got sergeant.

Tell me about some of the social life on base? You mentioned dances, but where would they be, who would organise them?

It'd be a one in town perhaps somewhere, but not often. It wasn't a frequent thing.

So what sort of thing would you do on a day to day basis in terms of just – obviously you were working a lot, but

12:30 **in the evenings?**

A little bit of card playing I suppose. Not too much else as I can recall.

What kind of game would you play?

Bridge mostly.

Is there anyone particularly in any of your training that stands out as either very funny or … ?

Now you've got me.

13:00 I'm trying to think of names now. There was one of the instructors at Mildura during the conversion to Kittyhawks who used to do a weekly buzz of the strip including upside-down flying across the tarmac. He had been working in New Guinea prior to the war. No, his name beat me.

13:30 And he went back to New Guinea after the war and unfortunately was killed in a motor car accident not that long afterwards. But a very effervescent sort of fellow. Let's see … No that's about it I think. No other names pop up at the moment.

No-one that really annoyed you?

No. I don't think so. No.

How would you deal with

14:00 **living with so many other people all the time?**

We just got used to it. It was as we went on, it got more comfortable. I think I mentioned earlier that our first base was living on the floor, then living on iron bedsteads with a straw palliasse. Then by the time we got to Uranquinty we actually had beds. The messes were always pretty good. No.

14:30 **What sort of ways would you have of respecting each other's space?**

There was no own space in the early days. It was 28 or 30 people in to a dormitory. It worked all right. There were no problems.

Any fights?

No. Not that I recall.

15:00 **And how important was sport?**

In the early days we were too busy for sport. Later on, with the squadron level people, yes there was sport. I played a lot of basketball, squash, tennis.

And what would you do on the weekend?

15:30 Just sat around the camp in the early days. Did the washing and things that we'd never done before, ironing. And then gradually, particularly after we got the car, we used to do touring. No big trips or anything.

And just jumped ahead a little bit, when we were talking about the Wacketts

16:00 **you mentioned that you spent a bit of time driving these trainees around.**

Yes. The idea was to, in addition to their training in the air in the Wackett, to also do training in the back of these big utility sort of things. And we'd just drive down to Scarness or one of those places along coast there and maybe stop and have a drink and then drive them back again. And that occupied half a day for us.

16:30 And for them.

How did you feel about doing this kind of work?

It was just routine duties to me. Didn't worry about it?

What was your response in terms of the fact that you weren't, you'd been told that you hadn't with Kittyhawks, is that right?

The Kittyhawks came along later, yes. Kittyhawks were at the fighter squadron.

And you'd been at Mildura?

Yes. But I never got to the Kittyhawks the first time, yeah. It was the second time.

17:00 **Was this a disappointment?**

Very much so. I was very unhappy at being suspended.

What sort of – given that you had this disappointment, how did this affect the work that you

were doing just driving people around?

Oh no that was all right. Didn't worry me.

Did you understand why you'd been suspended?

17:30 No. Not in those days because the information wasn't available that the aircrew training rate was exceeding the demand. Later on I understood more I suppose.

So how did you get over that disappointment at the time?

In those days you did whatever you were told to do next and that was about the end of it.

And it was sometimes hard to do that?

Yeah, I suppose at times.

And so after you'd worked with the trainees

18:00 **where did they send you next?**

That's when I got back to Mildura to do another course there. I'd been suspended from the first one – oh I'm sorry, we did the scrub course first, this assessment of pilots. And that was a very high wastage rate there. I suppose only about 25 percent of us were passed

18:30 and were able to go back into the squadrons or the training.

What was the stigma attached to this course?

It wasn't very much liked. I can't remember the official name of it, but I call it the scrub school and that's what it was known as. It was a quite deliberate cutting back of the numbers of people who got their pilot's wings. Cutting back the numbers that were going to the squadrons.

19:00 **Tell me what this course required from you.**

Basically it just seemed to be part of the continuation of the Wirraway training that we'd already gone through – in my case at Uranquinty. And at the end of it – well some people were scrubbed very early if I remember rightly. You only had a couple of flights.

What did you have to do to get scrubbed?

Not meet the requirements of the instructors. But it wasn't specified in any way.

Would they put you through any particular tasks?

19:30 No. Just the same flying training tasks. Aerobatics and this.

What was your favourite task?

I think gunnery and bombing.

Walk me through what you have to do say on a bombing run as a pilot.

Identify the target first. Then get yourself in the appropriate position for the dive,

20:00 make sure the aircraft was flying straight and not skidding or anything like that. Put the appropriate measurement of the bomb sight, or the gunnery sight in fact it was, and then release the bomb at the right altitude and hope you're going to go close to the target.

And how long do you have to fly – do you have to fly straight and steady for a certain amount of time after you've released bombs?

No. Very

20:30 often it was a matter of do a dive, drop one bomb, climb up, do another one.

And how was it assessed whether or not you'd hit your target?

There were people on the ground monitoring the bombs and where they hit.

And what was it like landing again and getting your results?

Fine. They didn't – no, I think they'd more or less say, oh yes you passed. They didn't give you any great detail.

What was the

21:00 **main reactions when they didn't pass?**

Pretty unhappy.

Did anyone take it really badly?

Not that I recall. No. It was terribly disappointing because this time they'd possibly been in the air force for up to two years. They'd got their wings and so on.

What would happen to them if they got scrubbed?

Sometimes they were bypassed into funny things like fruit picking. Few things like that. Nothing to do with aircrew at all.

21:30 **And you mentioned the bombing runs – they were another one that you really enjoyed?**

Gunnery, flying them. That was a little simpler in that the gun sight itself was more use, more related to the firing of the machine gun and you fired those from a little lower.

As a pilot you don't fire the guns, do you?

Yes.

22:00 **Can you describe the set up in a real way of where the guns are … ?**

The guns are mounted in the wings. The gun sight was in the cockpit of course. The trigger was on the flying control stick. And you measured it by eyesight and what you'd been briefed on. Went down to the right altitude with the gun sight pointed in the right direction and let go.

What's it like to split your mind between flying and shooting?

22:30 It was all part of the deal.

And what sort of things were you firing at?

If I remember rightly, the gun sight was a ten by ten feet target. Just a square white target probably made out of canvas or something.

Would you fire at it with a special kind of bullets?

Yes. They'd just be a ball round. They wouldn't be an explosive sort.

Was there any

23:00 **paint markers?**

I don't think so, no. Not that I recall.

And given that you were possibly there to be scrubbed, what was your feeling, your emotional state when you were there?

Worried about what was going to happen. I have said that after that long delay between graduating from Uranquinty,

23:30 being scrubbed at Mildura the first time, of about seven or eight months I think, I'd flown about 30 or 40 hours in the Wackett trainer, maybe a bit more, and there was nothing in that that was going to improve my skill as far as I was concerned. So it was a bit strange.

So did you go straight from seven or eight months of not improving your skills to straight away into being … ?

The scrub course,

24:00 yeah.

And so were they assessing you from the first day, do you think?

Yes.

They tried to practise.

Yes. I hadn't flown the Wirraway in the meantime.

It's a bit rough. What was your opinion towards the air force about it?

Disappointed, but aware I think that that's what they had to do. They had no option but to somehow reduce the numbers of aircrew.

24:30 **How did the instructors treat you at the scrub course?**

Pretty good. They were sympathetic, I think.

And how long did you spend there?

I think it was a fairly short course, less than a month.

How did they tell you the news?

I think they published a list of those who passed in routine orders.

And your reaction was?

25:00 Pleased. Nice to be back at it again.

And then you headed back to Mildura?

Yes.

Take me through what you learnt in the course there.

It was a mixture of formation flying for example. Getting used to flying in formation. Fours usually. And delivering weapons. And fighter

25:30 tactics. The basic manoeuvres et cetera.

On Kittyhawks?

Yes.

Can you describe the difference between flying a Wirraway and a Kittyhawk?

The Kittyhawk was bigger, stronger, faster, a little more sophisticated in several ways.

What sort of ways?

26:00 Its ability to do manoeuvres was better – the Wirraway had some limitations – but certainly faster.

How about in terms of gunning power?

Yes. Had more weapons. Six guns.

Where were these guns located.

Mounted in the wings again.

Controlled in the same way as the Wirraway?

Oh yes. With the one trigger in the

26:30 cockpit.

Kittyhawk you always fly solo?

Yes. It's a single engine, single seat aeroplane.

And can you describe for me your set up in the cockpit from what you can remember?

Goodness. It was reasonably roomy. You weren't cramped.

27:00 The vision was good. You were up high enough to be able to see around you quite well. Apart from that, no.

This may sound like a silly question, but in terms of 360 degree viewing ability, how do you see into what would be behind you?

Kittyhawk was better than the Wirraway. But you couldn't see directly behind. You had to

27:30 bob your head around a bit.

Is there a series of mirrors?

Yes. There were some mirrors.

And in terms of where everything is set up, can you take me through what your procedure is as soon as you get in the plane when you're going to take it off in the Kittyhawk?

Oh dear. No. I'm afraid I couldn't. Not now.

Is there some system of routine checks?

28:00 Oh yes. What are called cockpit drills. There's a procedure to go through prior to starting and after starting and so on.

What sort of things are being checked?

Making sure the fuel level, turning on what's called a booster pump to provide fuel under pressure to the engine. Getting the starter going. Making sure the

28:30 idle revs [revolutions] are where they should be, making sure the oil pressure comes up and so forth.

Do you actually turn the plane on or do ground crew?

No. The pilot does it.

What do the ground crew do for you?

They provide the battery cart. In other words they put external battery power into the aircraft for the starter.

29:00 And then once the engine's started they withdraw that and that's the end.

And you mentioned that on the Kittyhawks you were going to be learning more battle tactics, tell me what battle tactics are?

Yes. Oh goodness. We used to do what were called dummy dogfights. In other words, challenging one another.

29:30 And it was a matter of learning what's the best way to go to avoid someone else or to get onto someone else, which is the best way down.

Give me an example of a basic evasive manoeuvre?

Put on full power and pull it as tight as you can and go in the other direction. Round in a tight circle.

And how about if you want to engage someone?

30:00 You get above and behind and come down and aim to be straight behind to be able to fire at them.

And if they take this basic evasive manoeuvre, how do you counter that?

You've got to go upwards. So if they're turning away from you, you go upwards to be able to come back across the corner at them.

And if you're taking the evasive manoeuvre and you know that this person's going to come up

30:30 **above you, what's your next step?**

To keep the advantage in height and speed if you can you won't turn as tightly when your speed is high, but you've got the opportunity to come up and come down again. They can't get behind you if you keep tight.

What was it like learning the conflict moves?

Tactics. It was

31:00 not quite enjoyable, but it was seen as necessary to learn these tactics.

How did it affect the feeling of, we're almost there?

We just saw it as part of the learning curve.

And how long did you spend at Mildura?

I think they were a course of about two months if I remember rightly. About one month on Wirraways and then the

31:30 next month on the Kittyhawk.

And after Mildura …?

It was the second time. It was a long way up to the Pacific, to Morotai and the Halmaheras.

When did you get your orders that you'd be required and going?

After graduating from Mildura, I got my posting to 77 squadron which was up in the

32:00 Halmaheras. But it wasn't as straight forward as you might think. We had two stops on the way. It was up in the back of a Dakota. The first stop was at Sandgate near Brisbane for what was called a toughening up course.

What did they do to you there?

Exercises.

What sort?

Running, marching

32:30 some physical exercise. Didn't last long. Couple of weeks or so.

Was there any element of jungle training there?

No. Not there. That to some extent occurred at – the next stop was up at Townsville. We got some jungle training there, more physical training.

What was Townsville like at the time?

Pretty quiet I think. We didn't see

33:00 that much of the town itself.

How many Americans were around the place?

Didn't see them.

How did the air force get along with other members of the armed forces?

Fine. No problem.

Any nicknames? Banter?

Not that I recall.

What was your uniform like to go to Moratai?

We were

33:30 into ordinary khaki cotton things.

What were you being briefed about the situation in Moratai in terms of – is it different to fly in the jungle? Are the mountains a problem?

No. Not much until we got to the squadron itself.

What did you know about the

34:00 **77th Squadron?**

Very little at that stage.

What did it mean to you to be posted to a squadron?

Great. That was the object.

Why is it important?

You'd done all that training over by this time a year and a half or so. You're going to see the

34:30 culmination of it, what you were on about.

Is it good to feel part of something?

Yes. There was pride in the squadron and pride in belonging to it.

And just before you went to Sandgate, did you have any pre-embarkation leave?

Yes. I think I was able to get home briefly.

What was your parents' reaction to

35:00 **you heading overseas?**

They didn't seem to be that concerned. It was accepted in those days that this is what the soldiers have got to do.

And at the toughening up course at Sandgate, how much time did you get to spend around Brisbane?

None at all. I can remember we did a little bit of fishing. There were boats for hire on the coast there.

35:30 We were very pleased to get some fish and cook them up ourselves, because the meals at that stage were starting to go down in the military so – what would you call the food? It was pre-prepared stuff. It wasn't so tasty.

In all of your time, travelling

36:00 **from different places, what was the troop movement like in Australia?**

What I did went quite reasonable. You were a bit crowded in the back of a Dakota sometimes.

So you flew?

Yes. Some parts were by train. Some parts – Sandgate was by train I think. We might have flown the rest of it.

36:30 **Even if just you were on leave and you were wearing your uniform, how would the Australian public react?**

Kindly. No problem.

Would anyone ever say anything to you?

No.

And in Townsville you mentioned there was a little bit of jungle training. Can you tell me about it?

It was mostly

37:00 just walk through, I think. Carrying a pack. But nothing too exotic about it.

Anything about survival in the jungle?

Yes. I think we were told about things you might find to eat. But not much more.

What about diseases?

No.

37:30 **How were the air force armed personally?**

As pilots, we were given a .38 revolver as part of our equipment.

And what sort of training did you have in shooting?

There was shooting at the range.

Is it easy to shoot with a revolver?

Yes. I didn't have too much trouble with it.

What sort of feelings were you having about actually going into a

38:00 **combat situation?**

Looking forward to it, I suppose, as much as anything.

At this stage what did you know about the way the war was going in New Guinea?

We knew that we were getting on the upper.

So how did you leave Townsville?

By the Dakota aircraft up to the Halmaheras

38:30 **You mentioned – I'm assuming this was only in Australia, but the Kittyhawks were painted yellow?**

No. I don't think so.

The Wirraways.

Yes. They were bright. The Tiger Moths, I'm sorry, were bright. No, the Kittyhawks were camouflaged.

And you didn't transport any planes, did you?

No.

Were you filling someone's place?

Yes.

39:00 The arrangements in those days were people had a fixed tour of nine months, I think, and we were replacements for people who had completed their tour and were going home.

How many people were going over with you?

There were about four or six of us, I can't quite remember.

Anyone you were good mates with?

No. None of my direct chums were involved in it.

Tape 4

00:36 **Tell us about receiving your orders and getting ready and going to war?**

To war? To Morotai? It was what we were expecting of course. We were pleased to be graduating and being involved. A long flight up of course. Dakotas aren't that fast.

01:00 The food had become a little bit ordinary. The further north we went the worse it got with – I'm trying to think of the name of those pre-prepared food. I'll think of it soon. Morotai wasn't much better. But it was nice to be with the squadron.

What were your impressions of Morotai as you arrived?

A little

01:30 jungle island.

Describe for us maybe through your senses – your sight, your smell, your sound, what your first moments on Morotai were like?

First of all, it was pretty big. There were I think three strips on Morotai. It was a very busy place.

02:00 But again it was back to basic living – tents, and not too comfortable. But that was the way life was in those days.

What were your tents like?

Four man tents.

Describe what you'd have in the tent?

Certainly wasn't any furniture, as you'd call it.

02:30 You kept your clothes in your kit bag and there was a bunk each.

Describe the environment and what effect it was having on you leaving Australia and suddenly … ?

No real impact. It was hot of course. Up in the tropics. Bathing facilities were pretty basic. But we lived through it.

Was there any comment or talk between people

03:00 **who'd been there a while and you as a new arrival?**

I suppose they did give us some help. I don't really remember.

What was the initial briefings that you received about what your role here was?

They'd be individual flight briefings. Before each flight, the flight leader would give you a briefing on what your task was, how you'd do it, what you did if certain things happened. But there was an individual brief

03:30 for each flight.

Were there any you'd need particular tips for the area – things to watch out for?

I don't think so, no. Nothing I recall.

Any wind patterns or anything like that?

No.

What was your task that you were being briefed about? What were you to do there initially?

There we attacked on the Japanese

04:00 soldiers in the islands there.

And what exactly were you being told to do against the Japanese?

To destroy whatever our target was of the day.

What kind of targets are we talking about?

Vehicles, camps, ammunition stocks, that sort of thing.

Do you remember your very first mission up at Morotai?

No. Not really I'm afraid.

04:30 **Do you remember any in particular that stand out for you?**

No. Not at Morotai. In fact, I didn't even live with the squadron. At that stage – again numbers – we were quartered at a secondary unit there. It was a repair and salvage unit if I remember rightly, an RSU. And because the camp of the squadron itself was full three or four of us were

05:00 boarded out at this RSU.

What was the RSU like?

It was fine. They were basically mechanics. Their role was to repair and restore damaged aircraft.

And how did you intermix, the pilots with the … ?

Fine. No problem.

Was it a different atmosphere?

No, not significantly.

What kind of

05:30 **bombs and weaponry were you using for the mission at this stage?**

Pretty standard. I think they were 250 pound bombs. And .5 inch ammunition.

And what were the tactics used to fly in during these raids?

Keep it as high as you could as long as you could. In and out as quickly as you could.

How high were you?

06:00 I'm guessing now, but I think we probably approached target areas around eight or ten thousand feet.

What were some of the dangers posed by the Japanese?

There was anti-aircraft fire, but it was machine guns. There was no heavy ammunition that I can recall.

What kind of range would be dangerous?

They wouldn't be able to contact you until you got down lower than two or three thousand feet.

06:30 **How were you finding yourself the accuracy of the missions you were involved with?**

You'd be happy sometimes. Come back and say, "Good strike." But very often it was hard to tell.

How do you tell whether it's a good strike?

That's the real issue. Unless you set a building on fire or something like that, bit hard to tell.

And how often

07:00 **were the what they call sorties nowadays?**

Two out of three days I suppose.

Was this a busy period?

No. This was again slowing down. The war in that part was grinding to a halt.

07:30 **How did you observe this feeling of it grinding to a halt?**

In the number of sorties we were doing. The targets we were given. That sort of thing.

Did you know how it compared to before?

No. I didn't. But I got the feeling.

Did other people talk about it winding down?

There was a little bit of that.

What sort of thing would they say?

"Looking forward to going home soon. Soon be over." That sort of approach.

What kind of expectations did

08:00 **you have of how long it was going to last at this stage?**

We didn't really know at that stage. We thought fairly soon. But no.

Did you ever have any contact with Japanese Zeros?

No.

Were they completely out of the war at this stage?

Apparently in that area, yes.

So did it feel dangerous at all, doing these tasks?

There's always an element

08:30 of that, yes. But not particularly so.

Did you lose any aircraft out of the squadron?

Maybe one or two. Some of which were accidents rather than battle loss as such.

And how did your squadron deal with these kind of situations?

They'd done it before. That sort of attitude.

Was there a ceremony, a party?

No.

09:00 **And you yourself, did you have any superstitions that you had with your flying?**

No.

Any good luck charms?

No.

Tell us about any other unusual events that occurred while you were flying.

Not at that

09:30 stage. Subsequently when we moved on to Labuan Island in Borneo, I had two episodes when we first started flying there. First one was, I started a Kittyhawk, turned off the fuel booster pump that you turn on to start, and the engine stopped. In the meantime the other three aircraft that I'm flying with had started flying. So I started again, turned off the

10:00 booster pump as required and the engine stopped. So I just simply packed up and waited for the fellows to come back from the sortie and the flight commander was angry with me. He thought I was quitting deliberately. And I explained to him what had happened. He wasn't all that convinced. So the next sortie was a long range one with what we called drop tanks – ancillary tanks underneath the wings. And the idea you should

10:30 take off on your internal fuel, your normal fuel and get the height and then turn on the drop tanks. And I was going along with them and turned off on instructions from the leader and my engine started to surge. It didn't run smoothly at all. And I thought to myself, there's no way I can call out and say my engine's surging, they'll really have me this time. So I continued on with the mission by turning the drop tanks off and running on internal fuel.

11:00 Which was a bit darn stupid in hindsight of course. Completed the mission to strike on the mainland of Borneo and then on the way home I was running low on main fuel so I turned back to the drop tanks and the same thing. Rrrrrrboom. But I got away with it, but it was a bit horrifying.

Why was it stupid to do that?

There was a real risk of the drop tanks failing to feed at all. I'd have just run out of fuel and had to

11:30 ditch in the ocean. But there we are. Got away with it.

What was the purpose of the drop tanks?

Increase the range, give you a much longer range.

And would you actually drop them?

No. You could drop them under some circumstances. If you got into dogfight for example they decreased your turning rate etcetera, so you could jettison them and that's why they were called

12:00 drop tanks. An ordinary strike you kept them.

And what did they look like?

Like a small – what would you call them – they'd be ten feet long, they'd smooth shaped with a little fin on the back of them. Maximum width'd be about a metre I suppose.

12:30 They just clipped in under the wings and we connected them to the fuel supply.

Did they clip under both wings?

Yes. There was one under each wing.

Did they make it harder to take off or load?

Yes. They do increase the drag a bit and make you a little bit slower.

And what can happen to you, if your engine is surging on and off?

You just hope it's going to keep going

13:00 and surging, not fail completely. And I used to get a bit behind when they were flying formation and then the engine'd run smoothly, so I'd catch up.

What would you do if your engines did cut out?

You'd just have to bale out. There'd be no way out of it. You can't land a Kittyhawk type aircraft in the sea. You'd have to bale out and drop in by parachute.

13:30 **Would there be any gliding to a strip?**

If you were close enough, yeah sure, you could do what you call a dead stick landing if you were close enough. But you'd have to be within a couple of miles of a landing field.

Why do they call it a dead stick landing?

Oh that was the name for a powerless landing. Because in addition to the conventional airflow over the control surfaces, you also

14:00 get additionally a flow from the propellers itself, so I suppose to some extent that's how dead stick came along. I don't know.

And tell us, you mentioned there were two incidents, what was the other?

No. That was the two. The first one was I couldn't get the engine to start. That was one. And the second was when I did get it to start and got airborne.

You also mentioned on one of the earlier tapes about a prisoner of war camp, do you know what camp

14:30 **this was?**

I'd have to look in the logbook or something. I can't remember at the moment. But it was not far, on the mainland of Borneo.

Where was it situated in Borneo?

Up in the northwest of Borneo.

What did it look like from the air?

Just a couple of long shacks with a fence around them.

And you mention the sight, talk us through this sight again that you saw.

Where the prisoners of war were?

15:00 Well we'd been briefed the army were going in to relieve the prisoners of war, get them out of the prisoner of war camp. And we in 77 Squadron were providing what's called overhead cover. In other words, you're up there in case anything comes in to attack the forces. In the circumstances, no, we weren't needed. But we were there. But that's what it was, to protect the ground forces going in to relieve the camp.

How do you

15:30 **communicate and interact with the ground forces?**

Oh yes, there was communication with them. It's widely used in ground attack work. They have what they call forward air controllers, people on the ground in radio contact.

And you said that you saw a message. Tell us about this.

Well it was just painted on the roof. It was jovial, I suppose. But

16:00 the intent was in a way to say, we're in control of our prison camp now. But what they were saying was, come on, come and get us out. It was along those lines. It was, get your finger out, I think. It was something of that sort.

Did this – what kind of effect did seeing this, get your finger out?

Just a chuckle. A bit of a laugh.

Was there much humour at Borneo as

16:30 **you remember?**

Yes. In a way. By this time the war was obviously coming to a halt. Our accommodation was still tents. We lucked out one way. There was a Chinese family living within a few yards of where our tents were and

17:00 the lady there did our washing for us – for a price of course, but not much. Which was a big help. We hadn't had that for a long while. The food had improved. It was a sergeant I think on our mess staff who did him best to improve the food. And among other things, he found a source of limes somewhere and made up some cordial for us,

17:30 which he kept in the fridge which was great. We hadn't had that sort of thing in a long while. The doctor was there who – this one doctor a chap called Mick Kater, spelt with a K, who was a very enthusiastic service medical officer. He looked after us very well. So by that time things were improving slightly.

18:00 **Tell us, did you have any entertainment or fun in camp?**

Yes. There was a travelling movie show. It didn't travel, but it was there. It was in the outdoors and they put up a screen and we were able to see some movies from time to time.

Do you remember which movies?

No. Sorry, I can't.

What were they like, seeing movies out in the jungle?

Oh fine. It was entertainment we hadn't had.

18:30 **Any other forms of entertainment come through?**

Apart from sport – we used to play volley ball in the sand. Do fishing. That was it.

Did you have any interaction with the local people there?

Apart from people such as the Chinese family that lived close, no.

You said you couldn't remember some of the mission, but just talk us through

19:00 **describing some of those actions you would take against the Japanese.**

First of all we'd get a briefing saying that your squadron's been allotted to do this task. Then we'd have intelligence officers as part of our staff. They would do there best to tell you what the situation

19:30 was and what the requirement was and so on. Then the flight commander or the air flight commander of whatever section it was going out – four aircraft – would give you the detailed operational briefing – how to do it, what to expect to see on the ground, and so on – it was with the intell [intelligence] people. Then we'd go and find the target, do our best to destroy it.

Would you fly in formation?

Yes.

What kind of formation?

20:00 Formation of four was the usual thing for the fighter squadrons at that stage.

And how far away were your targets from the base?

Relatively close at this stage, within 100 miles or so.

So all up how long would a mission usually take?

Oh, hour and a half. Perhaps a bit less.

Did you ever have any dangerous weather conditions to contend with?

No.

20:30 We didn't that I recall.

About what time of the day would these missions be?

Varied. Mostly in the mornings I think.

Which plane were you using at this stage?

This was still the Kittyhawk, while the war was still on.

Were you being told about how the war was progressing in

21:00 **other parts of the world while you were here?**

Yes. This time we were getting a bit more information.

What were they telling you?

How things were going in Europe. What was happening there. We certainly weren't getting newspapers or things like that, but there'd be some information coming through.

Well did you hear about the end of the European War?

Yes.

Tell us about that.

We had a little mild

21:30 celebration in the squadron, but nothing much.

Did you feel that there was still a lot of work to be done?

No. We saw it grinding to a halt.

You mentioned briefly, but I'm just interested in exactly – maybe I'm double asking the question, but some of the targets that the Japanese had – what exactly were you targeting?

22:00 The Japanese encampments, stores, depots, things like that.

How well set up were they at this stage?

They weren't well set up at this stage, no. They were down to basics I think.

And what was the overall purpose of these missions do you think?

To just stop the war. To defeat them in the field.

Was it a harassment of a

22:30 **dying force?**

No, it was a bit more than that I think.

Did you see the Japanese on the ground yourself, running around?

Occasionally.

What's that feeling like, seeing men scatter around?

Yeah. Oh, it just is part of the war I think.

Did it seem strange being at this distance looking down?

No.

23:00 **Tell us about the lead up to hearing the news about the atomic bomb. What situation were you in at this stage?**

We were just serving our time. Our sortie rate, the number of flights had been slowly dropping.

23:30 We didn't know anything about atomic weapons of course. The word came through this great big bomb had gone off. We didn't know much more.

What did you think about this great big bomb?

We didn't have the background knowledge in those days to know was it dangerous to other people or what were the subsequent impacts. We just didn't know.

Could you quite believe it?

24:00 **The power of this thing? What was the talk about it?**

There wasn't that much I don't think. We were I suppose to some extent seeing it as a move to stop the war and that was the biggest impact.

And what was your reaction to it, or the other men's reaction?

No great alarm or anything like that expressed.

24:30 **I guess having even large bombs during the war, did it seem particularly unusual, the use of**

this bomb?

No. It was accepted, they've made a further development of some sort. That's about it.

So tell us about the war ending where you were and what you heard and that?

Yes. Let's see, the word came through the war was over.

25:00 We had a little party. I can remember that in our stores we had fuel tanks that we'd emptied them and made them containers for emergency supplies, if you like, to drop to either soldiers or perhaps down to them or something like that to help them survive.

25:30 We put all sorts of goodies into them to make them as good as we possibly could. So the war was over. We opened those up and had a little feast on the things that were in the special drop tanks. But that was it. We didn't have liquor and things like that in any quantity. I can remember we had a ration of two bottles of beer a week each. And

26:00 there was the provision of an ounce of whisky or gin per operational hour, sortie. So there was a little bit of gin and whisky there, but not much. So there was no way of having a real celebration.

You mentioned something there about supply drops. Had you been doing these missions?

No. We hadn't. These were special things developed for that one purpose to

26:30 drop to people who were surrounded, lost, cut off, but that was it.

Was there any danger in using drop tanks?

No. Drop tanks flew off quite well.

They'd have to watch it on the ground, I guess.

Yes. You were meant to.

So how did your role change once the war finished?

By this time we were converting from the

27:00 Meteor to the Mustang. The Mustangs had been progressively replacing the Kittyhawks in the fighter squadrons and ours had arrived up just before the war ended. So we finished converting to the Mustang and then there was a decision for an Australian fighter wing to be part of the Japanese occupation. And our wing, 81 Wing, was selected to be the wing to go up to Japan.

27:30 So we more or less started thinking about the flight up to Japan and what we'd need and who would go. It was a matter of those who were dead keen to get home and get out and back to home and those who were ready to stay on. I was one of those who wanted to stay on for a bit. So I volunteered for the occupation force and the squadron people changed

28:00 quite dramatically. Both airmen and pilots who wanted to go home went home. And people from other squadrons came and joined us to be part of the occupation force. So it was a bit of a re-organising of the three squadrons getting ready for the trip up to Japan.

And why had you decided that you might be a part of it?

I thought I hadn't seen enough yet.

28:30 And I was enjoying what I did. It was another experience coming up.

Tell us, before joining this, what kind of role and work were you doing once the war had ended at Borneo itself?

We were filling in time I suppose, would be the best way – we were swimming. There was a good beach fairly close to us. Fishing. We had two boats built in the squadron.

29:00 And we'd go out and get fish and we did it not only for fishing but also to get some better food into the mess for the other members of the squadron – particularly the airmen. There's a bit more to this story perhaps I can tell you. We found we weren't too successful fishing with conventional fishing gear. We didn't have any nets. So we found out that the

29:30 fish in the bay at Labuan tended to move around in big schools and we could lob a hand grenade among them and kill quite a number of fish. So that's what we started doing. We'd go out, lob the grenade among them, go out and pick them up. We used to dive for them. A lot of the killed fish dropped to the bottom rather than floated. And that was very welcome, to get these fresh fish into the messes to be cooked.

30:00 But apart from that – swimming and fishing and sports – played a lot of softball. That was about it. Just waiting for the time to come to go to Japan.

Was there any danger in the grenade fishing?

Yes. A little bit. Because – I've forgotten now, but I think a hand grenade fuse went on for about five or seven seconds and if we pulled the plug out and threw it and it went

30:30 to the bottom so there was a tendency to wait a couple of seconds and then throw it so it burst soon after it hit the water. That was a bit dicey I thought. Then the sharks in the area learnt when they hear that big bang, there'd be a feed over there so the sharks started to come around to chew up the dead fish or the damaged fish. And then we ran out of hand grenades and we

31:00 started building our own weapons with a piece of gelignite and a fuse and a bit of fuse wire or burning fuse so you'd have this, light it and throw that at the fish. That was a bit dangerous too I suppose in hindsight. And on one occasion, the good doctor, Mick Kater, who I mentioned earlier came along in a boat with us. It was a fairly big boat. Two of us were down in the front of the thing,

31:30 down lower than the cabin and we were out blowing up fish and the sharks were circling around and suddenly there was a machine gun went off immediately over our heads. And it was the doctor, Mick Kater. He'd got angry at these sharks taking the fish that were meant for the airmen so he was up there with his machine gun shooting at them. Oh dear.

Weren't you worried by the sharks being about?

32:00 Yes. But fortunately they were small hammerheads. So they weren't that dangerous, I suppose. But we used to dive in the water with the damn sharks around. Mad, I suppose.

Did the sharks ever approach you?

No. Didn't have any aggression against us personally that I'm aware of.

And when you used gelignite and a fuse how does it not get

32:30 **wet?**

I don't know. It seemed to work all right.

What kind of fish were you catching?

Forgotten. The name's gone. They weren't flathead. They weren't – popular fish. Can't think what they were.

Were they large?

Yes. Up to two or three pounds. Quite a reasonable size fish.

Different types?

33:00 Mostly the same sort of fish.

What did they look like?

Silvery, regular shaped, quite an even looking fish. Can't think what they were.

How'd they taste?

All right. Better than the tinned stuff.

What kind of meals were being cooked up?

Just fried fish. Pretty straight forward.

Were you involved in any sorties at all after the war ended dropping supplies or anything of this nature?

33:30 No. There was a bit of reconnaissance from time to time. It'd be mentioned that a Japanese group are still out there. So there was a bit of reconnaissance like that, but nothing offensive.

With these Japanese groups still out there, what had to be done about them?

Had to be located. Then they'd send the army out there to round them up.

Were there any of these Japanese who were still fighting?

No. I don't believe so.

34:00 **What were they doing still out there?**

I suppose they were cut off from their units, cut off from their supplies, living off the land, that sort of thing.

And what other people were at the base apart from the pilots? Who else was there?

We had our whole strength of technicians, airmen

34:30 who did our service requirement, refuelling and so on.

How did you get along with these men?

Very well. I've got a great admiration for the airmen that serviced the air force over the years in many ways.

How good were they during this period at Borneo?

Fine. They did a great job.

Were there any mechanical issues that came up?

No. Not that I'm aware of.

35:00 **You mentioned that you were doing conversion …**

To the Mustang.

What do you do with a conversion? How does that operate?

The new Mustangs came up, and there were two instructor pilots came up from Mildura with them. And they gave us briefings on the aircraft of course first of all. What the requirements were, what the instrument readings should be et cetera. Then of course single engine aircraft, there's not instructor possibility.

35:30 Went along in pairs with us and followed us around and gave us information on the way, but by that stage we were reasonably experienced. There was no great drama.

What was different about the Mustangs? What was new about them?

Bigger. Heavier. Much longer range. Faster.

36:00 More sophisticated aircraft in a number of ways.

And overall how did you enjoy your time at Borneo? Had you enjoyed it?

Yes. It was a bit long. We didn't get away to Japan until about April if I remember rightly – March April. So we had three or four months sitting around there. But no, it wasn't that bad.

Why had it taken so long?

36:30 There was something going on about the arrangements for the occupation and who was going where and who had responsibility for what and so on. This was between – because the Indians, the New Zealanders, the Brits and the Americans were all involved. The area of the occupation force that had been allotted to Australia, we were eventually allotted the south western end of the main island of Honshu

37:00 and that was the BCOF area – the British Commonwealth Occupation Force area. But working out the details apparently took some time.

You talked a bit about your free time and that, but how did you occupy yourself for this long?

As I said, fishing, cards, sport. There were no tennis courts or golf courses or anything like that.

Did any of the group get frustrated?

37:30 No. Those people were the people that would have elected to go home straight away.

Tell us about finally receiving your orders to go to Japan?

We were given escort aircraft to go with us. The Mustang's navigation capability was very, very basic. So we got

38:00 both Mosquito aircraft to lead us and navigate. And there was an air sea rescue aircraft – I forget what it was now. And we went up as squadrons, one by one about a week apart. And the other two squadrons 76 and 82 went first and 77 was the last. We went up through

38:30 the Philippines and Okinawa. So there were two landings on route. And then up to Japan. And it was made pretty simple by the escort having navigators on board and aircraft too with navigation equipment helped. There were a couple of incidents. Let's see – the Philippines went well. Good landing. We were only there – it took three days –

39:00 they did some repairs to the aircraft as needed – minor repairs. Okinawa was a little bit of a problem in that a storm came through. We had to vacate the aerodrome we were on the western side of the island over to the eastern side to get shelter from the storm. After Japan went well. The preceding squadron – 80 squadron – lost three aircraft in an accident – and a Mosquito –

39:30 in an accident in the Inland Sea. The weather was bad, very low cloud and there were some little islands

I'd call them in the Inland Sea that are quite small but they shoot out at quite a height. Apparently this Mosquito leading the flight of four Mustangs was down in the cloud and careened into this island. So that the Mosquito went and three of the Mustangs went which is a pretty sad thing. But we didn't have any troubles. We got there.

40:00 Only to find – and this is down at Bofu which is almost down to the western end of the main island – that our accommodation – one of the huts which were pretty much like the huts that we'd had at training schools in Australia had been burnt down so we had pretty limited accommodation for a while. But that was fine.

Tape 5

00:38 **Tell me about the first day you arrived in Japan – where you landed?**

Okay. We landed at this base of Bofu down western Honshu, the main island of Japan. Met by our own airmen of course, they were already there.

01:00 The living quarters were on the base so they were close and we were in some more comfortable accommodation we'd had for a little while. The Japanese staff were already there helping out. For the first time ever we had room girls who came around and looked after us and made the beds and did the washing and all those things. So life suddenly became a bit more comfortable.

And tell me about

01:30 **the general area the air force was based in?**

It was a rural area of Japan. The people mainly were living of the land – farmers, agricultural mainly. It was a bit basic. Their agricultural machinery was very basic, but they were apparently living comfortable lives.

And where were you

02:00 **in relation to the rest of the occupation forces?**

The army were up closer to Tokyo at Eta Jima I think – no that was the island – but they were further up two or 300 kilometres further east along the southern side of the main island.

Tell me what you'd been briefed about what the role of the air force was as part of the occupational force?

Our brief and our duty became surveillance.

02:30 To make sure there were no Japanese military establishments existing or operating. Which there weren't. There were none found that I'm aware of. So from thereon, it was just merely to be there and to be a presence.

And what sort of planes had you taken there with you?

These were the Mustangs that we received at Borneo before we left. Same aircraft.

So you were familiar

03:00 **with them?**

Yes.

And you mentioned the air force was a lot more comfortable.

Yes. Than living in tents on the islands. Yes indeed.

Tell me about how it was set up.

It was not very different from the Australian air force base. There was the runway and the tarmac and the control towers, hangars. The quarters were double storey in parts.

03:30 Quite good accommodation.

And tell me about your situation where people looked after you and did things for you.

It took a little bit of getting used to for us men to have young women wandering into our rooms. And they didn't seem to be as shocked as we would be if people caught undressing or something. So it

04:00 was a little different. But they were very well behaved young women and did a good job.

What sort of things did they do for you?

They'd look after you completely. They'd make the bed, they'd keep the room clean and do the washing and ironing – just looked after us pretty well.

What sort of relationship would develop with them?

There were a few relationships developed, although in those early days – particularly the first two or three years – they

04:30 were forbidden. We weren't supposed to associate with the Japanese at all, but nevertheless there were one or two people who formed an attachment to young Japanese women. We've got one friend in particular who – he and his Japanese wife have been friends ever since.

And how about a general relationship? How would you explain – was there a friendship that would develop?

05:00 Not quite. No certainly not in those early days. But there was no animosity demonstrated at all. It was quite amicable.

Would you talk to the girls?

Very basic, because in the main they didn't have English and we didn't have Japanese in those early days and apart from the morning greeting, that sort of thing, no.

Did they ever have nicknames for you?

05:30 Not that I'm aware of.

How would they address you?

Sahib. Mister.

And what was one of the first things that struck you about Japan in terms of differences?

That's an interesting point. I suppose the

06:00 similarity to our own occidental way of life. They were easy to get on with. Some of us started doing weekend tours. We found that we could borrow an air force vehicle, sort of a land rover type of thing, pick up

06:30 an interpreter at the local police station and go for a drive into the local community just visiting local areas. In those days we had to take our own food with us. The Japanese hotels would cook it for us, but they didn't have the food. They were quite amicable too.

What sort of effects were you seeing of Japan having been at war for so many years?

Not much in the rural areas.

07:00 Hiroshima was another shock. I saw Hiroshima only a month or so after I got to Japan and that was a pretty rude shock.

Can you describe it for me?

Utter desolation. Just nine tenths of the town of Hiroshima – which is a very big town – was flattened. What was alleged to be the aiming point for the bomb was a building with a tower on top of it and that was a shell.

07:30 But there was still the framework of the two storey building. But most of the rest of it was flattened. And yet in the town of Hiroshima when we visited there as we did for sightseeing there were Japanese men selling goodies, stuff they'd made themselves and they seemed to be quite friendly too.

What was your reaction when you saw Hiroshima?

08:00 Shock at the utter destruction and the awareness that many, many people were killed.

And what were your feelings about the use of a bomb like the one used in Hiroshima?

There are two aspects of it. One is what I already mentioned. The other is shock and horror of the people that were killed.

08:30 But the other part of it was the realisation that if that hadn't been done there would have been a lot more people killed on both sides if the allied forces were forced to invade Japan. So in the balance between the two certainly the allied forces came out way on top.

Tell me about what these Japanese men were selling in Hiroshima.

09:00 They were things like handmade bits of silverware, paintings, objects of art I suppose. Some clothing, but not much – pretty basic sort of clothing. Things of that sort.

Were they selling anything of the town, like rubble?

No. Not that I saw.

What sort of talks or warnings

09:30 **or any information was given about radiation?**

None in those days. It seemed to be assumed that the radiation had disappeared.

To go to Hiroshima for sightseeing, what sort of a journey is that?

Two or three hours drive. The roads weren't bad. They weren't marvellous, they weren't highways,

10:00 but they weren't bad. Or there were trains, but no it wasn't a bad journey.

Would people go there often?

No. I only went to visit Hiroshima on that basis once. But others went more often.

And given that there were people selling things around the area, what signs did you see of people living in the desolation?

No, I didn't see. I don't know where they went

10:30 or what happened to the people who were homeless, no.

And did you ever see anyone in Japan – I suppose you mentioned older men earlier who had been war veterans? How would you recognise them?

Only by subsequent conversation. One I could remember ran a fishing gear shop in west Iwakuni which was

11:00 part of the shopping area – this is after (UNCLEAR) and he turned out to have been the pilot of the float plane that flew out of a submarine over Sydney. But he didn't make a great big thing about it.

Did you learn any Japanese words while you were there?

Yes. We found it, yes we did.

What sort of things did you learn?

The common every day ohayo gozaimasu – good morning –

11:30 counting, ichi, ni, san, shi – one, two, three, four. Which you had to have in shopping and things like that. Yes. I didn't become fluent in Japanese by any means but I learnt enough to get by usual day to day business.

And what sort of things were you able to do socially in Japan?

Not much. Because

12:00 initially the shops were bereft of stuff, but the gradually picked up. Fishing was again something we did. We had swimming there, tennis, but no social events outside the base really.

Was there things like beer halls?

12:30 No.

Take me through what you would have done in a typical days work early on when you were in Japan?

It would have been flying. We flew on average once a day I suppose for an hour, two hours. But we all reported at the crew room, where we met at eight o'clock in the morning.

13:00 Didn't leave there till five o'clock at night. Did some study at times. There was some advanced training went on. We hadn't had rockets with our Mustangs, but the New Zealanders had rockets fired from aircraft in their aircraft so they helped us learn how to

13:30 operate rockets, fire rockets. That was a development in the technique of our aircraft and their capabilities.

Would they modify your aircraft, to allow rockets to be used?

No. They already had that capability on them. It's just that we'd never used it.

So what do you have to learn to fire a rocket?

It's a little bit like when I was talking about bombing or some gunnery earlier, except that the drop of a rocket is much more than a bullet.

14:00 So that you had to allow what we called lee – in other words, where you're falling to where it ended up. So we had to learn that and there were dive angles for rockets too. They were shallower than dive

bombing. They were twenty degree dives.

Where would you practise this?

Off the sea particularly. There was a small lump of rock off the shore off Bofu and we did use that as a

14:30 target.

So you'd fly up at least once a day – tell me about a typical flight?

It could be formation practice. So we'd go up in a four and stay in tight formation all through the thing. Or it could be aerobatics, single aerobatics. Just general flying. Just keeping our hands together and on target.

15:00 **And you mentioned there was surveillance.**

Yes. That was gradually reduced. There was nothing to see. But that was the original idea. The aircraft should keep a close watch on the whole territory. Make sure nothing untoward was happening.

Tell me about flying a surveillance mission. What did you see?

You went up and you had your area to cover and you looked for any activity on the roads

15:30 or in the scrub itself. Nothing to see.

Would you see any signs of old infrastructure of war? Like I mean around the coast submarine pools?

No. There was one not at Bofu, up at Iwakuni there was.

What was up there?

Close at Iwakuni was a miniature submarine

16:00 thing, which still had some wrecked miniature subs on it, so that was interesting to see.

And in terms of working around the base – the girls would work domestically, was there any Japanese people doing menial tasks around?

Yes. A little bit of kitchen work, that sort of thing. And also some work in association with the aircraft. But not what I call technical work. They helped with cleaning aircraft and hangars.

16:30 They helped with refuelling. But not technical work on the aircraft itself.

Was it ever hard to trust them?

No. It didn't seem to be a worry. And of course they were under supervision when they were doing their work.

Was there anyone in the occupation forces who maybe had a hard time during World War II harbouring resentment?

No.

Was there any sort of Japanese

17:00 **cultural things that became a part of your way of life?**

In some ways. Those four miniature things up there were miniatures made into Christmas cards of a French painter that was resident in Japan and had been for some years and my wife's mother

17:30 got interested in him and persuaded him to do those Christmas card things. So there was a little bit of that. Some of their artwork was quite good.

What about food?

Yes. We ate some Japanese food. It's a little bit like Chinese food.

Was there any of that sort of influence within the base? Any Japanese food as part of rations?

No.

How about – would you ever get out to concerts?

18:00 No. There were no such things going on in those days.

You mentioned democratic elections. Tell me about what these were and the build up to them?

Under the government – Americans really – it was decided that the Japanese should have a democratic election of their rulers for the future and the whole area was divided up into whatever you call them –

18:30 districts I suppose. And it was left to the Japanese to nominate who they wanted to put up for an election. But they'd never had that sort of thing before. It wasn't part of their organisation. So it was necessary to supervise it to some extent, to make sure it went as it should do.

And tell me about your role of supervision?

I was left with the impression

19:00 that yes while I was there they were behaving themselves and everything was right. But I went from place to place. Some places I'd visit, they'd never had a car in there before. And I didn't know what they did when I wasn't there. But while I was there, they did it very properly.

And were you basically – describe what you'd do while you were there.

Just have a look at the voting system, how it was set up, whether there was anyone attempting to talk to the people as they came up to

19:30 vote. That sort of thing. Just general supervision.

Were you alone?

I had a driver and an interpreter with me. So they used to walk along with me too.

What were these people like, the driver and the interpreter?

Fine. The driver was one of ours. The interpreter was Japanese.

Would you talk to him about the election?

Yes. He knew exactly what we were up to.

And what did he think of it?

He was happy with it.

How would you say the general atmosphere of the

20:00 **people was towards the election?**

They seemed to be accepting it. They had a full voting. It wasn't as if a great many of them refused to vote or anything, that didn't happen.

How would you sum up the economic situation of Japan at the time?

They were living with some difficulty. People weren't starving. It wasn't as bad as that.

20:30 Some of their housing was a little bit ordinary. But they seemed to be coping.

Do you know anything about the political parties?

No. Didn't get into that at all.

You mentioned other forces in Japan, how did the allied international forces get along with each other?

Fine.

21:00 We visited the Americans both south on the southern island. We at that stage had never had what we call GCA – ground control approach – radar. And they were quite happy for us to go down and practice radar, learn about it, on their airfield.

Tell me about this radar. How does it work?

Ground control radar's been around for a long while now,

21:30 since then. But the idea is, in bad weather where you can't see you're picked up on the radar, you're instructed where to go, how to go, where to turn in on the runway. It was a big learning curve for us.

Why did America have it and not Australia?

Australia was behind in a number of aspects

22:00 of the air force way of doing things. We had some things to learn.

Was this a time of change for the air force?

For our air force it was, yes.

What sort?

I mentioned the rocket fire, that was new. Instrument flying using GCA was new. Even night flying was new.

22:30 I could mention that in another context, but at that stage Australian fighter pilots, single engine pilots, were not supposed to night fly. There had been apparently an accident of some sort in Australia. I'm not sure whether it was the one outside Canberra where it was a nasty accident and some very senior people were killed early in World War II. But

23:00 fighter pilots were forbidden to night fly. We gradually got back into the night flying up there.

Do you remember your first night fly?

Yes. We'd done it of course under training in Wirraways. But in the squadrons no. So it wasn't that new, but we hadn't been doing it.

What's the difference of doing it in a squadron?

Just because this rule had been

23:30 laid down we shouldn't night fly.

Do you enjoy night flying?

Yes. I have.

And you mentioned a little while ago that say you'd go to the crew room at eight in the morning and leave at five – if you weren't going up or if you just went up for a little while, what other things would you fill the day with?

A little bit of card playing went on. There was a sort of floating bridge school where if one was flying he'd come back, he'd take on the

24:00 seat and one of the others would go flying. Photography was something we got into. Just hobbies almost.

What sort of things would you photograph?

Just scenery, travel, that sort of thing.

Where would you get the photos developed?

In the squadron crew room. We got as far as having our own photo processing facilities – dark room, in the squadron crew room.

24:30 **And you mentioned going down to the American base? What were the Americans like?**

Fine. We always got along well.

Was there anything that you found really different about the way they were?

No. Not of any great significance.

How about the way they lived?

No. Pretty much the same.

And how about New Zealanders? What was the relationship like?

25:00 That was fine. We were never on the same base, but we used to work with them – flybys over Tokyo, that sort of thing. I can tell you one story – when the Australian air force left Bofu to Iwakuni the New Zealanders went down and were returning to Bofu, some of the Australian airmen were still at

25:30 Bofu and one night the commanding officer of the New Zealand squadron whose name just escapes me but it'll come back – Sir George Jones, who later became chief of their air force – heard this rowdy noise downstairs from where his room was. So he opened his window. He said, "Stop all that noise down there." And this voice of an Australian came back up, "Who's that?" and the answer was

26:00 "St George here." "Well if you're St George, where's your dragon?" And then they disappeared quickly. But he was a nice chap. A little serious.

Was there much boredom around the air force base?

Yeah there was a little.

How was it dealt with?

Just finding a hobby or something like that to do or studying for the staff college

26:30 qualifying exam or one of those things. There were promotion exams from flight lieutenant up. Had promotion exams to pass or those sort of things.

And did you have any leave while you were there?

Yes. That's where we lucked out. The Australian authorities got control of a hotel up near Tokyo called Kawana. It was on the seafront – oh don't know, fifty miles south of

27:00 Tokyo, down round Tokyo Bay. Which had apparently been built by some of the Japanese aristocracy for their European friends and guests. It was a great big hotel with a lot of accommodation, swimming pools, lovely golf course, horse riding, tennis, all those things. And we were able to go up and stay at Kawana on our leave for amazingly cheap prices. Two and sixpence a day I think.

27:30 And it was a pretty enjoyable stay.

Tell me a bit about the area where it was located.

It was a bit beyond agricultural. It was rural but large property sort of thing. A bit upmarket. But down around the western side of Tokyo Bay.

Anywhere near Mount Fuji?

Yes. You saw

28:00 Mount Fuji on your way to Kawana.

Did you go and visit Mount Fuji?

Yes. In fact my wife and I had the first part of our honeymoon at a little Japanese hotel close to Mount Fuji. Forget the name of it now. I should remember. We had to talk along our own food, but they looked after us remarkably well.

Tell me how you met your wife.

Her father was American, her mother remarried an American during World War II while he was in Australia.

28:30 He was American Red Cross. From Australia they went up to – I'll think of the name in a minute – and he started what was called the United Seaman's something. It was a place for merchant seamen. A club, drinks, that sort of thing. And he did the same thing in Japan.

29:00 Then when I went up on Tokyo guard duties I had a month up in Tokyo and I met Pamela there. We kept contact and then about six months later, I had a second stint up there and that's the way it went.

And how did you meet her exactly?

One of my Australian air force friends had been up on the Tokyo guard before me and

29:30 Pam's stepfather had helped him. I think he needed tyres for his Jeep. That's another story. And Irving, the stepfather got the tyres for him and Bill, my friend, owed Irving a bottle of whisky in exchange for the tyres. So I was deputised when I went up on the Tokyo guard to take the bottle of whisky to Irving. That's how I met Pamela.

And what attracted you to her?

She was

30:00 a pretty girl.

How much time did you spend together?

I had to take the guard, I was there almost daily. We used to talk on the phone a bit and she came down and stayed twice with some of our married friends living at Iwakuni. That was fine. She'd come down by train, stay with them. Worked out fine.

30:30 One chap and his wife still live here in Elanora I think.

Tell me about this Tokyo guard bit.

It was a show flag thing. We used to put – and it was in rotation among the Americans and so on – these formal guards at places like the imperial Japanese palace at the front gate and these chaps in uniform with the bayonet and rifle and so on

31:00 would stand there in ceremonial style. But it was a show the flag thing. There was no real dramas about it. It was just being there.

What would you do there all day?

My role was to make sure they got where they should be on time and they had what they needed and get them back again and those sorts of things. Another story I can tell there.

31:30 [General Douglas] MacArthur, the senior American general, had a ceremonial move from his residence to his office in downtown Tokyo every day. I lived at barracks out – it was called Ebisu Barracks, but it was a military barracks – out of Tokyo. I was heading off in the Jeep to do some work in connection with

the guard and got to –

32:00 we were off on a side street and as I came from the main road there were a couple of Japanese policemen like this – I thought, "Dash it, I'm late!" So I went around them and on to the main road. And then I found myself – the motor cycle, the Barnes Jeep, the MacArthur limousine and the other motor cyclists, so I took off on the next exit. Oh dear.

Did you ever have any interaction with MacArthur?

No. Not directly.

Did you ever see him?

32:30 Yes.

What kind of a man did you think he was?

Oh he was pretty formal and a bit full of his own importance I suppose, but there we are.

What did you think about the way he treated Australian troops during the Second World War?

I didn't see any great problems, no.

What was Tokyo like as a city at the time?

It

33:00 was a big active city. We had – in addition to the hotel down at Kawana I mentioned there was also a leave hotel in Tokyo itself that we could use – the Australians could go up on leave and stay there. There was nothing in the way of public transport in those days. No trams or buses. So you needed your own vehicle to get around, but no there was

33:30 shopping there. It was a big city but a little bit behind the times because they hadn't been able to keep up to date with their goods and pieces and things.

Was there much evidence of poverty on the streets?

No. There was some devastated parts of the town itself from conventional bombing, not atomic bombing. No otherwise.

34:00 **And Tokyo was there more general socialising outside of bases at all?**

No. Not really. Although Pam's parents lived in a house that had been built by a Japanese who was very big in the cotton industry but he was part of the Tokyo elite almost. And he'd built this big Elizabethan type mansion and

34:30 in the backyard or the grounds of this house they'd built a Japanese style residence for his parents. And the occupation forces took over the house and the family – Saito was their name, S A I T O – moved into the Japanese place at the back but then became good friends. They attended our wedding. Not that many years ago Mrs Saito sent us photographs of three

35:00 young ladies that were potential brides for one of their sons and asked us our opinion. We did get a little bit closer than ordinary.

And when did you decide that you wanted to marry Pam?

After we'd known one another for about a year I suppose. She was quite young. I had to wait a while.

Given that her father was fairly – did you have to ask permission …?

Oh yes. I went through the formalities.

35:30 **Was there any Japanese influence on your wedding?**

No not directly. Our chaplain from Iwakuni did the wedding ceremony up in Tokyo for us. That went fine. It was only one little mix up that didn't matter, but we were married at the church ceremony, we had the reception afterwards in

36:00 Pam's parents' house and we headed off in a Jeep to the Japanese hotel I mentioned out near Mount Fujiyama and that all went fine. We also had to be married at a consulate in addition to the church ceremony, but unfortunately the consulate thing got a bit mixed up

36:30 and we went back a week later to get married at the consulate.

Why did you need a consulate wedding?

I don't know, but in fact it was a British consulate in Tokyo, not an Australian, so I never did understand that. But there was a requirement in those days to have the double ceremony.

Were you disappointed or were your parents disappointed they couldn't be there?

Not really no. Pam's mother wrote extensive letters and told them all about it. My air force friends participated

37:00 of course as groomsmen and so on.

Were you married in uniform?

Yes, I think it was.

Did you get any good natured jokes from friends about marriage or anything?

No. By that time some of the other people had been able to bring their wives up from Australia and join them in Japan, so we weren't the only ones there.

How did your accommodation change when

37:30 **you were married?**

That was one of the aspects that eventually led us to being married, because in about 1948, end of 1948, the occupation force started to go down in size. We dropped from three squadrons to one squadron. And as I'd been with the original squadrons, I was one of those selected if you like to return to Australia when we returned to one squadron.

38:00 And in the meantime, there'd been married quarters built which were really quite nice ones for the married people and some of those were going home. So we found there was a married quarter coming up available. So that's what led us to the wedding. We thought, oh yeah we'll get married, we'll live there.

What was your decision to stay in Japan for quite a while rather than head home?

Again it was interesting

38:30 work that we were doing in a way. We weren't sure what was happening in Australia. The size of the military forces was dropping quite rapidly, so there was a possibility that if you went home you might find yourself thanked for your service and that was it. Whereas if you stayed in Japan you were still in and there was the prospect of at that stage we were considered to be not citizen air force, but not

39:00 permanent air force either. So we hung out until we had the opportunity in Japan of joining the permanent air force.

And what was it about the air force that made you want to stay with them?

The lifestyle, the flying, companionship – was all good stuff.

And how did you find things like weather in Japan?

Not too bad. It was colder than we were used to. Bit more snow

39:30 and stuff around, but not bad.

Tape 6

00:38 **Now we were just talking off camera about a target competition. Would you like to explain to me what that was?**

They were competitions. The three Australian air force squadrons, the New Zealand squadron, the Indian squadron and the RAF squadron – they had Spitfires -

01:00 would compete in a weapons competition and you had air to ground gunnery, rocketry, and dive bombing. You picked a team from among your squadron. I think there were only three or four from each squadron participated and it was straight out competition, who got the best result.

How did it work exactly? What were you targeting?

01:30 As I mentioned, air to ground gunnery was on a ten by ten target. Rocketry was just a big post I think if I remember rightly and they could measure where the rocket hit the mark or not more readily. Bombing was a bit the same. Bombs didn't burst, they just put out a puff of smoke.

And whereabouts was this competition situated?

02:00 One occasion it was up where the Indians were up on the northern edge of the main Japanese island – and the RAF were up there too. They were friendly competitions, but competitions.

How did you go?

Well I thought I'd done well in one until one of my mates, I think, if I remember rightly I'd got

02:30 ninety percent hits in air to ground. In other words, 90 percent of my rounds went to this ten by ten target. And this chap, Gordon Harvey, who I still know well, came in with 95 percent. So there we go. And another chap – I'll mention Gordon Harvey again in a minute – called Bay Adams, John Adams, succeeded in not only that competition but against Americans he succeeded and got the top scores

03:00 and MacArthur himself praised Bay Adams and then when the Korean War started he said, "I want that Australian squadron to come in and join us with their marksman. Bay Adams is the best shot in my command," which is pretty nice stuff to say. But Bay Adams had been a World War II fighter pilot based

03:30 in Britain and his squadron commander was a Frenchman whose name I should remember, but I don't who subsequently became big in French politics. But the story this chap told in his book which I have was that eight of the Typhoons – British fighter – went in to attack a target in Germany and only two of them came out the other side. He

04:00 and Bay Adams. Pretty terrible thing. But there it was.

How did the Australians go generally in these competitions?

Pretty good. We weren't always – well we were around second place. Pretty good, but not the best. Sometimes

Who was first?

The Brits would be, just I think.

How did the Americans go?

They weren't in this. This was more the -

04:30 some were the Americans, but most were British Commonwealth – English, RAF, Kiwis and ourselves.

The election supervising job – how were they going to vote? Using cards or what were they going to use?

They had something to fill in. To tick as appropriate.

05:00 It was ready for them.

Could you recognise the language at all?

No. There was a bit of bluffing went on.

Do you know if they had a preferential system or a first past the post?

No.

What were you to look for as a supervisor?

The possibility of it not being fair, there being pressure put onto people to vote in accordance with – some

05:30 pressure being put on them, which we certainly didn't see.

What kind of irregularities would you particularly look for?

Someone standing near the voting table where they ticked their forms or not, doing this sort of thing.

And how were you told to act if that situation came up?

Just report it to the Japanese police.

What kind of paperwork would you have to fill in with

06:00 **this job?**

None. None at all.

So how would you make reports of your day?

We'd just say, nothing abnormal, everything's fine.

Based mainly on word of mouth?

Yes.

What kind of places would you go with this work?

Little tiny towns and villages in the vicinity of Iwakuni. I forget what they called that, arrondissement? – no that's French.

06:30 Can’t think. But that particular section of the island.

What kind of things did you exactly observe?

Just the behaviour of people.

Did they have ballot boxes or security – what kind of security?

Yes. Wasn’t much in the way of security, but they had ballot boxes, you get the form, tick it as appropriate, stick it in the box.

And where would those

07:00 **ballot boxes be taken?**

They’d be counted at the shire headquarters or wherever it was, I presume.

All right. That’s that done. So tell us about your wages. What were you wages like?

Pretty reasonable. We didn’t have trouble with money. We got by pretty comfortably I think.

07:30 No real concern. Mind you, I don’t think we paid much, but …

You talked a bit with Naomi, but what was the interaction with Japanese like towards the end of your stay there? Did you mix much?

Yes. We did later on. The association was good. There was no animosity at all. They were friendly.

So how would you say Japan changed over those

08:00 **few years that you were there?**

I don’t think it did. We didn’t see in the general run of people the viciousness and nastiness that was evident during the war. It just wasn’t apparent.

Tell us about when it came to a close, your BCOF work, how you received the news and what happened next.

08:30 By this time I’d been overseas from mid 45 through till early 49 and it was time I went home with Pam. We sailed home on a funny little boat, but never mind.

09:00 Went through Cairns and down to Sydney. And Pam’s relatives – her auntie, uncle, grandmother, all met us there – and then we travelled down to my family in Melbourne. Yes, the what was it? The Taiping. Four and a half thousand tons, it bounced and bounded around the seas like a canoe on a typhoon.

09:30 **And how did Pam’s family react to you?**

Fine. I’d had a leave from Japan before we were married and I went and met her grandmother and her uncle, got on well with them. Yeah, fine.

And what about your family and yourself?

Yes. Great. We went and lived there for some several months after we got back.

Tell us what were you doing

10:00 **back at home when you got back?**

After some leave, and there was a little bit of leave, because I think as aircrew we’re entitled to three weeks leave a year and I was able to take some leave in Japan, but not all of it. So I had some leave waiting for me to take. And Pam was pregnant by this time, so we took it easy and did some working and that sort of thing, good for our health.

10:30 And then I was posted down to the Citizens’ Air Force Squadron at Laverton, number 21 squadron. Which was also flying Mustangs. And started working there and enjoyed that because there were three or four permanent air force people and about eight weekend citizen air force

11:00 people who came out every second weekend, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and flew with the squadron and a couple of them in particular were very experienced and notable fighter pilots in the world war who were happy to come and join in and be part of it. And that went on for a few months. We had contemplated building a house in Melbourne, because in those days

11:30 the defence headquarters were at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, Point Cook, an air force base was down that side of Melbourne, the eastern side. Laverton was down that side. And we planned to build a house out just on the eastern side of Melbourne. And we were making progress on that when I got another posting down to Sale to do a flying instructor’s course. I think I mentioned having got there, I

12:00 found out I’d been reposted back to Japan to 77 Squadron because of the start of the Korean War. So I just had time to race back to Melbourne, stop the building of the house which hadn’t started but was ready to go and disappear back by air to Japan. This was in June 50.

How did you feel about this reposting?

A bit shocked.

12:30 But there were no options. That was what I had to do.

Were you ready to go back to war?

Not really. But never mind. There we were.

How did Pam feel about this?

She tolerated it very well I thought. I don't know quite how. She had a young baby to look after too. By then he was three months old.

So she had to stay back?

Stayed with my parents.

13:00 **Tell us about returning to Japan? What was it like being back there?**

Busy, active. The squadron already had a full establishment of pilots. There were 24 pilots in the squadron. They sent another 12 of us up. And to my surprise we were all very active straight away. There was a lot of operational flying going on. We had to transit over to Korea from Japan and carry out our

13:30 operational missions and then get back to Iwakuni again. And sometimes we'd fly every day and they'd be three and four hour sorties. But busy. And fairly successful. The North Koreans were way down into South Korea by this stage and then they were

14:00 brought to a halt up around the main city there and we were able to move as a squadron over to southern Korean, a place called Pohang on the south east border and we were able to fly two and three missions a day there. But even before we'd moved over to the squadron we used to go over and fly an operational sortie,

14:30 land at Pohang or one of the other American controlled bases there, refuel, re-arm, do another sortie, stay over night do two more sorties the next day and then fly home. But they were all long flights because of the distance back to Japan. Once we were at Pohang, the sorties were much shorter.

Tell us before you went there or when you were over at Japan at least, what did you know of the Korean situation?

15:00 Nothing at all. It was an utter surprise to me that the war had occurred. Knew nothing at all.

What about Communism, what did you think about it?

It wasn't something that seemed to enter into the argument really. They were just enemy forces, simple as that.

So you never really expected this war.

No. Didn't know anything about it.

Tell us, when you arrived in Japan were you

15:30 **briefed about the war?**

From the military side, yes. Where the movements were, what the progress had been, what sort of targets they were. We were controlled by American controllers. So we took off at Iwakuni and then our next contact was with the American control system. I can still remember our call signs. Our squadron call sign was, "Drop Kick".

16:00 My name during the flight was "Mike" and they were "Mellow." So when I got airborne and got close enough I'd say, "Mellow from Drop Kick Mike" and I'd get their instructions of what target they wanted me to hit.

What kind of targets were they?

Troops in the main. Troops, weapons, ammunition, stockpiles, trench, guns, things like that.

16:30 **Were you briefed on the political situation?**

Not really. No.

How did you feel about that?

Again it wasn't an issue for us at that stage. We were military, we were doing what we were told. That was the end of it.

But as a military man, did you think, why are they doing this or anything like that?

Only to the extent that North Korea had

17:00 invaded South Korea. It was as simple as it got.

How does a briefing go? How does it work? Talk us through. Is it in a room? Everything?

Yes. There'd be someone there to brief you on the weather and what the weather was there. There'd be someone else to brief you on the military situation as it was and then there'd be someone to talk about the specific target and what it was on about and warn you of any problems.

17:30 Pretty routine stuff.

What kind of problems would there be?

Anti-aircraft situations, some hazards from smoke, but basically it was anti-aircraft flight.

What kind of anti-aircraft did they have there?

Just conventional long range anti-aircraft guns, and lower down they had machine guns.

What

18:00 **range do those guns go to?**

The high level ones up to about 10,000 feet, machine guns 2000 feet maybe.

What level would you fly at?

Over ten. When we were crossing country we didn't know about then when we had to look we'd go down lower when we had to search for things.

Was there any airpower at all from the enemy?

I think

18:30 I saw one enemy aircraft throughout my tour. Other people saw more, but I only saw one.

And what did you do in this situation?

It disappeared. It was nothing. We were able to go on with our business and he did with his.

Could you walk us through maybe your first operation, if you can remember it?

No, I'm sorry I can't. The biggest problem was map reading as we called it – finding

19:00 your way along, because the Mustang as I mentioned didn't have any navigation equipment in it, so it was all by eyesight and calculations.

So what would you look for to navigate?

Rivers. Mountains. Roads where they existed. Bridges could be helpful.

And would you fly in formation?

Yes. The usual thing,

19:30 a flight of four aircraft.

And tell us, when you were attacking troops, would you fly down low at this stage?

Yes. There weren't that many attacks on troops themselves, but yes we'd have to go down to a thousand feet anyway.

And describe that for us? Walk us through what you'd do on a troop attacking mission.

20:00 You'd be briefed that's what you were to attack, what vicinity they were, whether they were being attacked because they were approaching an Allied base or troops and you'd have to be very alert because the country was pretty rough in parts. And the idea was to stop them attacking.

How would you do that?

Machine guns.

20:30 **Would you point the aircraft?**

Yes.

Tell us about that, what you'd have to do to the aircraft.

In a fighter aircraft, the guns are in line with the fuselage of the aircraft and the gunsight is in turn aligned with them and you'd have to point the aircraft at where you want the bullets to go.

What kind of degree is it?

Fifteen to 20 degree dives.

Were these dangerous missions?

21:00 Yes. I suppose they were. We didn't lose that many people in the Mustang days. The loss rate became greater in the immediate days. I got bullet holes in my aircraft about five times, I think, in the hundred odd sorties I flew. But I never had a serious damage to an aircraft. Other people had to bale out because of seriously damaged aircraft.

How hard is that to do, to

21:30 **fly near possible gunfire?**

I think the answer to that is it doesn't do to think about it. You've just got to get on and do what you're told to do.

Do you remember that moment where you start to dive, is there a feeling in your stomach?

Not really. I think you're so busy getting yourself there and navigating your way there you haven't got time to be scared.

What about when you're hearing bullets hit the plane?

22:00 Well that's always a bit of a shock, yes.

What goes through your mind in that situation?

I hope it's not serious. I hope I haven't got a hole in anything important.

Do you pull out in that situation?

No. Not unless you've got some feeling that there has significant damage to your aeroplane. But a bullet through the wing or something, unless it goes through a fuel tank is not that serious.

What other weapons

22:30 **were you using?**

We were using rockets and napalm bombs and conventional bombs.

And what was it like using the napalm?

You had to be lower and flatter. You couldn't really dive with them. And yet after a while you learnt to be fairly accurate. I always remember one particular attack, there were troops and weapons

23:00 on trucks evading attack and they'd got themselves into a tunnel running through a ridge and a road came up and went two or three hundred yards through a hole, a tunnel in the ridge. And I found the right one, saw there was smoke coming out of it, which indicated there were people in there and was able to drop napalm tanks into the tunnel like approaching straight at it and zipping over the top.

23:30 And got some pretty big explosions as a result. So you could be fairly accurate with napalm, but you had to get be down low and pretty flat to do it.

And what's napalm look like from the aircraft?

Like a drop tank. It's a cone shaped – not cone shaped – tank and instead of carrying fuel, it's carrying napalm with a detonator on it.

24:00 **And was it hard for you at any time to drop this on people on the ground?**

Yes. That was the worst one I think.

Why?

Somehow the thought of burning people seemed nastier than shooting them. I don't know why.

Yes. Interesting kind of situation. So you didn't like using

24:30 **napalm?**

I didn't like it, but it was the requirement of the day.

Were there ever any questions that people would put to those in command about the use of weapons like that?

No. Not that I ever heard.

Did they ever debrief people about their missions?

Oh yes. There was always a debriefing when you got back.

And what would they say in the debriefing?

Oh, just "how did you go, how accurate

25:00 were you, did you see anything else?" That sort of thing.

Did they ever debrief people in the aspect of being worried about using something like that?

No. There was only – there was one case I remember. I won't use the person's name. This chap had flown a mission, got a bullet through his canopy,

25:30 the press happened to be present, he fronted up, stood on his wing with another chap, pointed to the hole, there were photographs taken and then the next morning I was driving down from our quarters to where the aircraft were which are diagonally across the other end of the runway. And I saw this fellow walking carrying a suitcase down through there because we had – this was over in Korea – contact daily with the Dakotas flying backwards and forwards.

26:00 And I caught up with him and said, "Hey, you want a lift?" "Yeah all right." He got in. "Where you going?" "Going back to Japan." So I dropped him off down at the flight line near the Dakotas and when I got back I mentioned to our CO, a fellow called Dickie Creswell, "Did you send so and so back?" "No. What's happened?" And that's what happened. This poor chap. It got too much for him and he packed up and went. That was the only one I knew of.

26:30 **There was that accusation in World War II of lack of moral fibre, was that still a prevalent charge in the air force at the time?**

No. This was the only one case where I found there was something similar to that.

But did they still have that as a policy so to speak?

No. It didn't get mentioned.

And what were your commanders like

27:00 **at the time?**

Good. We had a sad loss very early. The CO that was there, called Lou Spence, was shot down and killed very early over the first three months. And then a chap called Dick Creswell came up from Australia to take over a command of the squadron. And Dick had commanded a squadron during World War II. And as I've said

27:30 to other people and in my book, he led very much from the front. He was interested in all the missions. If there was a particularly difficult mission coming up, he'd lead it. I've been out – and we did keep in touch with one another whilst in operations over Korea and he'd heard me directing my group on to a particular target and I get a call from Dick saying, "Hey Freddy! You got any more

28:00 down there?" And away he'd come and join in the battle. And he was the CO right through the rest of my stay up there and in fact stayed on and helped convert the squadron from Mustangs to Meteors. Old Dick never made it past wing commander but never mind, that's another story.

Why not?

Well there's some things like that that I've known that I'm still puzzled about.

28:30 **Why, do you think?**

First of all there were some jealousies among the different pre-war people. The pre-war cadets and the wartime people. And then some other petty jealousies seemed to be around and Dick Creswell – he's still around.

29:00 He lives in Canberra. He's not the politest of people. But very able operationer. But he was squad leader, acting wing commander in Korea and never went beyond wing commander. And he, I said, he led from the front. But anyway.

Did you find this can happen in the forces?

Yes.

Who do you blame – not directly –

29:30 **what kind of people do you blame?**

The same sort of thing I hinted at. The jealousies early days between the pre-war cadets and the wartime direct entry people. Some area I didn't understand involved in it, you know I could name four or five people – Keith Parsons

30:00 flew in England, commanded one of the bomber squadrons for the RAF which is unusual, then commanded one of the RAF stations in Binbrook. He commanded 460 Squadron which is a famous

bomber squadron. He was acting group captain during the war. And he never went beyond air commodore, one rank up. I could never understand that, because he wasn't the personality of Dickie Creswell.

30:30 First class bloke. Another chap called Bill Brill who was the same. Commanded an RAF squadron, then an RAF base, unfortunately died very early, around 1959 but still a wing commander. Several like that I saw and always wondered why. Why did this happen to these people? Why weren't they promoted?

31:00 **Talking about interaction of different sections, tell us about how you were interacting with the ground crew first up.**

I have always admired our Australian ground crew. They do a terrific job. There were very, very few if any cases of poor engineering

31:30 maintenance resulting in damaged aircraft. The conditions under which they worked after we left Japan were miserable. The weather was bitterly cold. They were living in tented accommodation in the main. They were being called out very early in the morning. Very often the Americans would call for what was called a pre-dawn take off. So they'd

32:00 have to be up very early. Then at the last minute, instead of being asked to carry napalm and guns we'd be asked to carry rockets and machine guns. So they'd have to change the weapons load before we could fly. A whole range of things like that. And they handled it amazingly well. I have great admiration for our ground staff. They did a great job.

Were there any particular jobs that had to be dealt with because of the weather or Korea's

32:30 **specific conditions?**

Yes. Two aspects. One was we had – the ground staff did this again – clean the ice and snow off the wings of the aircraft before we could try and take off. They were slippery and icy and that wasn't the easiest and best thing in the world, but they did it. And then the other one was a little different. To operate from the icy runway particularly when we were up in

33:00 North Korea, we got special tyres for the Mustangs. They were conventional rubber tyres, but with a coiled wire on the outer layer of rubber which helped you grip on the icy runways and they came from the Americans.

You said the serviceability was good, how good was it over the whole period of the war?

It was superb.

33:30 I don't think we lost a single aeroplane because of a malfunction that resulted from an engineering failure of any sort. It was really good.

And what about your interactions with the other forces, like the ground forces and the army?

77 Squadron in my days there didn't see much of our own army. I think I was only aware of once or twice we were in direct support of

34:00 Australian ground force. But there may have been other times that we didn't know. But not much in support of the Australian battalion.

What about other forces? Americans?

Yes. Mostly American forces.

And how did you interact with the ground forces?

That went fine. No trouble.

I mean on a mission basis. Would you communicate achieving a target?

34:30 Occasionally you'd be able to talk to them on the air force VHF radio, but that wasn't always available on the ground. But if it was we'd be able to talk to them. Say, "We're ten tacking this area which is so many hundred yards north or west of you, any problems?" That sort of thing.

Any

35:00 **peculiarities of the Americans in the communications?**

No. We'd been used to them during the occupation I suppose. No problems there.

And would they report on what kind of effect your bombs or napalm or gunfire had on the ground?

Yes. There'd be some debriefings come back particularly when we were flying multi missions out of Korea itself.

35:30 One stage I flew eight in two days. And that was because there was a nasty situation developing. They let you know, thank you very much, your forces have helped. That sort of thing.

What was that nasty situation that developed?

The American forces were being either over run or they were in a non retreat sort of position, they were backed up the hill as far as they could go. That sort of thing.

36:00 **What kind of task would you have to do in this situation?**

To try and strafe the attacking forces. Stop them coming in.

And would you use napalm in these situations?

Mostly. They were mostly machine guns in that situation.

Would the use of napalm be too close?

Yes. And not so good against scattered troops.

36:30 Good for tanks. Good for things that were guarded or had protective barriers around them, that sort of thing. That was the main use of napalm.

And sorry you talked about it a bit earlier, but how would the napalm be dropped, what specific technique would you have to do to drop napalm?

You'd come in at a fairly flat thing and

37:00 you'd attempt to get the napalm to hit the ground just before it got to the target. So it was getting there shortly after you'd passed overhead. So you went directly over your target.

And how low would you have to fly?

Drop the napalm at under a thousand feet so you might have been five hundred feet overhead.

Is there a psychological difference between low flying dropping napalm and strafing bullets as opposed to dropping from ten

37:30 **thousand feet?**

I suppose you're a little safer up there.

I mean that psychological effect of maybe seeing your enemy closer – did you feel a marked difference in this respect?

I don't think so. Not that I recall.

What was your set up like in the cockpit? What

38:00 **did you have in there?**

We didn't have anything specific in the way of navigation or any of those things. We had our conventional instrument panel and then the gunsight. That was all.

How would you keep yourself warm?

Yes, you could heat the cockpit. The only one that was of considerable

38:30 I'm going to say embarrassment was part of our escape and survival gear – you know you had your parachute and these bits and pieces was a water bottle in a rubber thing that was flat, sat on top of your parachute and you sat on top of that. And that was fine until the very cold weather came along and you went out to fly and that water bottle on top of the parachute was frozen hard. And (a) it was uncomfortable, and (b) it made you pretty cold.

39:00 It was not a great thing to sit on.

Would it make you want to go to the toilet?

Not particularly. We had a duct you could use in the aeroplane.

And what kind of things would you have on you apart from the water bottles in case you did have to eject?

You had an escape and survival kit, a bit of food and a bit of this that and the other. You had your .38 pistol. That was about it.

Tape 7

00:38 **You were talking earlier about Meteors, when did the Meteors come in?**

I'm guessing a bit now. I'd say about March 1951. Yes.

Were you mainly flying Meteors?

01:00 No. I flew Mustangs all the while. And then we had a fixed length of tour – I think it was nine months. So I completed my tour, I'd flown 114 missions and so on. But when the Meteors arrived I was asked to go back from Korea to Japan to help with the conversion of the squadron to Meteors. And another chap and I got busy

01:30 doing some other work in association with the Meteors. New techniques for various aspects of general flying. Transformation, what you look at to be in the right position. Things like that. So I got a few hours on Meteors before I went home.

And that was after you were finished.

Yes. This was non-operational flying. Flying at Iwakuni.

I might ask you about that in a moment.

Sure.

Can you describe the air force base at Japan

02:00 **from when you went there at your first arm of operational flying?**

Iwakuni?

Was it similar?

Iwakuni was a permanent Japanese air force base. It was on the waterfront. It was on a river delta. Iwakuni was a pretty big town and there were shops in there.

02:30 I've mentioned the fellow that ran the fishing shop that was flying over Sydney. The waterfront had an old Russian destroyer, I think it was – certainly a Russian boat – which the Japanese had captured in their war with the Russians years and years earlier which they used as a breakwater for the waterfront there.

03:00 And there was a clubhouse down on this same waterfront that we used. So it was a pretty big base, and it was able to handle all of us pretty comfortably.

And how was the life different being operational compared to when you were there during the occupation force?

You were certainly much busier and there was little time for socialising – no possibility of it really. So it was a busier

03:30 place altogether. At times we had Americans based there too with us.

Had any of the rules changed about socialising outside?

No. Although they'd eased up on the man-woman thing a bit. Yes. Because there were some marriages occurred in that period round 49, which happened, and there was no great outcry.

How about the differences – the fact that Japan was actually an ally

04:00 **at this time. Did you make any observations about how that was a difference?**

No. I don't think so. Didn't seem to have any direct impact, that was obvious.

Was there anything exhibited in the way people behaved towards the Japanese?

No. Again I don't think so. By that time the Japanese probably were taking a more active role in supporting the air force, but apart from that, no.

04:30 **What about changes in terms of economy and things like that?**

Not that I was aware of.

And did you still have Japanese people working for you on the base?

Oh yes. That was continuing.

When the base moved to Korea, whereabouts were you based then?

There were three moves in Korea. The first one was to Pohang down on the

05:00 south east side of the coast. Then it was up to a place usually called Hamhung, but the city's up in North Korea and in fact the base was at Yongpo, but up north in Hamhung to be closer to the centre of operations because by this time the allied forces had driven the north Koreans back and this was past

the 38th parallel. The old border. But that didn't last long at all because then the Chinese

05:30 came into the war. Very soon, our squadron got deeply involved in defending the allied forces up in North Korea who were being driven back by very big Chinese forces. And it was that stage that the MiG-15 started to come into the war and so on. Although we didn't see them from our Mustangs. The Americans with their Sabres were a little bit involved with MiG-15s.

06:00 But we only lasted there a few weeks and were driven right back – well not virtually driven, but we did evacuate right back south to a place called Pusan right on the southern border of Korea. So we had those three changes there.

What was the sense of urgency like to get out?

I think getting out of Yongpo or Hamhung got a bit – "Gotta go quickly, they're coming down on us."

How would you

06:30 **evacuate?**

By air. Typical in those days, we took off from Hamhung, we conducted a strike on the way and landed at Pusan and our ground troops came out by air.

And what were these bases like, how were they – temporarily set up or using existing?

No. They were – the first one, Pohang

07:00 was all tents. We had no permanent facilities there at all so we were back living in tents. And cold. In fact we lost two or four people there. The tents were coupled up to electricity for lighting and one night the lighting fuse did something that set fire to a tent. Two of the – a pilot and another chap were killed.

07:30 But then it was up to Hamhung. It was communal living. It was a building. Not a tent. But all the pilots were in one big room. And there's another little silly story there. Because of our erratic movements we sometimes missed a meal and we were usually fond of picking up a tin of sardines or a can of beans or something and having a snack before going to bed. One of the chaps got

08:00 a can of I think it was beans. And in the middle of this room in this bit of cold weather was a big fireplace to warm the room which was built of red mud. It had been painted. And this chap put his can of beans in the fire. The normal practice was to punch holes in the top so the steam could get out and then you'd go and pick it up later and this chap went to sleep. And about half an hour later the can of

08:30 beans burst and the whole room was full of smoke and red dust. And of course we all woke up and thought we'd been attacked or something. But never mind. No. The accommodation was pretty basic. I've got a photograph there of the same Dr Mick Kater I mentioned earlier and one of the other chaps outside of what was supposed to be our water tank with that much ice on top of it trying to dig a hole in it to get some water out. So it wasn't too good up there.

09:00 Down at Pusan down on the south there were rooms, big long dormitories not room, but this time we had kerosene or what they call it rain fuel sort of a kerosene operated

09:30 stoves along the centre of the thing so we were able to have some warmth. But the ablutions affairs weren't so good. The water was bitterly cold.

And what was – when you were at a temporary base, especially one with tents – what's an airstrip made out of?

They were sealed. One of them was –

10:00 was one of them steel matting? I forget now. It was an American invention for World War II. They were big sheets with holes in them but interlaced with one another and they just laid them over sand. Some of those in the Halmaheras were like that. No I think they were sealed runways in Korea.

What's it like when you move to a new base? Is there a bit of a moment where it's a new airstrip to use and land on?

10:30 No. The surroundings were the more interesting thing, what you've got to dodge on the way in or out. What you've got to line up with if you're approaching. But the airfield itself, no, it was standard.

And did you have a problem with ice on an airstrip?

Only up north when we were up at this Yongpo place near Hamhung where the icing there was severe.

How do you land with ice?

11:00 With some trepidation, and you've got to be pretty darned careful.

Is there a special way that you don't brake?

Yes. You've got to be very careful with your braking and take it easy.

You mentioned that the surroundings were the things that would cause a problem and Korea's very hilly – how did the mountainous terrain

11:30 **affect?**

Could be a problem. Again I'll tell you a story. One of the last operational missions I did in Korea from Pusan down to base – bottom – was a call that this group up north badly needed some fire support. They were in grave trouble, could we send up a flight to attack the approaching enemy.

12:00 And I had three new pilots who'd just arrived who were still learning the ropes. So we got off, got up to the area, found the fort air controller, who was the person who directed us to the area, carried out a successful strike and then started to fly back south to Pusan and as we went south the weather got worse and worse and worse so we ended up in a river valley and I had to steer this group – four of us -

12:30 down between the trees in the river valley staying underneath the cloud. But fortunately, we ended up to the coast and then we were able to fly round the bottom of the coast and then come back in. So yes it could be a bit tricky at times.

How does things like wind and air stuff for lack of a better word change when you're in a mountainous terrain?

Didn't seem to be a problem as such.

13:00 The cloud level was the problem. If the cloud level had got down to the peaks of the hill then you were in trouble. But otherwise, no.

And in terms of some of the operations you were doing, you mentioned a while ago flying in formation, was there much of this?

That was the normal. We always went in formation. The standard was a group of four aircraft together.

What's the communication like between those aircraft?

13:30 All radio. You did have some hand signals, but mostly radio.

What sort of hand signals?

Sometimes if there was some other chatting go on you'd rub your hand across the top of your windscreen. That meant you were turning right. Or turning left. But apart from that no.

What sort of radio call signs would you use to each other?

We were numbered, so that I mentioned earlier I was "Dropkick Mike" and

14:00 I was "Mike 1" and it's "Mike 1, 2, 3, 4" So if I wanted to talk to the fourth man in a section of four I'd call, "Mike 4." That's the way it went.

And any sort of jargon when you talked to each other?

Not really, I think. You had to stick to a pretty common language so that we all understood one another easily and knew what was going on.

Were there things –

14:30 **for example was a target given a special kind of name or if you were going to start a bombing run, how would you indicate that to someone?**

We'd tell them by radio.

Any special call signs on the radio to represent certain things?

No.

What sort of relationship developed between the four people in a formation?

You've got to completely trust one another.

15:00 **Did you ever have problems with that?**

No.

What level of danger is it, flying in a formation?

It's so routine, you're doing it so often that it doesn't become a problem.

Would you ever fly in formation with other forces?

Yes. I think I've done it with Englishmen. Again, not a problem.

15:30 **When you were based in Korea and not having to fly as far as you did from Japan, can you walk me through what would have been a typical day when you were going to fly an operational mission?**

Yes. We'd get during the night there'd be what they called a frag order – fragmentation order – that was an order from the controlling central authority to say what they want you to attack and where. And what time.

16:00 And we'd meet supposedly at pre-dawn, but it was dawn and I'll come back to that, and brief. If it was a squadron thing there'd be just the CO briefing three flights of four. If it was a flight thing the flight commanders would brief on how to go about it, what we're going to do, what is start time for engines and so on.

16:30 That was the briefing. Then we'd get to the fort air controller or the local controlling authority and get further details there maybe. That's the way it went.

What sort of things would you do in the evening when you came back, or after you came back from a flight?

Pack up and go to bed, usually. There certainly wasn't much to do at some of those places. It was so bitterly cold that the best thing was to get into bed.

What was –

17:00 **you could even compare this to you time during World War II – it like being in a war zone again, in terms of behavioural changes?**

Not too different. Our way of life had to be whether there was a war on or not had to be pretty strictly controlled and organised.

17:30 No, it didn't differ that much.

And when you were based in Korea, what sort of contact would you come into with civilians?

Practically none.

What were your observations of the way the country was dealing with the civil war?

A little bit disappointing in some ways. There was a tendency for the local hierarchy –

18:00 particularly the men – to dominate the way life went and was run and so forth. But we didn't think much of it.

In terms of Korea being a country with a lot of civilians and a war raging around them, what sort of problems were there in ensuring that targets weren't civilians?

That's something we had to be very, very careful about.

18:30 There were one or two incidents where Australian air force people attacked the wrong target, but they'd been told to do it under direction. It's a pretty worrying aspect.

Was it on your mind?

Not really. The chap I mentioned earlier, Bay Adams, was

19:00 leading one flight that was quite clearly directed at a target that was friendly. That was a bit upsetting.

What sort of steps would you take to ensure that it wasn't?

Proper identification of the things on the ground. Making sure that they were the ones they were supposed to be, they were in the place we were told they were.

What sort of briefings

19:30 **would you get to allow you to make that kind of identification?**

Fairly detailed usually. The people seeking the attack would have to justify it to their authorities.

And you mentioned at one of the bases a tent caught on fire. How did the squadron deal with a death of someone within the squadron?

20:00 That was a bit sad, that one. One fellow died instantly. The other one lasted about five days, I think, and it was a bit of a shock.

Is there any sort of ritual that happens after someone dies?

If it had been in peace time or the major base we could have been, but over there we couldn't have done anything about it.

Is there a padre or a chaplain attached to the squadron?

Yes. There

20:30 was in Korea.

What was he like?

Good.

What sort of things would you access him for?

I suppose guidance for people who had a worry of some sort. That was about it.

And how hard were you finding it being away from home?

It was hard.

21:00 A wife and a young boy growing up and missing the whole lot.

What sort of things would you tell them about what you were doing?

I had to be pretty circumspect. Couldn't say much about it.

We talked at the beginning of the tape about when you went back to Japan for the Meteor conversion. Tell me a bit about the background of the Meteor plane?

British aircraft, twin engine, jet.

21:30 Selected by Australia as the replacement for the Mustang. Not terribly successful. Not as good as the American F86 for example. Limited speed. They had a maximum speed, well mark as they call it, mark number of point eight two. Which

22:00 meant the MiG-15s went over mark one, so they were faster. Not as robust as the Mustang proved to be, so they were a little more vulnerable to ground fire and damage from shells.

And is the Meteor a jet?

Yes.

Is this the first for Australia?

We'd had the Vampires around the area before that, although they hadn't been entering

22:30 our squadrons by then, I don't think.

What did this signal as a change in the air force's way?

Yes. Fortunately the Meteors didn't last that long. They weren't around for many years.

And what sort of difference does it take to fly a jet engine rather than another kind?

Conventional engine? Piston engine?

23:00 Not much if its – the fuel usage is much higher. A jet engine gets through the fuel pretty quickly. And then it uses kerosene, not petrol. Not as responsive in some ways as a conventional engine – the Mustang for example. Because on landing, for example, when you pulled the power back on a Mustang you had those

23:30 big blades standing up in front which to some extent were air brakes of a sort so they'd help you slow down after landing which a jet engine didn't.

And how about in terms of taking off or firing up your engine?

Yes. The jet engine gave out more power for its weight. So in some ways they were much better.

What's the speed of a

24:00 **Meteor compared to a Mustang?**

Meteor was limited to point eight two. Mustang I think – I don't think it had a mark number thing, but it was slower certainly. The Mustang was flat out at about 500 knots, I think.

And we talked before about your conflict tactics. How did they change when you have a superior speed plane like a Meteor?

Not much. The could

24:30 carry much the same weapons load. They were attacking the same sort of targets.

In terms of those conflict manoeuvres we were talking about is there a new set to learn, a new way of thinking about this?

Yes.

Can you tell me about some of it?

It relates to the rate of turn, the rate of acceleration, etcetera, and certainly the Meteor could accelerate quicker and get up to height quicker.

25:00 Not quite as stable as the Mustang in the dive, in its steadiness. So yeah, there were some differences you had to take into account.

In what way is that sort of step forward in technology making a more effective fighting plane?

It was showing a potential, I'd say more than anything else, for future aircraft types that came along.

And we talked before about

25:30 **how the air force possibly needed to step up a bit, did you at the time see this – was it a good thing that Meteors had arrived?**

Yes. I think so. It's a pity they didn't quite measure up in operations, but it was a step up in the development of the air capability.

Do you remember your first flight up in a Meteor?

26:00 Yes. The Royal Air Force – the Brits – sent out some flying instructors with the Meteors. One of them gave me instructions on how to fly the aircraft. No. It was fine.

Was there a bit of a desire to put your foot down?

Not really.

How about

26:30 **in spins and dives and things like that?**

I think I preferred the Mustang.

And how long did it take you to get used to the Meteor to the point where you could train people on it?

Only two or three flights. People who were coming were well experienced pilots by this stage. They'd done a lot of operational flying.

How would you train someone in a Meteor?

You'd have to brief them on

27:00 the aspects of the aircraft, what its stall was, speed, how quickly it would rotate, what power you needed for this, what power you needed for that.

Explain what you mean by what its stall was?

If any sort of aircraft gets too slow, it loses lift from its wings and drops. And

27:30 very often that can not only be a drop but also a spin which different aircraft have different techniques to get out of. So yes, the stall was important. And if you were flying straight and level there was one stall speed and if you were pulling tightly in a turn speed goes up for a stall.

You've said that you preferred the Mustang and also that the

28:00 **Meteor wouldn't fly quite as straight and steady, how would this affect accuracy in terms of what you were doing in Korea?**

If you were changing speed at the time you were trying to point the Meteor at a target, yes, it would be a nuisance. So you had to stabilise your dive angle and your speed before you tried to shoot your weapon.

And when did the Meteors go into operation in Korea?

About the end of April

28:30 50, I'd say.

The Meteors?

Yes. Yes, the Sabres stopped in early April – 51, excuse me. Not 50. 51.

And so the Sabres, when did they come in?

Not until after the Korean War had long finished. I was involved in that and that was – let me think now –

29:00 1956, I think.

And how did the Sabres compare to the Meteors?

Much better aircraft.

And the Sabres were an American?

Yes.

In what way you think this signifies a change in allegiance?

We used to send teams out to search

29:30 the world for what aircraft were available and it was a procurement team that went around and looked at what the British had available and what the Americans had available and decided on the Sabre.

Did you feel – not necessarily in the acquiring planes element – but that there was a shift in maybe relevance of the air force?

I suppose a little bit.

30:00 But it was much more important that we got the best aircraft that we could.

What sort of a relationship did you feel to the RAF considering an historic … ?

Fine. That didn't enter into the thing. There was one earlier episode when an aircraft they were promoting and trying to sell to Australia – I think it was called a TSR2 – and we had a look at it and decided, no, it's not too good.

30:30 And the Brits were angry about that, because it also meant that they didn't produce it in England either. So it never did get produced. But otherwise no there was no animosity or friction or anything.

Just to go back a little bit, tell me about when you came home from Korea?

Back to the family? Yes. Well we had a little leave and

31:00 a little holiday.

How did you feel about your homecoming?

I was happy just to come home and quietly mix with the family again.

Was there a part of you that would have liked … ?

No.

Do you feel that maybe for other troops

31:30 **that maybe celebrations would have been important?**

Perhaps they were. I tend to think they've been a bit overdone when troops are returning from overseas these days.

How closely did you follow what happened in Korea after you returned home?

I was able to get pretty much in touch because there were people coming home that I knew and we'd have a chat. "How's the last month or two been?" et cetera.

What was you level of interest in

32:00 **the situation?**

I was quite interested, because as I said some of them were friends. I knew most of them anyway. It was a matter of 'how's it been?'

And what was your reaction when you heard about the armistice?

Very pleased indeed.

And you continued with the air force?

Yes.

How did the end of conflict in Korea

32:30 **affect the way the air force worked?**

I was – whether it was the Korean war or not I don't know – but it was about the stage where the air force was reduced in numbers even further. Some flying instruction which used to be air force pilots went out to civil flying schools.

33:00 And I was not happy about that. If I can give you an example of what made me think that way – when

the Korean War started, number 77 Squadron was fully equipped with aircraft, pilots – had 24 pilots – twelve more of us were flown up immediately. Within two years the Australians were forced to have six RAF officers to come over

33:30 to build up their squadron strength in pilots to be able to maintain their aircraft. In the meantime, pilots had been coming out of flying instructional posts, staff posts, etcetera and going up to the squadron to do a tour. But even so, in two years they were running out of pilots. And yet since then many of these posts where pilots

34:00 with flying experience were occupied in non-operational flying roles, or non flying roles such as flying instructors or staff pilots – as I was up in personnel or something like that so that – so that my feeling has been ever since that should there be a national emergency and the squadrons of the air force be obliged to be involved. We haven't got the numbers of pilots

34:30 to operate the aircraft. They'd be very limited. I was quite horrified to visit Williamtown a couple of years ago which is the fighter base of the Australian air force near Newcastle and I was taken around to visit the squadrons and one squadron I went to – it was the only one I sat down and heard the thing in detail –

35:00 there were about nine pilots present who represented the squadron pilots. So there were far fewer pilots than there were aircraft in the squadron. And of the nine pilots I think four were permanent or regular Australian air force, three were ex-patriots from overseas and two were part timers. They only worked so many days a

35:30 week or month or something. That, to me, is not manning our air force to the level that could be required.

Why do you think the air force let this happen?

The air force unfortunately suffered from some re-organisation that was done by non air force people that started with the then secretary of the Department

36:00 of Defence – Sir Arthur Tang – years ago. And it's continued since with things being re-organised in a way that I think has seriously depleted the capabilities of the air force. The total numbers have gone down. It used to be 22 – 23,000 in my day when I left at the end of – when did I go? 1981.

36:30 It's down around 12,000 now, and as I said some of those are not regulars.

Did National Service have an intake to the air force?

No.

Do you think perhaps it should have?

I'd prefer to see regulars, but get some trainers as citizen air force squadrons used to do years ago –

37:00 have pilots who were part timers in the citizen air force – be better than – as I said, when I was required to go to Korea, I got no days notice at all. I was up there with eleven others. But you can't do that to a part timer who's got a regular job and does his air force training part time at weekends. Just not on.

37:30 **Were there signs of this – if you can elaborate a bit more – starting to happen when you were still involved?**

Yes. It was starting to happen.

Within your experience, what was being done to combat this depletion?

I've said it this way, I was involved at a pretty senior level

38:00 and we would suggest an amendment to the way things were being done, certain ways, we'd have to argue that strongly and loudly at conferences at Department of Defence level. Then we'd grudgingly get acceptance of part of what we proposed, but then when it came time to

38:30 spend money on what we proposed, and what appeared to have been accepted – we'd get a reduction in the amount of money that was to be available, so that further depleted it. We'd argue at length, but didn't happen.

And you mentioned that there'd be a staff pilot – why are they unable to also be an active pilot?

39:00 Largely because of their legal commitment. They're not regular air force.

Not regular air force?

Not permanent air force.

Tape 8

00:37 **Returning from Korea, how easy was it for you to settle down after your war service?**

It wasn't too much of a problem. It was all right.

Did you find coming back into routine civilian life any difficulty at all?

No. Happy to do it.

01:00 **So what were you doing when you returned?**

I was posted to undergo the Australian test pilots' course down at Laverton at the aircraft research and development unit, and got involved in some test flying there. Some pretty funny little things in the Wirraways which had been around for years.

01:30 The Wirraway had an unfortunate habit of doing a nasty flick if you got it too slow and if somebody got a Wirraway to slow on their final approach to land, it could go like that and it was a very nasty result. They were developing some wedges on the leading edge of the wings to try and stop this flick thing. So I was doing the tests on that with a civilian engineer on the staff of the ARDU research and development unit.

02:00 And two or three other things picking up some aircraft at Fisherman's Bend – the factory there. And then I got word to go over to the hospital and see one of my old acquaintances, a chap called Freddy Knudsen who lives over here. He'd had an accident in the piloted version of the pilotless aircraft project. This was the Pika and it was the piloted version of the Jindivick pilotless aircraft project. Poor old Freddy's had

02:30 a prang over there, was badly bashed up, and they wanted me to go over to Woomera and take it on. So having had a briefing from Freddy at the hospital, away we went to Woomera. That was a very interesting period. There was a range of test flying to do. Dropping bomb shapes, dummy bombs if you like, to determine their ballistic characteristics so that the

03:00 sightings systems could be set up for them. But the Jindivick thing – the Pika thing itself – is a tricky little aeroplane to fly, a tiny little thing. There were three or four roles with it. One was to check the aircraft out itself. The other one was to check the instrument reading on the ground of the instruments in the cockpit which were sent down to the ground for flying the pilotless version.

03:30 Check out the autopilot itself which was controlled from the ground also in the pilotless version. And then let the people on the ground do some flying of the Jindivick while I sat in it for them – the Pika. There were some tricky periods doing that. I had one engine failure in it which we discovered what the cause was. That was remedied. Then helped train the first Jindivick crew. Then when the

04:00 Jindivick started to fly, I was put in the back seat of a Meteor aircraft – twin seater trainer – where I also had a control system for the pilotless aircraft – the Jindivick. I monitored how things were going in the air while the thing was being flown from the ground. We had some disasters with the Jindivick early. One when the engine failed in mid flight.

04:30 I had to fly it from the back of the Meteor into a saltpan where it was recovered more or less intact and so on. So there was a lot of interesting flying there at Woomera. But remote from parts of the rest of Australia in a way. But an interesting period flying with the – it was called originally attachment B of the aircraft research and development unit.

05:00 So that went on for the best part of three years. Then I was posted directly from there to America to go on exchange with the American air force, first of all flying F86s and then F100s for two years there out in the Mojave Desert in California. I learnt a lot there – just touching on it briefly –

05:30 for some years until the Korean War started, Australian fighter pilots had not been permitted to fly at night. I think I mentioned that. In America, not only was it night flying, it was night flying in formation and night flying in formation land away cross countries. Which we'd never done in our air force. They had a higher state of mobility preparedness than we'd ever seen, in that it was constantly being practised.

06:00 The base I was on had six fighter squadrons and two night attack squadrons. The squadrons'd get no warning that they were about to be sent somewhere, which could be in America or might even be overseas and the first thing sometimes they'd see is a couple of transport aeroplanes would suddenly appear in the circuit. They'd say, "Oh who's going this time?" And they'd be on their way somewhere across the States. And in this regard they had

06:30 packing cases all ready, manifests made out for each packing cases and what was to go in them so they could pack up and leave within hours. So that in itself was a development for me. Anyway, American tour was great. Advanced aircraft.

Tell us about the Americans. Was their sense of preparedness in response to the Cold War?

Yes. They were ready to be involved. And they were trained for it.

07:00 **Was there a lot of talk about the Cold War at this stage?**

Not so much, no, but an awareness that they could be called on at very short notice indeed. One role I had, I was made the operations officer of the squadron I was with. And in the fighter weapons delivery program that I mentioned for our air force, they had the same thing.

07:30 Rocket delivery, gunnery, so on. But they also had to meet certain minimum standards and squadrons in turn would go to a base up a bit further north near – it'll come to me – but the base was called Indian Springs. It had been built in support of the American atomic

08:00 program as a base from which they operated, but it was also a base where we could go and do weapons training. So I was sent off with first of all those of my squadron who didn't make it and then people from the other squadrons on another occasion to get them through for their minimum standard. But it was very interesting and very advanced from what we'd seen.

How do these exchanges operate? What was the requirements and

08:30 **how did it work that you just joined another force?**

Well there were ten of us went on exchange if I remember rightly. There was one fighter pilot, that was me, there was on bomber pilot, there was on transport pilot, there was an advanced flying training instructor and an elementary flying training instructor, an armoured officer, an ordinary mechanic, an engine

09:00 specialist and we did our two years in different locations around America. It was all very valuable stuff, as far as I was concerned. That was the first exchange program. They continued after that.

Was there limits on the information they could give you?

No. I didn't experience that in general. I experienced it once only. At one stage after the F100s started to become available I got involved in

09:30 flying them back from the factory down at Los Angeles back to the air base where I was and I got weathered out on one occasion and had to land at another US air force base which happened to be a secure base and they heard my voice when I called up for landing instructions and I was met by service policemen and escorted to where I had to go to check in and escorted back

10:00 to the aircraft. They weren't about to let me see anything. In general, no, we were well accepted.

What was the life like in American for you?

Great. We enjoyed it. In particular, Pam had friends she'd known in Tokyo and we visited them on the other side of America. She really enjoyed it.

What kind of lifestyle changes were you undergoing?

No. It wasn't too bad.

10:30 There was a good deal then of being able to bring home a car tax free if either you'd owned that car for twelve months or you'd owned a car of the same value. So I bought a Chrysler. Plymouth. So I bought a used Plymouth when I first got there and brought home this brand new Plymouth when we came home and it was great. And it was

11:00 relatively cheap. We toured quite a bit of America and down into Mexico at times.

What were you noticing about the atmosphere of America at the time?

I had no problem. I just was able to mix in very well.

What was the popular culture like, that was late fifties, was it?

Yes. This was 1954 to 1955.

11:30 Anyway it was after that I came home to form the first Australian Sabre squadron at Williamtown, number 3 Squadron. But I'd had that two years experience with the Americans. So it went well.

What were you hearing at the time of the build up towards Vietnam?

Nothing.

What about once it began, what was the kind of

12:00 **talk within the air force about Cambodia?**

Not much. I think the people just faced up to what their operational duties might be. Did them. Went away if they had to.

What did you think of involvement in another Asian war against Communism?

Well, fortunately I didn't get involved in that one directly.

Just talking generally, what did you think

12:30 **of Australia getting involved in another war against Communism in Asia?**

Yes. I was not as certain about that as I had been about Korea.

And were you involved with any of the air force involvement – I mean not directly, but through your work in Australia?

Not at that time, but then subsequently I ended up in Malaya

13:00 and I was more or less running the flying side of the base there as operations officer and I made a point of not only flying with the three squadrons we had up there on their aircraft, but also going on the visits that the Dakotas did over to Vietnam. So I got to visit Vietnam

13:30 and see what was happening there. And also the wounded being evacuated used to come back through where we were. I made a point of making sure those aircraft were met by ambulances that were cold and buses that were cold. The wounded people got the very best treatment we could give them. Those not seriously wounded flew on with bigger aircraft,

14:00 flew home to Australia on bigger aircraft soon afterwards and those that needed more hospital care were cared for up there in Malaysia before they flew home.

What were your impressions of Vietnam on that short visit?

I suppose I was surprised at some of the things I saw. The fighting in the fields where the family seemed to be closely there. A few things like that shook me a bit.

14:30 **How were you able to see this? Where did you go?**

One of the roles of the Dakotas based at Butterworth was to fly in support of the ambassadors in those countries there. I again made a point of going along on these trips. The ambassador in –

15:00 where was he? Forget now. Had been the minister in Paris when I'd been there. He only briefly showed us around a bit. It was pretty interesting.

What did you see that disturbed you?

We were taken on one occasion to an area where there'd been fighting on a few days previously and found that whilst the soldiers were fighting there, half a mile back were

15:30 their families with their dogs and cats and animals. It was quite incredible to me. They were housed in temporary accommodation – tents and things. A bit different.

Did this seem like a more involved war for civilians?

Yes.

What did you think of the running of this war from your impressions?

I'd really,

16:00 it wasn't something I got into. It was someone else's war.

How long were you there all up?

I'd be there over a week in one of these places there, whilst the ambassador did his tour around the country.

And you mentioned wounded coming back through Butterworth.

16:30 **What were their injuries like?**

They varied from very severe injuries being on a stretcher to people that just picked up flying pieces of debris or shrapnel of some sort. They'd have little wounds all over them, but still able to walk around. Pretty horrifying.

And what were these men telling you about the fight

17:00 **in Vietnam?**

Didn't get to talk to them. My role was to make sure they got the best comfort we could give them on the way through.

You mentioned France also. Tell us about the lead up to this work?

I'd got involved in the procurement of the Mirage. I took a team over to France to

17:30 learn to fly the Mirage over there. Did their ground skills with all the aspects of the Mirage, the radar et cetera. Fortunately they did this English, so it helped a lot. Then finished up back in Australia running the first Mirage squadron. Then

18:00 went back as the air attaché in France. So I had a further two years there as the Australian air attaché in France.

What were some of the unique differences of the Mirage, compared to what you'd been used to?

More sophisticated. Much faster. Mark two plus. It was a lovely aircraft to fly. It had a great ability to get to height

18:30 quickly. Unfortunately the Australian version missed out on a few things. It was procured before the French had settled on their equivalent aircraft. The first version was just pure fighter where it'd get up and go quickly, but pure fighter. Quite short range.

19:00 Ours was to be the ground attack version, which the French hadn't built themselves yet and it had a couple of failures. The first one was that the gyro platform on which the navigation equipment was based and also of course the ground flying instruments was an American one – a Sperry twin gyro platform. And unfortunately

19:30 it was not as stable as it was needed for a fighter aircraft. If you flew straight and level and didn't turn too much it was fine. But if you rotated too sharply the twin gyro platform lost its balance. So in effect the navigation system which worked fine when you had a good stable platform didn't work in our Mirage. And there were a couple of other

20:00 similar features that weren't as good as they should have been. But basically a very good aircraft, but I always thought too short in range and didn't carry enough in weapons weight for Australia. It was basically a get up and go, strike – not a striker, a defensive fighter aircraft.

Was this a big change in military, purchasing to buy from the French at the time?

Yes.

20:30 I suppose it caused some surprises. But a first class team toured around the world looking at what was available and I think made the wrong decision, but never mind.

You thought it was a bad decision?

I did. Yes.

You mentioned a couple of the reasons, is that the main reason?

They were the main reasons. Yes. It was in effect to me too short in range

21:00 and didn't carry enough weapons load.

You told us earlier that part of this work you learnt French, tell us about how you did this?

In those days, the air force had its own language school. It had been going for many years, based at Point Cook. I did two trips there. The first one to go over for my four and a half months

21:30 of just learning to fly the aircraft and bring it home, come home and teach it to other people. And then I had another spell down there when I was going over for two years. So I learnt a bit of French.

How good were you?

Not as good as my wife became.

Where did you go from this role in France?

Back to

22:00 run the squadron at Williamtown up near Newcastle. It was the first Mirage.

How did they fit it within the air force structure?

Fine in that regard. There was no operational requirements, so they were great.

Were they ever used in operations at all?

No.

What kind of exercises would you take them on?

22:30 Oh, by this time of course we'd overcome all those prejudices against night flying and night flying across countries and all those things and we're doing all of that kinds of things and the squadrons became quite capable.

You said you were running this squadron, how did you feel about being promoted to this rank?

This role.

23:00 I was the wing commander by then I think. It was just part of the steady progress I suppose.

Did you feel proud of your development?

Yes.

What kind of ceremony did the air force put on each time you went up a rung?

No, I'm afraid not.

There was no ceremony?

No.

How did they signify it then? What happened when you changed rank?

23:30 You got a signal, a telegram if you like, to say you've been promoted with effect from such and such a date.

Change your uniform?

Yes. You'd have to get a bit more braid or whatever it was.

Tell us what life on the road was like,

24:00 **cause you mentioned a lot of places that you went to – how did you find this life moving around the world?**

Not too bad. My biggest worry always was the care of our children and the way we were forced to be away from them for long periods of time. There was one period where we were away for six years overseas. And the children were in secondary school

24:30 or past secondary school. Specially the boys were settling into their occupations. That was the big thing for me, to be away from the family, the kids. The rest of it was all right.

Was service life hard because of these reasons?

No. But it was that problem that we couldn't take our proper place as parents effectively.

25:00 **Does a service life require big sacrifices?**

Some cases it can, yes. I was just a little bit different I suppose to end up with three overseas jobs in a row.

Tell us, does being in the services become a bit enclosed, a group, within itself as far as being

25:30 **a society within a society?**

Only to some extent. We've always had civilian friends outside of the military. Some of them we've known for years, still friends.

Tell us, after returning home from a lot of these overseas postings, what did you continue on in in the air force?

My final post

26:00 was deputy chief in Canberra. That was a period when as I mentioned earlier many of the air force capabilities were being degraded or lessened because of money being diverted elsewhere. The air force as I told the chief of the day that

26:30 his roles had been reduced to welfare, discipline and something else. But the means of achieving some of those things were being removed from him. It was a degradation of the air force as far as I was concerned.

Did that make you think about politics and a political …

27:00 I didn't directly see it as politics. I saw it as more public servants assuming control over things they didn't understand.

Did you feel during this period – you mentioned there wasn't enough money coming in – do you feel Australia's defence requirements were worth a lot more?

27:30 I think so. As I've said, we air force people and military people generally have had a lot of training. I spent a lot of hours undergoing training – the Royal College of Defence Studies in London for a year. The staff college course for a year. The experiences of being overseas and learning from the other countries.

28:00 But these days we see someone who I've never heard of announce that they're defence specialists, who make pronouncements about what the military need, and I don't think really understand what they're talking about. So I've been unhappy to see the way the defence forces have deteriorated in their capability. But the attitudes of

28:30 international relationships, rivalries, religious denominations, the potential for international squabbles have not decreased. And yet our capability of defending ourselves against them have.

Now looking back personally at your own

29:00 **service life and experiences, what do you think are your best memories?**

I think flying the Mustang. I got nearly a thousand hours in the Mustang. I enjoyed flying it. France was great, enjoyed that. Malaysia was pretty good.

29:30 The role when I was in the operational side of the air force was much better than in the last years when I was in the higher level, the command level, and we saw our purpose in life being degraded by things outside our control.

That might lead into the next question which is, what are the worst memories?

30:00 The worst memories I think were the Tang Report, the impact by that on the military, and the – just the reduction in the capability of the forces to defend Australia.

When was the Tang Report released?

30:30 1980. Thereabouts.

What did it …?

It was the forerunner to changing the authority and where the decisions lay.

And where did it change to?

To the public service.

Looking back at some of your wartime experiences

31:00 **what lessons do you think you've learnt, from say World War II and Korea?**

I tried to indicate earlier, respect for the technicians, the air force people who kept us flying – there were some great fellas there.

Do you feel part of the Anzac tradition?

No. Not really.

31:30 **Why not?**

None of my family were involved in those days – World War I. I'm a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League] and support it. I respect the ANZACs [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] of course. But no. No more than that.

Do you march on Anzac Day yourself?

32:00 Yes. I used to. I didn't last year.

What does that mean for you when you go on Anzac Day?

It's nice to see the people thanking the military for their action over the years.

That might prompt another question – the Korean War's often been referred to as the forgotten war. How do you feel about this kind of statement or idea?

32:30 I didn't want to see a great reception, but I agree with that, the forgotten war. Because the loss rate was quite high. The conditions of operation were pretty terrible, particularly the weather. The living conditions were deplorable at times. And yet there was much made of Vietnam and other subsequent events, but Korea, no nothing.

33:00 **And how does this make a Korean vet [veteran] feel?**

Bit disappointed.

In what way?

In that the Korean War is not seen by the general public as being a significant part of the Australian military life.

I'll finish up with a final question, because we're coming close to the end of the tape. Tell us,

are there any final thoughts that you'd like to

33:30 **add to the record about your wartime experiences and your life?**

I don't think so. One thing that irked me I suppose was the command of the air force from 1940 to 1954 for reasons I've never been able to understand. First of all, there was a Royal Air Force

34:00 commander of the air force – 40 to 42. Then Sir George Jones was commander of the air force for the ten years 42 to 52, during which there was some squabbling going on and things didn't work too well. And then 52 to 54 was another RAF chief of the air staff and I've never quite forgiven that.

34:30 It meant in effect some of those people of the Australian air force who served with great capability and bravery etcetera during World War II never had a chance of moving up the ladder, because Sir George Jones was there for so long and then the RAF occupied it for so long. I never quite understood that one.

INTERVIEW ENDS