Australians at War Film Archive

Alan Morton (Tex) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **So I understand you grew up in WA [Western Australia] in the goldfields.**

Yes, in Boulder. Boulder, if you've not been there, is very close to Kalgoorlie. In fact, there's a sign

01:00 just outside Boulder township where the speed is 60ks [kilometres], ten yards further on it says you can go up to 80k and another 20 yards further on, you're back to 60k. So that's how close they are, the absurdity. But today, they're amalgamated virtually into a Kalgoorlie, Boulder kind of, that's where I was born.

01:30 My people came from, or my parents were born in Australia but their parents came from either Scotland or from Cornwall and they came because they belonged to a long generation of miners and the Cornish miners were probably among the best miners in the world.

02:00 Although they were in an industry which was marked by appalling conditions, some of them did very well because they had a system of mining in which a leader of a group of miners would bid for a section of the mine. Now, the mine owners wanted to get that

02:30 ore out at the cheapest possible rate and it was up to the miners with their knowledge of the ore structure and other features, the depth of the mine and so on, to say, "We could get that out for so much a ton." So they would bid until the two got to an acceptable level and their success would depend on their judgement

03:00 as to how rich it was and how easy it was to get the ore out. So these people were virtually self employed, they were never paid a wage by the mine owners, they made their profit above what they would accept as a living wage by their skill in judging their ability to get this ore out in a very quick time and

03:30 so on. So they were good at it and a lot of them, well I say a lot of them – I don't know any numbers, but when they came to Australia some of them were able to retire on a farm because of the margins that their team had earned. So they were not, although mining is a labour intensive industry,

04:00 they still managed, some of them, to do very well. And of course why did they come to Australia? Because the price of copper fell for some time but the mines in Cornwall were so deep they became uneconomic to mine and Australia, where copper had been found in places like Mount Isa and of course,

04:30 in South Australia, they were attracted out there because it was easier mining and these people were very skilled. So that's what brought them to Australia. And we left when I was ten, the family moved to South Australia, the reason being because my mother who knew all about miners' lives and sometimes

05:00 deaths determined that her kids weren't going to grow up in a mining town because that was the principal source of employment in the goldfield and despite that in the last 20 years I've had a mine of my own in Tasmania, a tin mine. However, she took us out of South Australia so

05:30 although I went back there as a director of a mineral exploration company and spent about four years altogether in various places including the Kimberley, South Australia is where I received most of my education and from there that I joined the air force in 1941.

06:00 **And what do you recall about Boulder?**

It wasn't an unhappy life. There wasn't a great division between the rich and the poor. So there was no climate of distinction. We didn't sort of, abhor the idea that there were people that were much better off than we were.

06:30 I suppose the greatest sign of affluence was you had a motorcar. There weren't very many of them. Our family had a horse and what they call a trap that would seat about four people. That was a great Sunday afternoon jaunt to go into town on this horse and trap and because we'd all dress up it was quite a

social

07:00 occasion. So we didn't live in either Boulder as a township or Kalgoorlie, we lived on what was known as Boulder blocks. These were areas set aside for mining but it didn't appear to have any prospectivity from the big mining companies and they allowed you to build a house. And people just did that. There were no sort of streets.

07:30 If you wanted your house facing that way, this way, any way. So these scattered houses were just plonked down on these so called blocks and my people didn't even build the house, they just bought it, somebody else had died or something and so that's where we lived. So there were wide open spaces around us, in fact quite a few abandoned mine shafts

08:00 which were done by individual miners, they weren't big mining company operations, and they were a bit dangerous because they'd only been fenced around with a couple of strands of wire and there'd been instances where people got drunk and would wander off in the night and fall down the shaft. So it was a bit of a hazardous thing. In addition to that, across the railway line which was past our home

08:30 there were enormous dumps. They called them the cyanide dumps. Cyanide is used in the process of extracting the gold from the ground up rock containing gold and they ground it very, very finely, small grains of sand in it, cyanide was added to this to help extract the gold. Well, once they'd done that

09:00 the liquid mess would pour out, then another layer, and some of the dumps were 50, 60 feet high and cover 20, 30 acres. When it dried out and there was a strong easterly wind or something, this dust would blow. But fortunately cyanide changes its nature

09:30 after it's been exposed to the sunlight for some time so it wasn't a health hazard, but it was a dust hazard and we suffered from enormous dust storms particularly in the summer. This came about because there were no other local sources of fuel to drive the mining machinery. And so they had teams of woodcutters that would go out

10:00 and cut down trees for miles and miles around and this would be put on to a small railway, brought to the mines and burnt to generate heat to the boilers and make the mine. Not only to drive the mine machinery but in the early days to distil some of the water from the mine

10:30 to get rid of any impurities and any arsenic and anything else. So this was a vital part of maintaining the gold industry was chopping down trees but, of course, you deforested an enormous area and there was nothing to hold the earth together when you had a strong blow so every home had this dust problem.

11:00 And my mother's greatest possession was a piano. She was a good pianist and she had this lovely piano and as soon as the wind started blowing everything would be covered with sheets and windows blocked and so on and the sun would be blocked out. And there are times I remember coming home from school, which I had to walk home from school, and I had to

11:30 disobey a family rule, "Don't ever walk on the railway line," because you'd get lost in this thick dust storm. So I'd follow the railway line and roughly knew where my home was because otherwise you'd be completely blown like almost in the Antarctic. So that was a bit of life. But we had a happy life.

12:00 **How long were you there in Boulder for?**

Well, we left when I was ten so that would have been 1928.

And your father?

Father wasn't a miner, he broke this tradition of mining. But he worked for a contractor, a cartage contractor. This was to cart all from a particular mine to a place where it was processed because this rock had to be

12:30 crushed and chopped down into finer and finer pieces so that it could be treated. In those days they didn't use motorised vehicles for moving the ore, horses and drays. So my father was a good horseman because he'd come off the farm and he'd be in charge of horses and drays. I never actually saw him doing any of this work.

13:00 Although on one occasion he had a fractious horse that got away and he tried to restrain it and he was kicked in the ribs by this horse and it was an awesome moment for me because I thought he was going to die and he was very ill for quite a long time. That was another feature of the mining fraternity,

13:30 there were no worker's compensation or anything like that if you were injured. If a miner was killed in a mining accident, the rest of the workers would give up a day's pay for the widow. But there were no company handouts or any legal responsibility. An occupation that you took on at

14:00 voluntarily and that's how it was people got killed and injured as well. So he was off work for about four or five weeks and didn't get anything out of it. Although his mates came to his rescue. So that was a kind of, well, everybody understood it. I suppose, the thing about uniformity is

14:30 the fact that there's certainty but in retrospect it was a vicious thing because the mining companies

were mostly from England and they made enormous fortunes out of gold in Kalgoorlie. So I suppose you can't blame them for not understanding because this was a tradition that had gone

15:00 on for centuries that workers took the risk. But it seems grossly unfair and this is one of the reasons, of course, why my mother wanted us out of the place. The most available areas or facilities for a higher education was the School of Mines.

15:30 And although they taught geology as a part of the mining process, it was a mine that you studied. How to sink a mine, how to conduct mining and so on. It was all the mechanics of mining and that meant spending a lot of time under ground. And incidentally, I've been down many mines because of my mineral exploration

16:00 activities. They drill into the rock that's got the ore in it, that's the mineralised whatever it is that you're looking for, gold in this case, and put explosives into the hole and have a long fuse and then they blow out this great heap of rock. Well, it comes out in chunks.

16:30 They're a great size. They have this team of fellows that go in and belt this with hammers and break it up so it sits on the truck and that's pulled back where it goes into a lift that brings it up to the surface. Well, in the course of this they create a roof of all the area that's been blown out and the rocks come under enormous pressure from

17:00 these explosives so before the miners go back to bring this broken up rock, somebody has to go in to check the roof because this is where most people get injured by chunks falling from the roof of this area that you've cut out. And this is done by a safety man and his job was to, he had a long wooden pole

17:30 with a bit of metal thing on the end of it and he'd go in and start prodding it all and be ready to run if any came down. None out, the safety man had declared it safe that the miners go. It was pretty hairy and they're still doing similar things today.

Do you recall any accidents underground?

18:00 Well, my grandfather on my mother's side was a miner, and he was in the cage, you know the cage that goes down and they're quite large, about this size, and you'd get about 40, 50 men into it. And they'd pack the men in

18:30 so tightly in those days that you could only stand with your hands beside you or on your shoulders because there were so many people pressed against you that you couldn't move. Well, he was in this particular cage full of mines and there was only two of them had their hands on their shoulders like this and

19:00 the cable broke and the cage plunged from the surface to the bottom of the shaft and there was a bar across the top, within reach in this cage and my grandfather and this other guy grabbed it and they were the only two that survived the fall.

19:30 Curiously enough or sadly enough, after he retired he went to visit his son-in-law who was a Baptist minister in South Australia, he and his wife went there for a holiday and he said, "I'll paint the house for you." So he got up on the ladder, fell off the ladder and was killed. So after escaping that horrific

20:00 fall he had to fall off a damn ladder. So that was one that I heard of, but of course kids wouldn't be allowed. They don't allow children in the mine and they never allowed women in the mine. Children for obvious reasons and women would bring bad luck. So women never ever and it's only in the last 20 years when

20:30 there's been what they call a tourist mine opened up in Kalgoorlie, they take you down and show you the works and got a few guides there plugging holes, that women have been allowed in the mine, for that reason. But that's another thing that's probably hundreds of years old. They probably let one woman in and the next day they had an accident and said, "Right, that's it."

21:00 But some of my earliest memories, as a kid, I shared a room with my brother which was near the kitchen in our home and my father got up early about 5 or 6 o'clock and my mother would be up and I'd be woken, not by any noise because they used to get around very

21:30 quietly, but there was a smell of frying bacon and toast, bread being toasted and then you'd hear the sound of, because we had what they call a wood fire oven and so on and you put wood in it for fuel and the fire never really ever went out, they'd just stir it up and put some more wood in it and you'd hear the scrape of

22:00 the ash being disturbed and they'd put a slice of bread in there and that toasted and of course as it got on in the day and I could lie in bed and I could hear the burnt bits being scraped off and then the smell of bacon, that would wake me and then I could hear the door closing very softly as my father left for work. That was the earliest thing I can remember about the place.

22:30 So I must have been about four or five or something. Anyway, we went to South Australia and that was a bit unhappy. My mother was asked by an aunt who lived in South Australia, in Adelaide, she was elderly and she needed someone to look after and she said, "Look, bring your family over here, when I die

23:00 you can have the house and so on." So that wasn't the motivation for leaving but it was an extra incentive. Well we went over there and mother looked after her aunt and she was a very pleasant lady although as kids we didn't take much notice. And she died after about a year and

23:30 she had children, but one was a lawyer and the others were up somewhere, but she didn't confirm her offer in her will and the son, the lawyer said, "I don't know anything about any arrangement my mother made, so as far as I'm concerned, I'm the beneficiary." So we were asked to leave and that was a psychological shock

24:00 which disturbed my parents quite a bit. My Dad was working at that stage for an electricity commission in South Australia and then the depression hit in 1929 and it was a case of last on, first off. So rapidly growing unemployment and I'd say he never had any regular job for the next five years.

24:30 That was hard. But again, we never, ever thought of ourselves deprived because there were lots of people without jobs and we said, "Oh well, that's the way it is," and we didn't, neither my parents nor the kids ever spent any time pondering the issues about distribution of wealth. This was how it was, so get on with it.

25:00 So we went to school there.

Can you just tell us how your father coped with that five years of not working, what would he do?

Well, he had a friend who had an orchard up in the Adelaide hills. They'd been mates together somewhere

25:30 else and this fellow had a withered arm and he had difficulty using some implements so my father would ride his bicycle all the way up to this place, it would take him a couple of hours to get there, and his friend couldn't pay him anything for any of this help but he'd bring home a sugar bag full of

26:00 apples or something and that was pretty good. There were always bits of things to be done. Somebody would need a hand to pull down a building or something and my father would pop into it and get a day's pay. And then they brought in this, I suppose you'd call it a dole.

26:30 And people who didn't have a job could apply for this welfare thing for rations. And you didn't get any money, yes, you got some money for rent, but you'd get vouchers that you could use for food and in order to make this stretch you'd buy the cheapest

27:00 cuts and the lowest price groceries and all this sort of thing. But we were never without food. But there was a degrading aspect to this rations thing. And I think they've recognised this in present day welfare, they give you money. How you spend it, the grocer doesn't know or the greengrocer doesn't know

27:30 whether you've got the money from what you've earned or whether it was a hand out from the government. There's not that sort of stigma, which was very evident in those days, and the word "rations" sounded a bit military. This was after World War I and the economy had never really recovered from World War I, both in terms of loss of manpower and some of our

28:00 best people were killed on the Western Front. So we lost as a nation, we lost that crop of top people. The cost of the war was a great burden, great burden.

Did you have any family members on your parent's side..?

No, my father didn't go into the war.

28:30 I don't know why. He wasn't a pacifist or anything. I think there was a policy of, well he was a young man, but at that stage he was working on the railways building the east, west railway line and they seemed to want to retain,

29:00 that was 1917 when that was completed – that was during the war. Maybe they wanted to retain enough skilled workers to complete the line. I don't know. Well, most people didn't go to the war but nevertheless, he wasn't one of them. They had an uncle who was in the war and he came back. Pam's father was a soldier in

29:30 the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in France. But to some it was a great adventure that ended pretty tragically.

Do you recall anything about it from your childhood in Kalgoorlie?

The war?

Yes.

Well, I was only, let me see, I was born in March 1918 and the war ended officially in

30:00 1918, in the same year, although peace wasn't signed until the following year. So no, I wouldn't

remember. Although you can trick yourselves with these things. My mother had so well described her mother-in-law, that was my grandmother. She was tall, she had red hair, she had a bad temper,

30:30 I assume my mother didn't get on, mainly because my grandmother had a patronising "told her so" sort of an attitude. So there was this impression of grandma and I could see her, red hair. Then when I started to delve into family history a bit and look closely, I was only nine months old when she died. So I couldn't possibly have remembered what she looked like. So I know how tricky it can be.

31:00 In my first run of my so called memoirs, I described grandma and how bad tempered she was and all this sort of thing, poor old lady. Her husband, my grandfather, I remember him dying, he died when we were in Boulder and I must have been about eight at the time. He was a nice old man, but I never, ever really knew his wife,

31:30 but I allowed myself to think that I did.

So he lived in Boulder, your grandfather?

There was sort of an understanding that when you got too old to look after yourself you went and lived with your children and I suppose even if you weren't feeling kindly about this arrangement you knew that one day you may

32:00 be calling on your own children. But this was the accepted thing. But, I guess, it was a period in which three generations – it was more the case that three generations would live in a house. And that was a kind of welfare arrangement which

32:30 disappeared. Lucky to find one generation in a house now. But anyway that's social commentary, I won't involve myself in that.

But social commentary's good. But I'm curious about your education in Adelaide.

In Adelaide, well, I just went to the local school and then when I graduated from the primary school I went into a technical school

33:00 because I wanted to be a draughtsman and I achieved that, I got a job with a small engineering company. First of all just going in on Saturday morning to clean up and things like that but I gradually got involved in it.

A technical draughtsman?

Yes, engineering drawing, yeah. But I studied most of that

33:30 by correspondence. There was an outfit that may be still in business called International Correspondence School. They offered the best course that didn't involve having to go to night school. Night school was always a bit of a problem thing to get there. I guess we lived in Adelaide, we lived in an area outside

34:00 the suburb and if you travelled in by tram, which was the nearest public transport, that would cost something and in tough times you didn't waste money, the alternative was to walk or ride a bike. That sounds pretty easy but in winter when it was raining and so on. So this International Correspondence School wasn't all that expensive,

34:30 so I signed up with them and they were very good. All your drawings would be posted in to them and they'd correct them and offer comments and so on. So I got through that and that was equivalent to what you needed to be a draughtsman and I did some interesting things. But then I became interested in flying. There was no possibility of

35:00 being able to take flying lessons, which were available out at Parafield, which is just outside of Adelaide, and my brother and I sometimes used to ride our bikes out to Parafield just to watch the planes. But then my aunt, my father's sister, she married an Englishman and

35:30 she was well past middle age when they married, he was a widower. And he was interested in the fact that I was crazy about aeroplanes so he bought me a subscription, which he paid for annually, to two magazines, The Aeroplane and another one called Flight and I used to read all the ads and so forth. So I got to be fairly knowledgeable about these things and I put this up to

36:00 the recruiting people when I applied to join the air force, because everybody that joined the air force wanted to be a pilot. And I remember saying to these chaps, "Well, I want to be a pilot." "No problem about that, that's your choice, go for it." Well when we were called up after being sent to Bradfield Park, just out

36:30 on the North Shore of Sydney, that was the number two initially training school and the CO [Commanding Officer] called a parade and he said, "Now look, I know all you fellows want to be pilots but you can't be because we don't need everybody to be a pilot. We need gunners, radio people, navigators and so on. So some of you will be selected for pilot

37:00 training and others will get different courses." So we listened to this in stunned silence and then he said, "At the end of this parade, go over to the notice board, there's lists of names and whatever you are

allocated, that's it because you're not here long enough for us to make up our minds what you're best at so it's pretty arbitrary, A-F [air force] – there're pilots and ..."

37:30 Some of the chaps got absolutely irate about this and one of the early courses in this school was air force law. They gave you a smattering of the outlines of the Air Force Act and so forth and one thing we did learn about was a process known as the redress of grievance. If you had a grievance there was a procedure and you wrote to the commanding officer

38:00 and he was obliged to give you an interview. In practice the CO didn't do anything of the kind, he just delegated it to one of his officers. So people were writing out this redress of grievance statements complaining that they'd been misled and they wanted to be pilots and they had a feeling they'd be a natural pilot and this was an unfair process. So I didn't bother about it this, I thought, "oh, paperwork they're not going

38:30 to take any notice of it." But fortunately the commanding officer delegated to a chap who in civilian life had been a real estate agent but he'd served as a balloon observer in World War I, that's the bloke that goes up in the balloon and reports the artillery, where the shells are fired. And he decided to deal brusquely

39:00 with these complainers, "Yes, of course, you want to be a pilot and you've only been allocated an air gunner. Now the reason for this is, of course, quite obvious to me, you've heard that the casualty rate among air gunners is higher and you're just trying to dodge it." Fortunately we had in our midst a chap who was a lawyer in civilian life

39:30 and he was outraged by this so he demanded that he speak to the CO. And he told us about and he said, "Sir, this is what is being said, now all of these people are volunteers, they've joined up to beat Hitler, now here's one of your officers telling them that they're cowards, now if you don't put a stop to it I know what steps I can take to enforce it."

40:00 It ceased immediately. But that was how my interest in flying ended up. I was signed to be wireless air gunner, as they called it. Which involved, after initial training where you virtually learn how to salute, who to salute and the Morse code, and then we went to Ballarat to do a

40:30 six-month radio course and from there to Evans Head in New South Wales to do a gunnery course and bombing and learning about weapons and so forth and from there to a what they call a pre-em vacation depot, which again was at the old ITS [Initial Training School] at Bradfield Park.

41:00 And the next thing we're on a ship to Singapore.

Tape 2

00:32 **You were going to talk about the night that war was declared?**

That was a Sunday, so on Monday morning, my cousin, Rhys Evans, who was living with us at the time, his people were in the country, we went into the recruiting office which was in North Terrace in Adelaide.

01:00 And so did about 5,000 other people and quite clearly they weren't going to be able to handle it so they had a couple of sergeants there who went around handing out bits of paper that you had to fill in and send off and of course, this upset a lot of people because they thought they'd be able to go home in uniform, you know, crazy.

01:30 So then for the first time, I was there many, many times thereafter, "Don't you bastards know there's a war on?" The fact we were being sent home. That was December, so of course it wasn't until the following year that I even got an interview.

That's a pretty amazing response isn't it, I mean, instant response?

Oh yes, because we saw,

02:00 I mean, they'd been enough about Hitler in the paper for a long time and admittedly we didn't know just how horrific were the results of his regime. We did know that this was clearly a bloke about to conquer the whole of Europe and didn't care who died in the process and he had to be stopped because if Britain went under, Australia was indefensible and so

02:30 we all had a strong sense of kinship towards the English people. We still had relatives over there, never, ever met them but we knew about them. It wasn't in their defence, England was the key to the whole of our defence. So we had to stop this guy, that was the motivation.

03:00 My uncle was an Englishman, married to my aunt, he was of course in World War I, got through, he was one of the old contemptibles as they call them, they were the very earliest English soldiers who were called up to serve and he went through from 1914 to 1918 which was pretty remarkable because the

casualties in

03:30 first years were horrific. He took hold of me and he said, “You know you have to satisfy yourself that the war is justified,” and he quoted from Henry V, “Is this a just war?” Henry, incidentally, if you remember Shakespeare, he gave some very

04:00 unconvincing answers to why his war was a just war and the soldiers to whom he was talking, they didn’t know they were talking to the King on the night before the battle, they said, “People killed in battle do not die well,” and he goes on to describe all those arms and legs cut off and so the King bears

04:30 a great burden that unless his war is just, then he cannot justify what is going to happen to people tomorrow. So my uncle who was a bit of a scholar he’d say, “Is the King’s war just, are you satisfied?” I said, “Absolutely.” “Right, go for it but don’t go because you think it’s going to be a great adventure. I can assure you it’s nothing like that.”

05:00 And so I went with a sort of, fairly well balanced idea of what to expect. And one of my expectations was not that I’d ever survive war. I thought that being early, see I was in the number two course at Bradfield Park and someone else went to Singapore, about ten,

05:30 the rest of them went to the Middle East or to England and I think there’s only five of us survived the war and there’s only about three of us left on that course. So we were not to know that at the time, but we knew that getting in early was going to be dangerous. But I

06:00 wouldn’t say I was utterly convinced, but I didn’t really expect to survive the war. I thought, “You’re bound to cop something either you get injured or knocked off.” So that was my attitude but of course, the further I got away from uncle the less I remembered him saying. So it was in fact an exciting time.

06:30 I had a fellow that I used to play soccer with, George Emery. George and I were called up together and we stayed together through the whole of the training period. He went first of all to an operational training school in Rhodesia, as it was then, and he was killed in a training crash. Which I didn’t know

07:00 until I got back from Java. The first news I had was that George had been killed. So that was the beginning of the war and we had a desire to get in and stop Hitler.

Were you really clear that you wanted to be a pilot?

Oh yes, we had no, sort of, concept of anybody else but just

07:30 flying an aeroplane. But you know, really, I don’t know whether I would have made a good, then I didn’t know, because I mean, I’ve done a bit of flying since but, I don’t know whether I would have done any better than. And I survived, with a company later on, two crashes, or two and half crashes, I’ll tell you about that later.

08:00 Yes, I survived two crashes in which I could have easily been killed and I’ve got a description of one of those in that stuff that I’ve typed up there. So what started that?

I don’t know, but we’re there now, but the reason I ask that question is because you got to Bradfield Park, you did some training

08:30 **and on a very flimsy way to allocate people to …?**

Oh well I can understand that. You know, when we arrived at Bradfield Park, the very hut that we were put into, carpenters were still sawing bits of wood and hammering and so on and there were no

09:00 sewerage and open latrines and, you know, quite primitive, it changed later on but we could see then why it, there was utterly no point calling people up if you didn’t have the facilities to house them and train them and we were still in civilian clothes almost to within days of leaving

09:30 the place. They gave you a set of overalls which you wore on all occasions, otherwise you just wore your clothes that you came with.

With the course, did they have an assessment?

Oh no, no, everybody did the same things, the Morse code, lots of drill and marching around Lindfield, which is

10:00 the suburb in which Bradfield Park was located. And that was great stuff, you know, cold mornings and everybody marching and being yelled at by drill instructors and so on. So that was quite good. There was a lot of sickness. Mostly flu and cold and things like that but we got through.

10:30 **So at what point did you get your allocation, navigator gunner, you were saying?**

Wireless air gunner. That was good that was the day the CO made his speech of classification. But the course didn’t change because everybody had to do this initial training and then

11:00 if you were selected for pilot training then you’d go to a different training, you’d got to the Elementary

Flying Training School or Navigators' School or whatever. I don't think I met any of the blokes – oh, one chap – that on my initial

11:30 training school course, he went to the Middle East, survived and I met him somewhere later and he was the only one of the fellows that got a pilot's course that I met again. But unlike the army that tended to retain people from different states or different parts of states as a unit, as a regiment or whatever, the air force never, ever had that.

12:00 If you were posted you'd go to a totally different social group in another squadron or whatever your class was. So I flew with one fellow, Geoff Hitchcock, out of Richmond in New South Wales and then eventually up into New Guinea, Milne Bay, Port Moresby and all the rest of it

12:30 and we flew together for 15 months, which was the longest they could do. Then there were four blokes who were in a crew in Malaya and Sumatra and Java, came back to Australia and were assigned to a squadron in Western Australia and it's the only instance where a whole crew worked through the

13:00 whole of the war, operationally and I think you probably interviewed one of them. Well, he has been interviewed, Scotty Jensen, 'cause he lives in Orange and he told me that he had been interviewed. So that was unusual, what was usual was that you got split up and

13:30 whether that was a good thing or not, I don't know. But it was the nature of the air force that that was inevitable and if you got transferred onto a different kind of aircraft then you went and did some training on that so you'd be in another group. So that was Bradfield Park.

So what school did you move onto after Bradfield Park?

Ballarat, and that was Ballarat common,

14:00 I think, constructed a radio-training place there, which included flying and working radio from the aircraft. But you spent hours and hours doing Morse code up, to 25 words a minute. I remember we had some Americans come to the school, I don't know how

14:30 they got there, because America wasn't in the war then. But these Americans came and this chap from Alabama said, "Sergeant, how fast do you have to do this stuff?" And he said, "25 words a minute passed out." "25 words a minute – in Alabama we don't even talk that fast."

15:00 But that was the standard, you passed out at 25 words a minute, you had to do radio theory, electrical theory, maintenance of radio transmitters and receivers and radio direction finding and all the things associated with radio. And of course then

15:30 you got some flying experience. They had a number of DC2s, which they'd snaffle from German National Airlines, I think, they just took them over. And they had four sets of radio equipment in there and the pilots used to fly around and had to communicate with the ground and so on. So that was a bit of flying.

16:00 In fact that was the first bit of flying that any of us had done since we'd joined the air force. Then when we'd completed that course we went up to Evans Head to do the gunnery, and that was a lot of flying. In a plane called a Fairey Battle, you've probably heard of those. And you had to do gunnery. First of all,

16:30 they'd drop something in the sea and you'd have to shoot at it, then they had another plane hauling a thing they called a drone and you had to shoot at that. Well, that sounds easy enough except that you had to remove the canopy – there was a sliding canopy in these things for the gunner in the back – and point your gun out

17:00 and of course the minute you did that a gale would enter the area, so you'd be fighting this gale, wearing goggles, which affected your ability to aim and of course, you had all this other flying gear and your parachute and so on and of course the smell of engine oil and some of the exhaust would get in there. So they weren't really a very comfortable aeroplane. And

17:30 one of the fellows that belonged to my church club, he got into the air force before the war as a cadet and he'd reached a pilot officer rank and he was flying one of these things up there so I did my best to fly with him when I could. And poor old Jimmy, he was flying a Spitfire and he got shot down over France

18:00 about six months later. So the gunnery one was go, go, go. From first light you'd be flying or learning how to strip guns and why they worked and how they worked and it was a very extensive, hands on sort of course. One township we never, ever

18:30 went to, simply because we didn't have time, and that was Evans Head. There was a bit of a strange relationship between the fishing folk and townsfolk and this air force station. No doubt the township did well out of the presence of the air force, airfield and so on. But because we were using it for gunnery and bombing, there was an area

19:00 from the coastline out to sea, in which nobody was allowed to enter because it was dangerous, we were dropping bombs and all the rest of it. Well, this meant that some of the best fishing spots around Evans

Head were denied all their people that traditionally fished there. But they were quick off the mark they got better outboard motors hooked onto their

19:30 boats and they got to know the bombing schedules and as soon it was over, they'd shoot in and they didn't have to fish because the bombing would stun all the fish so all they had to do was scoop them up. So the air force on one hand was denying them entrance and was standing back watching them get all these dead fish. Anyway, there were a couple of planes that went in up there,

20:00 engine failures.

Was that while you were there?

No, not while I was there. We heard about it when we got up there.

Who were piloting the planes?

Well they had a flying staff. Like, for instance, Jimmy McIntosh that I was telling you about, he was just assigned there to fly them. And the Fairey Battles, although they were pretty slow, they were an obsolete aircraft.

20:30 One of the first German planes to be shot down from the air, was from the Fairey Battle. But they were chopped to pieces against (UNCLEAR), nearly twice their speed.

Had they been in the First World War?

No, they were developed in between the wars.

21:00 We were always critical particularly when we were in Singapore with the RAF [Royal Air Force], there was a lot of stuff about England being unprepared but given the fact that the electorate was dead against spending money on armaments. They'd suffered so many casualties in World War I that the idea of war was just

21:30 horrific. So they wouldn't allow governments to spend money on armaments and couldn't just go and buy an aeroplane off the shelf, it takes years to develop and develop and develop. In fact the Hudsons that I flew in, most of my flying was done in Lockheeds and Hudsons, were American and there's an interesting story about that

22:00 but nevertheless, they didn't do what everybody expected them to do, the Brits, but they didn't have the facilities to do it. It was like having obsolete aircraft. When we were on the ship going to Singapore, just a few miles before we got into Keppel Harbour, we saw these biplanes staggering along at a full 90 knots

22:30 and we thought, "Oh, training? Nonsense." These were the first-line aircrafts. And they got shot down by shooting peas and a lot of good guys were killed. But you do the best with what you've got.

What about the guns that you were trained on?

Oh, well every type of gun. The Browning, which was mostly used in the Hudson turrets and in the wings; the pilots' guns were

23:00 Browning. And we had the Vickers, what they call GO Gun. GO stands for Gas Operated. The gas, which propels the bullet, some of that is used to push the bullet, out of the gun, out of the barrel and send it on its way. But they have a little hole in the side of the

23:30 works. Some of this gas escapes in the hole and there is enough gas pressure to reset the gun for the next shot. And that's how the gas-operated guns did it. And they were very good. Most suitable in an aircraft because when you fire a gun it gets very hot and being in an aircraft there's plenty of

24:00 air to cool it. So these were good. But they were mostly side mounting, shooting out of windows.

So your training at gunnery school, you did obviously a certain amount on the ground.

Oh yes, well, you had to do the theory of the gun and how it works and you had to be able to pull them to pieces and put them together and so forth, and how to clean them.

24:30 Because in operational areas you don't always have the same facilities as you do when you're working out of a regular base. The crew, in fact, have got to do their own things if nobody else is there to do it. So you have to know how to arm the aircraft; that was the gunner's responsibility; put

25:00 more bombs in, if you needed more bombs and ensure that they were safe and so on and so forth. To prevent a bomb going off prematurely they had a safety pin in the nose of the bomb and there was a big ring on the end on the end of this and so you'd have to ensure

25:30 that before you took off that those four rings for four bombs were hanging on a little hook so the pilot could see that if he dropped the bombs they're going to go off. That was the gunner's responsibility to know how to handle the bombs. And then of course after you landed you had to put the pins back in again.

What sort of bombs were you handling?

Mostly high explosive.

26:00 But you had bombs suitable for anti-submarine work and they had a different impact arrangement. Later on when I was in Catalinas, we were dropping mines and they were a different proposition but I was radio all the time in Catalinas and you had to have armourers

26:30 to look after mines because they were pretty tricky. But they were still a part of the armament. Still on training, that was Evans Head and from there we were allegedly qualified to go and fight a war.

Well just before that, can you tell us a bit more about Ballarat and

27:00 **radio school?**

Again that was another intense, because you still did things like route marching to keep you fit, but the emphasis, the hands on bit was learning about radios and not much maintenance really because when you're in the air

27:30 there's very little you can get at. But, tuning to get on the right frequencies, this was a bit tricky, so you did a lot of that under the supervision of a corporal who was well qualified. And they would introduce little faults into the equipment and you had to find out why it wasn't working and you had to

28:00 be able to tune it into a particular frequency. And we went out flying, the group that had flown before you, they'd naturally tuned it in and communicated so somebody would get in the plane and upset all the settings so that you had to do your own settings to get on frequency. And it tested us, because if you couldn't communicate

28:30 with the ground it meant that you hadn't tuned it in properly. The transmitters were a bit tricky.

So what was the technology like?

Oh, pretty good. In fact it was quite a bit more hands on than the later gear that came out

29:00 in the more modern aircraft, you didn't have to do a lot of the things that you had to do with this earlier stuff. So you were probably better trained in the primitive stuff. For instance, the thing called an oscillator which generates a frequency signal, now,

29:30 to get your receiver where you're on the same frequency with your receiver and your transmitter, you had to go through a process of making this set oscillated. Now it was an audio frequency oscillation because when you're using Morse code, you're not interested in voice transmission. It's

30:00 just an ordinary audio signal as far your receiver is concerned and so on. And so you had to make sure that your receiver was going to produce the right sort of sound and there were a couple of tricky things about that, but with the later gear you never had to worry about it.

30:30 You just had to turn a knob and you were either on voice or Morse code. And I guess one of the features of the training is the repetition of tasks so that when you're in the air, which is a different story - first of all there's a lot of turbulence, you're bouncing around,

31:00 pencils disappear off your desk and the static in your earphone is enormous and if there is any lightning about you could hear this crackle, bash, stomp and you're trying to read somebody's message, in Morse code, through this. So you'd have to

31:30 repeat from there to there, because you'd missed it in all this crashing and bashing. But until you've been in the air and realised just how rough it can be for the operator to get the message in and out then it certainly put everything into perspective and particularly if it got rough enough that you had to have your seatbelt on,

32:00 otherwise you'd get chucked against the wall. So it was good. They did a good job and the air force had a pretty long history of being involved in radio and so they had some very good people.

What about the communication between the crew on the plane, did you learn about that,

32:30 **the protocol?**

On intercom?

Yes.

Oh, this was, you know, you did what suited the situation and depends who you flew with. This is another aspect of the air force, it had a lot of hangover from the traditional or the early

33:00 Air Force. It was full of class distinction in the sense of rank, had authority and if you weren't a commissioned officer then clearly you were of lower intelligence and probably ate your peas off your

knife. It wasn't really prepared

33:30 for this influx of blokes from civilian life that had to be trained in a hurry and this distinction between the permanent air force and the intake for this Empire Air Training Scheme was something they hadn't adjusted themselves for. So I flew with a fellow, he was later killed, but Cyril

34:00 never once in the whole time I flew with him, called me by my name, he just said, "Sergeant." Now, I know other crews, it was 'Bill' and 'Jack' and so on but there were enough people like Cyril for us to be aware that the permanents were a cut above the rest of us and he was

34:30 determined to maintain this distinction. And we used to see films about the RAF, you know, the Battle of Britain and all that stuff, and we saw how crews were assembled before an operation and how they were briefed on the weather, on the radio signals, on where they were going to bomb, timing over the target, everything, the whole crew

35:00 and hundreds of crews were all briefed together in this enormous hall and I can remember seeing pictures of the intelligence officer with a map telling them where to go. We had nothing like that. When we did our first, well not our first because that was a different thing, but when we were operating out of Sembawang on Singapore Island,

35:30 there was an RAF station and they had what they called a tannoy system. A tannoy was just a public address system but Tannoy apparently was the brand name. Whatever news you got came over the Tannoy. The Tannoy would go, rumble, rumble at three or four o'clock in the morning and, "The crew of the following aircraft report." Well, all of the crew except,

36:00 well that was four of us, three of us would go down to the airfield to our aircraft and start checking it and the skipper would go to the operations room to get all the information about what we were about to do. Well, this would go on for a bit, then all these pilots would

36:30 get into the back of one truck and go around the airfield and drop pilots off at their respective aircraft, "You've got to be in the air in two minutes." So everybody would get in the plane and the skipper would go up the front and start the engine and start checking and no time to talk to the crew, the rest of the crew and I remember once,

37:00 when you take off you usually go up at a prescribed height, say 2,000 feet, that's the top of the climb. I waited to the top of the climb because at that stage the pilot's concerned with the throttle adjustments and so on and you don't disturb, but when I got to the top of the climb, I got on the intercom and I said, "Where are

37:30 we going, sir?" "What do you want to know for?" I said, "Well, if we happen to come down, I'd like to know where I've been to start walking from." He didn't seem to think that was funny but really that was how, and if I hadn't asked he wouldn't bother to tell us, which is strange. But I knew from conversations with other crews

38:00 that they weren't all like that but there was enough of them to give this impression of, well, you know, "You're carried along because the rules say I have to have an air gunner and I got to have a radio." It was strange. Although one fellow wrote his memoirs after the war and said that it was a great pity that they never got know the others.

38:30 And as for not knowing the people you were flying with, they didn't even know the names of the fellows that were serving the aircraft and in my view they were more important than the pilot because if they didn't do their job you were out. So that was a bit of a social thing but that was a hangover from the RAF and we were pretty critical of the RAF in Singapore and I've written about that.

39:00 But they'd been there too long these fellows. A lot of them were about to be recycled back to England because they'd been in Singapore for two years. Well, when the Japanese war was imminent, they cancelled all that. So there were some of the airmen in the RAF and they maintained the rank of

39:30 AC2 [Aircraftsman], that's the lowest form of life, and they got a miserable bit of pay and out of that they had to send a bit home to their dependents and then there were some that had had children that they'd never seen, the wife was pregnant and had given birth after the husband had been sent out to Singapore

40:00 and the kid was nearly two years old and they'd never seen them and then of course there was a lot of marriages that broke up and engagements and the fellows would get these 'Dear John' letters [letter informing that a relationship is over], "Sorry John, I've found another fellow and ta ta." And they'd put these letters up on the notice board in a nappy, you've probably heard of a nappy,

40:30 with a blank piece of paper beside it, "You're invited to put your comment.," Some of them were unprintable and they'd mail it back to the lady that sent it. So you can hardly expect these blokes to be bursting with enthusiasm when they led such a lousy life. And the other thing that we had against them, the 'pongos' as we called them,

41:00 with good reason, they hated taking baths or a shower and it got so bad that they issued an order that everybody, regardless of rank, had to on a certain day, had to take a shower. And they put military or air

force police at the entrance to the cubicles, well they weren't cubicles they were just showers, 50 or 60 of them, and

41:30 you had to strip, put your clothing over your arm, have your name ticked off by this policeman and go and take a shower. And some of these fellows were competing to get from one end of the shower thing to the other without getting a drop of water on them, I couldn't believe it.

Tape 3

00:30 From the pre application depot we went on a ship called the Marella, which you've probably run into that name before. It was owned by Burns Philp and they had a shipping run to a lot of the Pacific Islands and between Australia and Singapore. So it was a leisurely journey. We were well fed and well

01:00 housed and it was really a luxury cruise. We stopped in Brisbane and we got up around to Darwin and then headed off to the Dutch East Indies, the Netherlands East Indies. We stopped in Jakarta, no, not Jakarta, it was Surabaya, which was a port. We were there for about five or six days and entertained by the Dutch people.

01:30 We got to know some of the air force blokes and then from there to Singapore. As I said, we were greeted by these bi-planes, which we couldn't believe because the stories were that Singapore was impregnable for a number of reasons and they had these great naval guns shooting everywhere,

02:00 underground hangars with the latest American aircraft and all this sort of thing. It was a lot of hooey. And we quickly found that out. But we went straight from the wharf to Sembawang and then we were told which squadron we were going to. 8 Squadron at that stage was stationed at Kota Bharu, which is up near the Thailand

02:30 border on the east coast of Malaya and those that didn't go to 8 Squadron stayed at No. 1 Squadron which was based at that time in Sembawang. In the following August we changed places and that is why No. 1 Squadron was in Kota Bharu when the Japanese first attacked. So we only spent two days

03:00 in Sembawang getting acquainted with the gun turrets on the Hudson bomber aircrafts. And this was pretty useful because we'd never seen anything like that. We'd heard about it, we'd seen photos of it but we'd never seen a Baldwin turret and they're pretty sophisticated. So

03:30 from there by train up to Kota Bharu. Interesting journey. We learned about third class accommodation on the train and how primitive that can be. A lot of the passengers brought their animals with them. Chooks and pigs and things. Not many pigs because the Moslems don't go for that. Anyway, that was the journey. We had an enterprising fellow called Bert Pitman.

04:00 Poor old Bert's long dead. And he was a streetwise sort of a fellow and he decided that there had to be a first class on this train, we were in second class. So he disappeared and came back with the news that he'd bribed the train manager or whatever, that we'd move into first class, which we did, so we enjoyed the best

04:30 of travel. Got to Singapore and introduced, first of all, to our quarters and then to the various officials, the adjutant, and he merely looked at us to see if we were still alive. And then we started meeting other members of the squadron and they were all very friendly, a bit sceptical as to the level of training

05:00 that we'd had because they'd assumed that we'd come straight out of a recruit. Anyway we were able to demonstrate that we knew our stuff and so we were totally accepted.

How long had 8 Squadron been in Kota Bharu?

They'd gone there in March and we joined them in June. No, no, was it like that? Anyway, it's all in the book, I'll check that.

05:30 But they hadn't been there all that long and that was another grout. They were sent up there and found that there was only accommodation for about 50 people. So the first thing that whole lot of them had to do was to get a labour force together to build the buildings they had to sleep in. That's another example of the RAF overconfidence, "Oh yes, there's an air force base there,

06:00 you go there," and you go there and there's nothing. There were no hangars. All the planes were serviced in the open and we were there in the hot season and in the turret, it used to get in to be 112, 115 degrees [Fahrenheit] and it was very, very hot. And of course, the mechanics who had to sometimes get inside the petrol tanks and clean them out or whatever, it must have been absolutely

06:30 horrendous, the heat. But those were the conditions that applied and it continued to apply even when 1 Squadron was up there, we never had any shelter and because of the heat we suffered a great deal from skin problems and I've written about this in my memoirs about how the most common affliction was dhobi's itch.

07:00 This was really saying it's a laundry itch. Dhobi is a laundry, you know. And most of it attacks you in the groin area. It's quite painful, red raw. So at morning parade, fall out the set and 100 people fall out to tend to the medical section, you see, because it's nearby under a

07:30 palm tree and they had these Indian medical orderlies and they had a big basin filled with some white liquid, I don't know what was in it, and they'd take a long straw with a bit of wadding on the end of it and they'd dip it in and you dropped your stride and anoint the affected area with this stuff and it gave wonderful relief for about two minutes and then it started to sting.

08:00 And it would cause great amusement to those who didn't suffer from this to see all these fellows with their shorts down around their knees, waddling away, keeping their legs apart as the stinging finally subsided, you know, back to the job and by the end of the day you'd be just as badly off as you were before. But that was because it was hot and humid and probably, we used to put our laundry out

08:30 to be done by the local villagers, they made a bob or two out of it and then we found they washed them in the Kolaten River.

Can I just ask before you go on, before you embarked, obviously the war in the Middle East was pretty high and the Japanese, this is before Pearl Harbor,

09:00 **so how did you feel about being made…?**

Oh terrible, the war was in Europe and that was where we wanted to go and where we expected to go and the idea of going to Singapore about which all we knew was it was an impregnable fortress, this was a disaster. We thought we'd do a bit of stint there and then they send us to England, but, you know, dream on. Yeah, you're right, nobody was happy about being sent

09:30 to Singapore. The only reason we joined up was to get into a real fighting war and here we were going to a place where there were no blackouts, you could buy anything you wanted there, no shortages of anything. And that was pleasant enough, that's not really what we joined up for.

And also you told us how your scowly uncle had said, "Is it a just war," and, "It's not about adventure," but what was it like, because I assume this was your first time abroad?

10:00 **Yes, for most of us it had been the first time we'd left Australian shores.**

So can you tell us a bit more about the voyage and you went to Surabaya you said for five or six days.

Well we went sight seeing and once the word got around that a ship was in with a lot of Aussies on it and a lot of Royal Navy blokes on it. They didn't even travel in the same class.

10:30 And in fact I got to know one or two of them and invited them up to our part, which is one stage higher and got the word, "Don't do it" and we said, "Well, get stuffed, they're our mates," so we did. But that was part of the scene. Anyway, the word got around that there were all these people and a lot of Dutch people came down in their cars and offered to take us

11:00 for a drive around, a free tour. And that was very pleasant, and then we got invited to an air force mess and that didn't impress us very much. The Dutch were much more formal and so on. They did it out of a sense of duty rather than cause they really liked the look of it. And some of our blokes behaved badly. Not in my

11:30 immediate, but there were three or four engineers that drank too much and made passes at the wives and all that sort of thing, but apart from that it was very pleasant and there was a lot to see. But I did have one fortunate encounter with a native police officer, he was

12:00 very black skinned, but he was the equivalent to a sergeant, and I saw him and I asked him, because a lot of them speak English, with the condition if you're in Holland and you wanted to migrate or take up public service in the NEI [Netherlands East Indies] you had to learn English, so there's a lot of English speaking,

12:30 So I spoke to this guy and told him who I was and so on. So, "Well, what would you like to see?" and I said, "Well, what is there?" So he took me around and introduced me to his family and we discussed a lot of things, prospects for the war and all that sort of thing. So, that was a very interesting episode. But, he did make a claim that this was as far as he was ever likely to go in the police force because he wasn't Dutch.

13:00 And all the good jobs, the top jobs, were reserved for the Dutch. And of course, the Indies were a principal source of revenue for Holland, even back to the days of Stamford Raffles, and it's not always understood that at one stage, Stamford Raffles was the Deputy Governor of Java, because

13:30 when the French made an attempt to take over the NEI or to take over Java. The Brits intervened because they didn't want the French in their province, so they cleaned out the French and installed their own administration and it was Raffles who worked for the East India company

14:00 was appointed Deputy Governor of Java and later he was the Governor of what is the Aceh area of Sumatra, and now see all the trouble they've got there. And they made a pact with the Sultan of Aceh that they'd always provide support, but then they allowed the Dutch back in to Java

14:30 and they said, "Oh, look we don't like this idea of having a Sultan that's up there," and Britain allowed that treaty to wither on the vine and we're still seeing the results of that. Anyway that's another digression but that was the Java visit.

But what sense was there when you went to Java and then Singapore, that the war may have been imminent?

Well there was a lot of sense of relief that we

15:00 were going there because it was a sign that Britain would defend and Australia would defend Singapore and therefore protect Java, but that was a dream that soon crashed. And the blokes that were taken prisoner in Java from No. 1 Squadron, there were about 200 of them, they were pretty bitter about the ease in which the Dutch

15:30 troops gave in. This didn't apply to the Dutch Air Force or the Dutch Navy, they fought pretty bitterly but the troops gave in and there was one instance where an RAF unit was sent off to defend some area, they were armed and so forth, and when they got there the Dutch disarmed them.

16:00 They said, "What for, we're in the middle of a war?" "Oh, well we've decided to quit," and they quit without telling everybody they were going to do it. So it was a difficult time for them. Their position was totally different because their wives and families were there so any reprisal if they continued to fight their families would suffer.

And what was the mood in Singapore when you first arrived?

Well,

16:30 first of all, we had to deal with all this class distinction, which we were ambivalent about it. We were amused by the nonsense that was involved and at the same time irritated that in this day and age these class distinctions were still,

17:00 and they went along through the war. If you've read some of the stuff from Kent Hughes' account of the last days up there when they brought troops back from the mainland and they said, "Right, we'll put them in this area," and they started digging latrine trenches and down came some civil authorities and said, "Hey, hey, hey, you've got no planning permission for this. This is a residential area.

17:30 You can't put up tents." This crazy sort of attitude, but they were supremely confident, there is not doubt about it and what is more, "These piddly Japanese, we'll kick them out in five minutes. Let them come, the sooner the better." And blind Freddy could see. For instance, this was about Japanese pilots, "They've got no night vision,

18:00 even their day vision is pretty crook and they're poor pilots." And a few of our fellows were saying, "If they were that bad, they wouldn't have had an air force, they'd have crashed it long ago, it has to be wrong," and that was the right summary. But no, they were supremely confident and yes there was potential

18:30 for spying and other adverse activities. In the large number of Japanese businessmen in Singapore and on the mainland and they owned rubber plantations and so on and so when things started to get a bit hot,

19:00 you'd say, "Well, why didn't they round all these people up?" Well, Singapore exists for trade and trade was the number one priority. Defence was certainly not. And then when it was clear there was going to be a war, the Army, particularly the Australian Army that was up there said, "Where are the defences up country?" There was nothing.

19:30 "Well, we haven't done anything about that because the Treasury back in London will not approve the going rate for labour, so if you want defences go dig them yourself." So these are the real problems about defending Malaya.

20:00 There were just no defences, no defensive lines anywhere up country, and they paid for it.

So when you got to Kota Bharu was it just the 8 Squadron that was there?

The 8 Squadron was the only squadron there, yes.

And what about down the length of the coast of Malaya, like in Kuantan, was there anything else?

Well, there was an RAF station at Kuantan but there was nothing on it.

20:30 It wasn't manned. The fighter squadrons 453 and 21, they went up on the east coast and eventually that's where the main ground attack came but it was also close to the Thailand border

21:00 and of course there was a Briton who was a spy and you've probably read about this guy. He was a man who was posted out to a British Army unit, but it was the lowest form of life as far as promotion was concerned.

21:30 The job really was to provide food for the troops. So it was known as the rice battalion. So no ambitious officer regarded it as a great thing to be sent there. Now, because this fellow was of mixed blood, he might have had an Anglo-Indian, but he had a bit of colour about him,

22:00 he was the butt of jokes and practical jokes and insults from his fellow officers. So it just developed in him resentment and he had taken a holiday in Japan, some time before, and he went back there again, essentially on another holiday,

22:30 went in to the Japanese authorities and said that he's prepared to work for them. Which he continued to do right up until the war started and he was the air liaison officer with the Australian fighter squadron and you could tell he was passing over this information. Anyway he was finally detected and tried

23:00 and found guilty and he was shot in one of the Singapore prisons. But he was an effective spy and the best kind of spy because you can get the walk in spy because he doesn't come in and say, "Give me money," he didn't ask for anything it was just to get revenge on the way he'd been treated.

So it was just the 8 Squadron there, basically

23:30 **that's the defence along the east coast of Malaya?**

Yes, well the defence was an Indian unit and they were under the command of Brigadier Keys and he survived the war and he's been written about. They had about 8,000 troops and it was pretty

24:00 hard to defend because you've got that long coastline, beaches and everything else, where they could have landed anywhere. But obviously they'd go for an airfield and so that's why, in fact, they did attack Kota Bharu beaches. And they'd install a lot of pillboxes along the beaches in various places, but there were gaps and also it didn't extend far enough. He did the best with what he had. And

24:30 they were the first to come under attack and they were the first to defend and they suffered about 50% casualties.

But in terms of air defence.

Well, air defence, we had no fighters. The reason that they had the air force there at all and the reason that they took over a private airstrip in the first place was because Britain didn't have any naval ships to spare to

25:00 run a surveillance over the Indochina Sea. So the next best thing was to have an air force base there that could do these 'recces' [reconnaissance] all over, to keep watch on what the Japanese might be doing. So that's why we were there to do reconnaissance and report. We never operated much over the land, it was always marine reconnaissance.

25:30 But we were up against another problem there, was that if we needed spare parts for the plane, and we always needed spare parts, that the delays and delays and delays that we had so that about a third of the aircraft we had were always unserviceable because of lack of spare parts. So we weren't always able to do the reconnaissance missions that we were there for.

26:00 And that prevailed for the whole time we were there and no doubt the same thing applied to 1 Squadron when we swapped places. But it was effective to the extent that, providing the weather never got too bad, and there was a lot of bad weather up there, we covered a pretty big area. In fact, there's an account I have there

26:30 about a crash that was in and we came across a huge ship and it was completely black, painted black and there was nobody visible on it and it had a submarine tucked into its side, obviously being refuelled. And we circled it, warily,

27:00 because if they'd taken a pot shot at us, we'd have gone straight in. We flashed lights on it and never got any response at all, no flag flying, nothing. So, that was a day in which it started out perfect weather, low swell, lovely. On the way back, we spent a lot time just looking at this thing, we ran into one of this inter-tropic

27:30 fronts. The cloud ceiling was down to about 200 feet and we were doing this. Eventually, we were just about out of fuel, in fact when we did put down the tanks were dry. But unfortunately we had to land on a beach, it was only place. We were ready for ditching actually, I was in my ditching station

28:00 which I could do in the dark. Then suddenly in through the rain they could see this beach and they put it down and there was a little stream, I think it was about three or four feet wide, which ran down from the jungle into the sea and it made a gutter and when the wheels hit the gutter the plane flipped over and had I been in the turret I would have been squashed like a beetle but I was in the ditching station and my seat belt broke

28:30 and when we went over I went from, my ditching station seat was on the toilet near the turret, and I went the full length to the bulkhead and hit something on the way and knocked myself out and, of course, we were out in the water, in the surf and either I opened the door

29:00 or the door opened itself in the crash, I don't know, I don't have any recollection of doing anything, and it washed out and eventually got up on the beach. The rest of the crew all strapped in, upside down, they're quietly drowning, trying to get themselves out. Anyway, they all got out, vomiting seawater.

29:30 Then they started looking for me and of course, there's the turret squashed like an egg shell and they thought I was in it, but they couldn't see any other signs of mortality and when they got out of the hole in the plane I was about 100 yards down the beach with blood running down my head wandering around in circles and so on. So that was the end of that piece of reconnaissance. On the same day another aircraft

30:00 in the 8 Squadron on a similar mission, they also ran into the storm and also ditched in there just off the beach.

So where was it that you had to land, how far from..?

Oh, we were miles from Kuantan and miles from Kota Bharu, it was the nearest bit of land. And navigating was pretty difficult. And as a reconnaissance, once we hit the storm it was useless because you couldn't see very much.

30:30 Up the front they were just battling to keep the plane out of the lightning and what not and the sea. So we just found the beach in time, otherwise we'd all be dunked.

So how did you get back to..?

Oh well, we had three days there in the jungle in a clearing

31:00 which was about 100 yards from the plane and we were asked later by locals where we'd been and we told them and they said, "Do you know what that place is called?" "No, it's Padang Rimau, that means the field of tigers and you always find tigers there," and they were astonished that we'd

31:30 spent three days there without being molested. We were attacked by sandflies and I'd lost my shoes and I got badly bitten around the ankles and in the middle of the day they'd festered and really got a mess and because I was a bit dopey because I'd been belted over the head and so on, well I really

32:00 wasn't conscious of it but by the time we were picked up these had got very, very bad indeed. Later on when I described what my feet and what my ankles looked like, you see the bone in through the holes in my ankle, and I was treated by an English doctor, a lady doctor, who I regret I can't remember her name,

32:30 but she served the local community and she was there when the Japanese came and she stayed at the job and she treated Japanese and locals alike, but she must have had an awful time. Anyway, she had me in her home, which was next to the hospital, and I had shades drawn and three times a day they'd come and pump this stuff in.

33:00 Anyway, I mentioned all this to the squadron medical officer and he said, "Let's have a look at you, she's done a good job," he said, "You know," in such and such a place where he'd been before, he said, "I amputated a fellow's feet for exactly that condition so if that lady hadn't got on to you straight away you would have lost both feet or lost a leg." So I was very lucky.

33:30 And the fact that I survived the whole war, I'm ahead. I take whatever comes and I've got no regrets.

Alan, you were flying in Hudsons, can you tell us about the Hudson and the turret that you were in, you have mentioned it briefly, but just a little bit of detail about your surrounds and your work environment as it were?

Yes, well I have got a photograph there of it which might help you.

But for the sake of what

34:00 **we're doing?**

Yes, of course. Well, to get into a turret, it's at the back of a plane, twin tail aircraft, and you kneeled on the toilet seat and put your head up into the turret above you and pull on a latch and a seat swings down and you work your way up to it

34:30 and then on either side you've got the guns, two Brownings, you've got cans containing belts of ammunition to feed up into the guns. In front of you, there's a joystick and by moving it left or right you can rotate the turret through 360 degrees and on top of the joystick is a button and that fires the guns.

35:00 On the sides of the guns there's a strap about an inch and a half long, sometimes the guns don't reset themselves, you fire one round and it doesn't cock for the next one so the only way you can get it started is to use a toggle, which is a piece of wire with a loop and a handle to pull these things against a

very heavy spring, and I mention that because later on I was in an incident where it got so rough

35:30 that I lost the toggle, it disappeared down amongst the works of the turret, and I couldn't re-cock the guns so I had to take my shirt off, turn it into a toggle to cock the guns. Anyway, you had a sight, and this was an optical sight and you're looking through virtually a prism and it had an electric bulb in it

36:00 and when you switched it on it gave you a circle with cross hairs. It was an apparent image, it wasn't a real one, it was just projected on this screen. So the idea is that you moved the turret, elevate the guns; that was the other thing, you could pull the stick forward or push it away, the guns would either deflect or lift; aim at the target, an enemy

36:30 and press a button, hopefully you'd hit it. But all this is happening at very high speeds, so although these guns fired at a rate of 1,000 rounds a minute, a five second burst if you're on target was all you needed. You weren't really firing 1,000 rounds, it was only the rate. So that was the office. Now, it was mostly perspex with a bit of reinforcement

37:00 and this was significant for reconnaissance because you observed a sector governed by these rims, "I've covered that bit of sea, I've covered that bit of sea," and so on and so forth and then you do it all again. And you think how can it change so quickly and it can. Up front they passed right over this

37:30 black ship and didn't see it and because I was doing this methodical business I picked it up. And so that was the job and you've got your headphones on and sometimes the intercom didn't work or maybe the blokes up front took them off because they make your ears sweaty and so on. So you could call up and nobody would answer. So that was your working

38:00 place if you were doing the guns. And sometimes I did the radio and in that case I'd be up the other end, seated behind the pilot and that was better fun because at least you could see where you were going and watch what was happening. But because I had a bit of a reputation for being a good observer on long reconnaissance I got stuck in the turret.

38:30 There was an enquiry into the crash and they asked me about navigation and I was able to say, "Well, I was in the turret so I don't know what was happening up the front." But it wasn't due to navigation, it was just due to adverse winds and the fact we'd spent so much time on patrol.

39:00 **In that reconnaissance patrol where you spotted that black ship and that submarine possibly there, were you not in a position where you could have attacked?**

Well, we weren't at war. This was before the war but they were active and that's why we were there to sort of try to get an idea, or for intelligence anyway, to get some idea of when and if

39:30 the Japanese would move. In fact, when they did move they were picked up, first of all by a Catalina, which was shot down by the Japanese after they'd reported. Because they circled it and were sending reports and the Japs [Japanese] took a push off at it. So they were the first casualties of the war and the whole crew was lost. Then they were picked up by 1 Squadron

40:00 reconnaissance on two or three occasions with a body of ships moving, not towards Malaya, but heading more towards Thailand or Siam. But obviously can change course and so on, but they were picked up by the very squadron that was there for that purpose. But you see, you had to contend with frequent squalls of rain

40:30 and so on and it's very hard to relocate ships when they've moved into such an area and you can't pick them up again. It was the best we could do.

Tape 4

00:31 **Can you describe to us the set up at the base in KB [Kota Bharu]?**

Well, we were living in very reasonably constructed, what they call atap huts, these were palm leaves for thatching and they were all made of timber and just laid out as barracks. Single iron beds and that was it.

01:00 Being a sergeant that was were we lived. But the airmen had similar quarters. We had a sergeants' mess, an officers' mess and an airmen's mess. We were told we were on Indian Army rations with one concession, that we got some bacon for breakfast. Now, they'd give you a piece of fried bread, locally made fried bread and it was

01:30 cut in two, so you'd get half a slice and each half slice was covered by a piece of cooked bacon and that was breakfast and occasionally you'd get an apple. So we used to chip in our money to buy food, which came up from Singapore cold stores, a firm called Fraser and Neave.

02:00 They were big on storing in refrigerated conditions, so you could buy pretty good food and it came out by train and that would supplement these monotonous rations that we were on. So that made life

bearable and you could take all the beers you could use, but of course you can't be

02:30 inebriated on the job. But apart from that, the airmen did similar things. We never discovered how the officers lived because we were never invited to their mess. Then they had concert parties from time to time. But I was dragooned and some of the others were dragooned because the CO said that he

03:00 thought that the previous concert wasn't well supported by the squadron so he was going to assign people to participate. And I've got a photograph there somewhere, where we had to dress up as women, you know, in grass skirts and so on, doing some sort of a ballet dance. Somebody took a photograph of it that I've got it over there. But that was our form of entertainment.

03:30 We'd play hockey. We had a good hockey team. When we got back to Singapore we took on the Indians at hockey, they beat us soundly but at least we had some good games. We had a couple of fellows who were champion runners in Australia, a fellow called Fred Barry Brown. So he used to compete against the RAF chaps and a few others.

04:00 So there was a bit of sport there, but it was so damn hot. The airmen used to buy native praus, you know, a boat and it would hold about four or five people. I was within a group, the bazaar prau, a great big thing that would hold about 20 people and we actually went down to the mouth of the river and out to sea.

04:30 But getting back wasn't so easy. There was no wind, no power, you had to use sails. But getting back was a bit of a pain because you were going against the current in the river. So at times we were ready to get out and push. But it was all good fun. And blokes used to have barbecues down on the beach. But apart from that it was flying and

05:00 serviceability and so on. You know, the forms of disciplines and daily parades and so on, they were all followed faithfully. Everything in the book was done accordingly. Our CO was a fellow called Frank Wright and Frank was a former aviation officer for the Shell company and he was on the air force reserve. He joined up

05:30 at the beginning of the war and he was sent to Singapore as CO of 21 Squadron and they had Wirraways and later on they changed over to Brewster Buffaloes but then he was switched out of 21 Squadron to take over 8 Squadron when Paddy Heffernan, who was the CO of

06:00 8 Squadron, he was posted to England. So he was the CO and I think he did a very good job, not only in the respect of running the squadron, although he was a pretty firm disciplinarian, he did his best to get us out of Java, which nearly everybody in 8 Squadron got out. So we respected Frank.

06:30 He was a good CO and he wrote some pretty scathing reports on the deficiencies, which have gone into the record. All our people were good at what they did and just showed up when the bombs started to fall, we didn't, sort of, fall apart. That was particularly the case with 1 Squadron. They had an evacuation plan,

07:00 they had a plan for any contingency and they put them into operation and they pulled out at Kota Bharu when it became untenable, without losing a man in the process. So it was good planning and sticking rigidly to a plan. They always had contingencies to things not happening as expected and that was the secret of the way the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]

07:30 operated.

Can you tell me about your specific aircrew, how many there were?

On some missions there were just four of us, mostly of reconnaissance but when we were on bombing, attacking Japanese, there were five, there was an extra crew member whose job was to man the side guns, these are the gas operated guns that stuck out of the window. But they

08:00 were a measure which only came in while we were up there. The planes themselves didn't have that facility, they had to be installed up there. But I think anything that we shot down was shot down either from the turret or from the front gun and when we went into action on the first day, we were assigned to attack,

08:30 first of all, Jap shipping and naval ships and then troops on the beach or troops in barges and what not on the water and that day we had five of us.

That's while based in Singapore?

Yes, well, no, we came up; our war station,

09:00 as they call it, was Kuantan, so we moved up a couple of days ahead of the actual landing and we were all in Kuantan and we came out of Kuantan to attack Kota Bharu at about six or seven o'clock in the morning.

Ok, we'll get to that shortly, just consider Kota Bharu like one chapter, I guess, lead me to the reconnaissance patrols that you're undertaking there.

09:30 Well, we continued reconnaissance from Sembawang, doing the same sort of work except we were assigned different areas to search.

So why were you moved from KB down to Sembawang?

I think it was regarded as being hard conditions. They wanted to give both squadrons the experience of operating under

10:00 quite different conditions and this was useful because there was kind of a townie approach towards squadrons based on the comfort of Sembawang compared to the up country stations. So let everybody become used to how tough it can get. And it was tough in terms of working on the aircraft on the ground in the heat. But it had

10:30 its pleasant side. A couple of us, we used to go off and visit villages, inland a bit, and we had some interesting experiences there. After we visited one we always went after that with a little first aid kit with some Aspros and things like that because you'd run into sick people

11:00 and you'd do your bit to help them. Anyway, we kept being invited back to this one village. The village chief was a very old man and he could recall the days when he was a child, of pirates coming down from Siam and raiding villages and stealing women and property and so on. And he remembered this vividly and he talked about this

11:30 and then when we went on our final visit to say good bye, he had all the people in the village out and he presented me with a kris, you know, a long ceremonial weapon and it was silver handled and all sorts of work on it

12:00 and made a little speech about how it was nice to have us and all that, but I'd been previously briefed on this by the adjutant who apparently knew his way around there, so I thanked him on behalf of our little lot and so forth and how we will treasure this gift but, having regard to what could happen in the war,

12:30 I wondered whether he would be kind enough to take care of it whilst we were away. And he got the message, so I handed it back with great reverence. So we were shaking hands and it was a nice thing and glad we did it.

Did you learn some of the language, the Malayan?

Yes, we learnt enough. Most of the blokes could speak a bit of bazaar

13:00 Malay and of course, they mispronounced a lot of words. Kechil is the word for small, so a small bus, for the troops, was a 'kechil bus', they always managed to mangle a native word. But quite a few of them spoke Malay quite well and actually it's a bit of a hobby, I went to Monash

13:30 for a year and half and did a course on Malay. You forget things though, if you don't use it, you forget it. That was that. Oh, yes, we could get along with them and some of them spoke good English particularly those who'd worked on rubber plantations. But

14:00 we never understood anything about the history, apart from the Raffles bit, we never understood any of the troubles that they'd had in Malaya. I don't know, I think, possibly because we were easily identified by speech as not English but Australian, there wasn't any evidence of the resentment they felt about the Brits.

14:30 And as you know there was a mutiny there in 1915 both in Kelantan and further south and of course there was a big one on Singapore Island. That was put down with a lot distress. And this was resented. It was an Islamic thing mostly.

15:00 But the high level of Islamic hate and so on there's an economic component because the Brits were simply using, as they did throughout the Empire because that was one justification of having an Empire was that it should contribute to the British economy and they didn't like being used up. And the other thing of course was the attitude of the British advisory who were advising the Sultans in

15:30 various states, they were virtually just telling them what to do and they resented that. We didn't know any of that history, I've only learnt it since. But I would like to say that as far as the Australians were concerned, we never ran into any resentment, but that wasn't the case with the Poms.

On those reconnaissance missions you said you spent

16:00 **some time in the turret and also time up front observing, what was the division there?**

Listening on the radio. If you found anything you had to send out a message pronto.

So were you always flying with the same crew?

No, when I first joined up there I was with a fellow called Lampey, Norman Lampey. And he was flying the day we

16:30 bent the plane at Kemisak and then he got posted back to Australia and then I flew with a fellow called

Williams, Cyril Williams and he was the guy that called me sergeant all the time, never any first names or even surnames. He was later killed in the islands north of Darwin. He was a very good pilot.

17:00 When we were attacking, we had a night attack on one of the airfields that the Japs had captured upcountry and we had to attack this one, one night. And most of us, there was about a dozen of our planes went and dropped bombs. But old Cyril he hung back and he dropped his bombs one at a time.

17:30 'Cause he could see a target apparently. But all this was while the searchlights. You've got your pin and ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] coming up. So after you'd done one, sort of, semi dive bombing attack with one bomb, you think, "God, we're lucky to get out of that," old Cyril's had twelve bombs and he wasn't going to let them all go at once so we went through this flak [German fliegerabwehrkanone, flyer defence cannon, i.e., anti-aircraft fire] and searchlight business four times to everybody else's one.

18:00 So he was that sort of a fellow. I think he was a bit of a gong [medal] chaser but I don't know.

Tell us about coming down to Sembawang and then basically the Japanese were getting closer.

Well, the next big event of course, was being bombed out of Kuantan because the day after we'd attacked

18:30 up at Kota Bharu, our base was back in Kuantan. 1 Squadron pulled out at Kota Bharu when the troops were attacking the airfield and came back to Kuantan, their planes came down, but their men were moved down by road. Well the next day the Japanese attacked us with 18 bombers, two lots of nine. And they bombed the airfield,

19:00 destroyed my plane. The one we'd been in the day before, attacking at KB. We'd been hit up there. Do you want to talk about that?

Yes, I do, Alan, I think I haven't handled this very well, if you could tell us about, just get us to Sembawang because you swapped with ..?

We were back in Sembawang and then we were moved to Kuantan at the outbreak of the war but whilst we were in Sembawang we were doing the same sort of things under rather more pleasant conditions

19:30 in maritime reconnaissance and training.

And were you seeing much?

Well, that was quite pleasant because we were in excellent quarters, brick buildings, you could hire a servant that cleaned your room and make your bed and clean your shoes and do anything you want. Shopping in the city and all the amusements that were there.

20:00 Oh yes, I had a movie camera and took lots of film, which of course, got blown up in the attacks on Singapore Island. Oh, no, it was good, it was good. I had a great box and I had stuff to take home or to send home, you know,

20:30 dress materials and artefacts of various kinds, all chock a block and of course, it went up. However, that was available and we enjoyed it.

And on those recces or your reconnaissance missions were you seeing much?

I don't believe, apart from native vessels, we didn't see anything that was hostile.

21:00 No, but at least that was positive as far as intelligence was concerned because they said, "Well that's been swept, there's nothing there, so at least we can sort of isolate and devote the attention to any forces that were picked up." So, no, it was effective. And it's only when you've conducted searches on a methodical

21:30 province, you have a square search and you fly the limit of present visibility, the visibility's a mile and that becomes the basis for a leg of your search, so you search that square and then you pick another square and the dimensions of which are the limit of visibility. So you keep it in these squares all the time.

22:00 Bearing in mind, of course, that you've got wind forces acting on the plane so you have to have a fairly good air plot, otherwise you don't know where you are, so if you find something you've got to be damn certain that when you report it, that it's there in reality on the map, not where you think you were, if you weren't keeping close watch on your navigation.

When you said that you were recognised as a good observer

22:30 **does that mean navigational?**

No, no only in terms of keeping a good lookout. Because there were a number of occasions in which I spotted things, not only this black ship, which everybody else had missed. But, it's because I had a method, you see, and I tried to teach other people about this but, see, when you've been up in the thing for eight hours and that's

23:00 the only thing you're doing after a while you get mesmerised by the sea or your inabilities, you see,

because sometimes you run into cloud, and thank goodness for cloud because that's how we often escaped from the enemy fighters, jump into some clouds and hope they didn't have any rocks in it.

So how do you maintain your concentration?

Well, I suppose it's a,

23:30 I don't know, perhaps you have to be a moron to be able to do it. But I had this fear, if you like, or concern that I was going to miss something and therefore, I checked that first panel and then I'd come around and then I'd have this fear that maybe I did miss something in the first panel, so I'd really concentrate on that

24:00 and so on, go around and by the time you swept over then you'd start saying, "There's a bit of a chop in the sea, did I miss a sub?" and so on and so on. There were always things to get you alert and after all I took it that was what I was there for.

So can you tell us about, was it December 8th when the attacks began?

Yes, yes.

24:30 **Can you tell us about that there and what was going on?**

Well, when we moved up to Kuantan in preparation for what we thought was going to happen, we got up there one evening, there was an RAF station and there were a few blooming bombs there and it was a bit of a shambles place, you know, the was no, sort of,

25:00 preparation for our arrival, so they just cleaned out a few of the barracks and stuff like that. Then we had a meal. And they had a Tannoy system around the area and it had been hooked into a broadcast radio transmission and all that you could hear over it was a name,

25:30 like Smith or Brown and then a string of numbers. We assumed that they were warnings to people on rubber plantations or gold mines or whatever about the upcountry activity. They all had a contingency plan in case of invasion,

26:00 that they were to destroy assets. Now it wasn't a direction to start destroying assets, I guess, but rather to put in train something that you could get started providing you got another message. But it went on and on for several hours, but they were sending out a lot of information to all these people in these out places. And I was surprised at the number of Australians that were up there in gold mining.

26:30 But they'd attracted people from all over the world. There was a Swedish planter who rescued the blokes on the other plane that went in that day. And the fellow that sent the truck to pick us up, I forget what he was, but he wasn't English and he wasn't

27:00 a local at all. So there were a lot of people up there and the only time we ever managed to have any contact with them was in an emergency situation. So that was our war station and we listened to all this garbage and the next morning, I think about three o'clock a fellow came around and said

27:30 that Kota Bharu was under attack and that 1 Squadron was defending it. In a sense, what they were doing was supporting the ground troops under Brigadier Key and it was done quite formally. They could hear the guns firing and he commanded Davis, Curly Davis, the CO of 1 Squadron, he rang Key on his phone line

28:00 and he said, "I understand there's some unfriendly activity, what can I do to help you?" Key said, "Get out and start blasting them out." But that was how 1 Squadron got involved. But we went up there and there was still a lot of shipping and barges and arms, launches and so we got stuck into this big ship

28:30 and of course, they were going that way and I'm looking the other way so as I observed the results of our bombs, the plane shot up because of the blast but I could see this huge ball of fire come up from where we'd hit. Well that got rid of our four bombs so the only thing left were our guns. So we started attacking with the front guns

29:00 attacking the barges and these launches and the last run we made was on a big fast launch and there was a bloke in the front of it and he had 50 millimetre canon, I could see it quite clearly, and so they attacked him with the front guns and as I passed over I gave him the works with

29:30 my turret guns and he made an abrupt turn to the left, now why, whether he was dead, never hung around to find out. But the bloke on the radio that day, a fellow called Tim Bethke, and he had seat behind the pilots facing his radio gear, but as soon as we started attacking this thing,

30:00 he stood up behind the two pilots to get a view from the cockpit window, then there was this bang and he looked around and there was a two inch hole straight through the middle of his seat, had he been sitting down, he'd have been dead. So the man in the brown hat was not a bad shot. Well, then we had trouble steering the plane.

30:30 Well the brown hat man had done better than he thought because he'd cut one of the rudder cables so we were going on like a crab. Then when got a radio message to go north because there was another

flotilla believed to be north, off the coast of Thailand.

31:00 So we did that even though we were crabbing along. And then we ran into the great squall and visibility was zero. So we did run the distance that they wanted, but we didn't see anything because of the weather. So we reported back and they said, "All right, go home." So steering got worse as we went along, so I pointed my

31:30 gun as to make a bit of extra drag to help the steering and that's how we got back to Kuantan. But we had taken more damage than we'd realised because when we were taxiing back to our revetment the looks of concern on the face of our ground crew, they could see what we couldn't see. So we'd taken a bit of a beating. So there had to be a lot of work to get

32:00 this plane serviceable, bombed up and fuelled up and all the rest of it. And on the following morning I went down to the armourer and he said, "I've done this and this to it, come and have a look at it," so I said, "Righto." So I made some adjustments and shifted a few things and so forth and we were working away and he said, "It's bloody near lunch time, mate, what about

32:30 we give it away?" and I said, "Righto." So I jumped out of the plane and I thought, "Where is everybody? Oh well, it's twelve o'clock or something or other, maybe they've all gone to lunch." So he came out and he said, "Where is everybody?" I said, "Oh, I don't know, gone to lunch, I think." Then we looked up and at about that angle we could see these nine

33:00 silvery planes in the sky and I said, "We know now where they've gone, we're going to be hit with bombs." He said, "Where's the slit trenches?" I said, "I don't know, I just found out, but it won't be in the middle of the airfield, that's for sure." So we started to run and while we were running they dropped the bombs. Well it sounded like

33:30 a hundred bed sheets being torn, if you can imagine the noise that would make, like tearing linen and that's just how they sounded as the bomb released. So I said, "We'll never make any slit trench, just lie flat." So we lay flat on the ground and of course, when the bombs did hit we felt it through our bodies because we were flat on the ground and it was awful. And the noise

34:00 and then we looked up and there were buildings on fire and planes on fire and then it stopped. So I said, "I think we better look for a trench." So we ran off on a bit of a road and there were a lot of our guys in trenches so we joined and then this other group of planes,

34:30 they turned off and another nine came in and most of the damage had been on the far side of the airfield and on our side they hadn't done much at all. Anyway, when we got to our feet, we found we'd been lying beside the bomb dump. There were about 200 bombs lying there, if it had hit that we'd have gone up. Anyway we tucked ourselves into this trench and then they came down again and they dropped the bomb

35:00 which hit just in front of our aircraft, which caught fire and of course, freshly loaded with petrol and new bombs, that went up. So it was a pretty sorry scene. Then they wheeled around and came in again at low altitude. You know, they were almost like at 100 feet.

35:30 They started spraying the place, all in formation. One of our aircraft had been out on another seaward reconnaissance and he came home to find the place under attack so he immediately bore in on them and he shot two of them down. Of course, once they realised they were under attack and they didn't know where it was from, they scattered.

36:00 That was the end of the attack. One of our blokes had to go and restrain the Indian anti-aircraft gunners who didn't fire a shot until Rod Widmer had done his thing and scattered them, they started firing at him. So he had to go and pull a gun on them and make them

36:30 quit. That was the end of the second day. Then as the night wore on Blenheims and other planes kept coming in and a few more of 1 Squadron's after dark and they put out emergency flare paths to let them in. Nobody crashed. So we had a scratch of a meal

37:00 because part of the mess had been blown up and some of the cook house, so any sort of food was good food at that stage. Then I went over to operations room to find my skipper, Cyril Williams, and tell him I didn't have an aeroplane and he wasn't there and the ops [operations] officer of the day was Geoff Hitchcock, the one I flew with later on,

37:30 and I told him what had happened and I said, "What's the score now?" and he said, "The word is that we evacuate Kuantan and all flyable planes are to be flown back to Sembawang and if you can't get a lift out by plane, well, then you join a ground party by truck or walking, get to the nearest railway station and get back to Singapore.

38:00 So, of course, I didn't expect to fly out because my plane was burnt and so were others. So that's happened. So I walked around and found a few airmen and they were all sort of saying, "What's going on?" so I said, "Well apparently word is you get out." And the party assembled out at the gates into

38:30 this place and there were a couple of trucks there but only a few people could get in it, so we started walking. And a few people had picked up guns and whatever and then we came across some trucks that

had assembled there. There were all sorts of things, petrol, water tankers

39:00 people climbing onto walls, all these sorts of things and they took us to the nearest railhead and we got on a train and went back to Singapore. And that was pretty sad. We felt we were walking out. But there was no point in staying there. And really we didn't go without permission. The acting CO,

39:30 a fellow called Ferguson, said, "Send the signal saying this is the situation in Kuantan." No, it was earlier than that, before the attack, he sent a signal saying that the squadron assembled here at Kuantan would have no fighter cover and after what

40:00 happened in Kota Bharu, which was attacked by fighters, we feel it would be prudent to remove the aircrafts from here back to Sembawang. And the signal came back, "The bombing of Kuantan is not on the Japanese agenda," and before he'd read the message the bombs were falling. So that was sort of a clown performance.

40:30 So back, in dribs and drabs, we never lost a man. And the non-commissioned officers, there weren't too many officers in this ground party most of them had gone off in various planes because they pack with the planes with as many as people as they hold. The NCOs [non-commissioned officers] behaved very well, there was no indiscipline but at least they saw that things were done in an orderly fashion and so forth. And we were a bit amazed later on when it

41:00 was said that the evacuation was disorderly. And I took this up with the CO who wasn't there, he was back in Singapore, and I said, "Sir, why could you write that it we're disorderly, you weren't there and disorderly sounds as though we were just a bloody rebel?" well, he said, "Yeah, I see what you mean, but don't forget this,

41:30 that part of the nonsense came from the fact that the RAF Commander of the station had no evacuation plan," and the fellow was court martialled later, and he said, "Yes, I shouldn't have used that word, what I meant was that there were no formal orders given for your evacuation which I interpret as the word disorderly to describe that" but he said, "I now see, what you

42:00 mean." He said, "I accept that."

Tape 5

00:30 And I think those were about the last words that I had to say about that. So we kept doing that and then we went and did several raids in support of the Army at a place called Muar River and that was a scene of disaster for the Australians and Indians and so forth because they tried to make a stand there, that was on the west coast of the Malayan peninsula.

01:00 And they neglected to destroy all the natives' boats. So the Japanese troops advancing, seized these boats further north and just sailed around the Australian positions, came at them from both directions. Anyway, crossing the Muar River in force was a big, which the Japanese tried to do. We were called out to attack their

01:30 troops either in the river, crossing it or whatever and we lost one plane on that. But they were attacked by Japanese fighters who stirred up the hornets' nest and they chased these two Hudsons of our squadron half way back to Singapore and they shot up the

02:00 gunner, and he was killed, his guns were still firing, but pointing to the sky, and damaged the plane and when they approached the land at Sembawang they didn't realise that the flaps, the wing flaps that you put down for landing to give you a lift and so on, one of them failed and the other one was down and the plane just,

02:30 straight in and they were all killed. So that was one casualty out at Muar River and one of similar incidences that we were involved in as well as doing the marine reconnaissance.

Was that the whole squadron that was sent to Muar River?

No, it was just part of it. There were other attacks from an RAF Blenheim squadron. But the thing about

03:00 fighting is that you know what you're doing and what you can see but you've got no idea what anybody else is up to. Well, I say anybody else, but you know your own squadron or your own flight, but what other units are doing, you have no means of knowing. And I found this when I was in New Guinea during the Milne Bay fighting, there was a bit of a lull and I went up to see a friend in an artillery unit and they'd just opened up fire when I got there and the

03:30 place was covered in smoke and dust and everything else and I finally found my friend and he said, "Well, what's happening in the war?" and I said, "Well, you should know, you're here shooting," and he said, "We don't see what we're shooting at, once we start firing the guns there's all this dust and mullock gets around and you only see about ten yards, so you fellows up in the air you know what's going on at all, we don't, we just follow an order." And that's the limited scope

04:00 with which, as an individual sees his bit of war and he knows what's here and what's there but all the rest of it's just a mystery.

When did you go across to Muar River?

That was during the days in which the Japanese, in fact it's on that map, Muar is on that map.

So how much did you know about the Japanese defences?

Well, we were getting general reports

04:30 about where they were and where the disposition of Japanese air facilities, where the fighters were likely to be, where their bombers were parked and where we could attack them. That's why we did some night raids on their concentration. When we lost a plane it wasn't replaced, when they lost a plane they had

05:00 plenty more. That was in the very first stages of the war. But the interesting thing is the Japanese war production of aeroplanes was no greater at the end of the war than it was at the beginning. Now that's where we had the reverse. Towards the end of the war we were churning out thousands and thousands of planes but they were still at the same rate as when they entered the war. So it became

05:30 an attrition of weapons. However, that was not evident in those days, we were outnumbered and outnumbered by better equipment. Zero was a very, very fast plane. It wasn't till the Americans came in with different types of planes, Lightnings and so forth, that the

06:00 Japanese started to fall behind.

So you would've been kept very busy during that campaign from Singapore?

Yes, well, serviceability affected our ability to carried out some missions because there was always wear and tear even without a war situation, there's always wear and tear that require replacement. Either your plane was at U/S [unserviceable]

06:30 or it was ready to go.

So what kind of damages were there to the squadron?

Well, of course, we were bombed on the island and at one stage it was the most heavily bombed piece of real estate on the whole of Singapore Island. Daily raids and casualties on the ground. I was in a slit trench one day on one raid

07:00 with three or four other people and the slit trenches are always made in an 'L' and this was a particularly long trench, it was unusual because blasts will travel along a trench. People got into the deep gutters around Singapore, using it as a trench, were killed and yet they could have been about 100 yards from the blast, it travelled along the concrete. So long trenches weren't very good. Anyway,

07:30 this fellow, a fellow called George Perry was in the other part of this long L, I was in this part, and the bomb hit where he was and all they found of George Perry was the wristband of his watch. So that sort of thing was happening. But by and large we didn't lose a lot of people on the ground but there were injuries.

08:00 We lost planes of course.

Ok, well, I'm just, sort of, going back to the chronology of events because that occurred in the final stages before the fall of Singapore, didn't it, that bombing?

No, not the immediate end. When we got to the point where the airfield became unusable because of bombing and at times shelling, an air force can't exist without landing fields

08:30 so we moved from Singapore over to Sumatra to prepared airfields which had been prepared by the Dutch and they were extremely well camouflaged by the planting of different sorts of grasses and so on, you couldn't detect it from the air. In fact, we had a bit of trouble even finding it. But there were again no hangars or anything like that. But we operated from there against

09:00 Japanese who were coming up the Palambang River or the river as it ran, Palambang was the target for the Japanese because that's where the great oil fields and production was and that's really why they were conquering Java to get their hands on those resources. So we were busy fighting these, shooting at ships and barges and so forth and we inflicted a lot of casualties

09:30 but, we were losing planes because somebody would come back and shot up and became not repairable so gradually we losing along the line. So then they decided, after the paratroops landed at Palambang 1, there were two airfields, Palambang 1 and 2, P1 and P2, they decided that they better pull out of Sumatra, so that's when we went to Java.

10:00 1 Squadron was then, we were told to hand all our flyable planes over to 1 Squadron, so 8 Squadron ceased to be an effective unit. So when we got to Java they said, "Right, get these people out to Australia." The fighter squadrons, 21 and 453, they lost all their planes

10:30 to aerial action or on the ground. So they were just sent home, they got them on board a big ship and took them to Colombo and then back to Fremantle.

So why did 8 Squadron have to give their planes to 1 Squadron?

Well, because there was no point in having two squadrons operating a very small number of planes, you might as well give them to one and get the rest out of the way. Because we couldn't be of any use

11:00 without an aeroplane.

And how many planes did 8 Squadron have?

Oh, at that stage, I think we were down to four or five.

So what had happened to the others?

Well, they'd either blown up on the ground or damaged in some way, some had landing accidents or they'd beaten up attacking the shipping,

11:30 come back with petrol screaming out of the tank because somebody shot a hole through it and landing wheel tyres destroyed and just landing like this and so on.

What about air attacks?

We didn't have them in Sumatra. The main action

12:00 there was in, because where we were Palambang is about on the same parallel, latitude as Singapore, just across the strait and I think they were busy attacking our troops on the mainland and bombing Singapore city. They really went for military targets and civilian targets

12:30 just to destroy morale, and in the process they absolutely killed thousands on the island. But they were relying on their troops and they must have known that our forces were depleted. We did get a shipment of Hurricanes from England via Australia but a lot of them were in boxes

13:00 and they were still in the same boxes after the surrender. Not all of them. But there were enough of them assembled. And John Gordon was a pilot in the 21, no, he was with a Hurricane unit, he wasn't with an Australian unit, but he was shot down in a Hurricane fighter. So they

13:30 were engaged, but they weren't a match for the Zeroes, even though the Hurricane was one of the best British planes. Because we didn't have the same type of controls that some of them had in Britain. So they were always, but you know, they shot down planes. Even the Brewster Buffalo, which was not a first class plane for the job, their ratio

14:00 of kills to losses was 2:1 and in some instances it was nearly 3:1. So they did a pretty good job even though it was virtually an obsolete plane by Japanese standards. So that was how we got chased off the island and that's eventually we got chased off Sumatra and then back to Java.

14:30 **Where these planes able to be, I imagine they were able, sometimes they were able to be repaired and taken back into action?**

Yes, what was repairable, yes.

So I'm just trying to get an idea during that time in Singapore when the bombing was very intense, what measures you had to take for the ground crew?

Well, they just did their best,

15:00 see some of the hangars, one of our fellows was decorated for going into a burning hangar and taxiing an aircraft out that would have otherwise been destroyed. But the other planes that were there, they were destroyed, so it was pretty hard for the maintenance staff to keep everything up to date when sometimes

15:30 all of you spares where in the place that got bombed.

What about your plane, oh, your plane got totalled, didn't it?

Yes, that, we lost that. We were given another one. So we weren't out of action to that extent.

So was it a very stressful situation, you know, the planes were getting hit or damaged so that was really reducing the effectiveness of the squadron?

16:00 Yes, there is a term, which is still in use, it's called the 'order of battle' and that term is used to describe what fightable equipment you've got left and it's on a huge board in the operation's room and every day you see the numbers getting smaller and smaller and your total order of battle is really is a picture of the

16:30 strength you've got to attack or defend and that kept getting smaller.

And that's equipment and manpower?

Mostly equipment, yep. They could have reinforced the manpower, I think, if they worked on it. There were still planes coming in at night from Australia and Java and so on. They

17:00 could have brought a few more people in. But we weren't short of people in that respect, it was equipment.

So why weren't you being equipped well enough?

Well they didn't exist. We had some planes brought from, were flown out from Britain, some Hudsons, which were handed over. And we had some brought up from Australia by ship.

17:30 Great Convair came up which reinforced us, at one stage we were at full strength but then this became dissipated as the bombing increased and as we lost planes in action.

So at what stage of the war was that?

Well, let me see, we left Singapore Island in February,

18:00 but the whole war up there only lasted 70 days. So everything that we've talked about is compressed into a very narrow time scale.

An awful lot happened in that 70 days.

That's right, yeah.

I'm just wondering when you got your reinforcements, was that when you were in Sumatra?

No, we got them while we were still on the island.

18:30 In replacement aircraft, yes.

And they were Hudsons?

Mainly, that's all we were interested in because that's the sort of Squadron we were. But I don't think the fighter people got any replacements. In numbers of fighter aircrafts, of course the Hurricanes are supposed to take up part of the slack but they went to an RAF Squadron.

19:00 And they performed very well. In fact, they went to Sumatra as well and operated out of there. But again they were in a lose-lose situation. And particularly in the fighter aircrafts you get more landing accidents than you do in the larger planes.

Why's that?

Oh, the high speeds, if you lose your flaps you've got to come in too fast and on some of these

19:30 airfields you can forget about looking like Tullamarine with nice neat strips, it was just grass and if it happened to have to rain, you could get bogged, you know, that sort of thing. Kota Bharu was like that on day one. Some planes were nearly bogged. They'd pull over to a revetment to get bombed up and they had to get a tractor to tow them out. That's how conditions were.

20:00 **Can you recall, some particular, I guess, operations that you did during that 70 days, I mean, you've told us about some of them already, the main ones?**

The initial sorties at Kota Bharu and at Kuantan, but mostly it was reconnaissance and then occasional bombing attacks on targets that were designated.

20:30 But of course, reconnaissance wasn't really a big issue when we moved to Sumatra, it was to attack the Japanese shipping coming into the oilfield. And there was something like 18,000 troops and we killed a lot of them. At least they said we did, we didn't hang about to count.

So that was 1 Squadron?

21:00 1 and 8. It was towards the end of the Japanese attack and then they put down these paratroops to capture the airfield and it was then that they said, "Right, you give your planes to 1 Squadron and you guys get back to Java." Of course, there was always the belief that there would be more planes sent from Australia to Java for us to carry on a good fight.

21:30 They didn't say, "You're out of the war." But when we got there as each day went by, the reality dawned on us that there weren't going to be any more planes although when I left Java and got back to Australia with a group of others, we thought we were going to Darwin to pick up some planes to fly back to Java. Well we didn't go to Darwin because this skipper of the civil

22:00 airliner said, "No, I can't reach Darwin," and he said, "I'll take you to Broome." When we got to Broome, as we stepped out of the plane, we looked like scarecrows, we were greeted by a fellow in majors, army unit with a very red face and he virtually accused us of being deserters. Fortunately we had paperwork to prove that we were on

22:30 legitimate business. But that was the homecoming, “You fellows, running away from the war.” But it quickly became apparent there were no planes available to go back and they wouldn’t have sent them back anyway because the war was already lost. The Japanese had the command of the air, had the command of the seas and they were rapidly gaining control of the land. So the war was over in strategic terms

23:00 before we left. And the Dutch Air Force and the Dutch Navy, they fought pretty well, but I don’t think the troops had much interest in fighting a hopeless cause. And I can understand. You see, most of the Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies had migrated from Holland. They

23:30 had their families there, their kids there and so on. It’s one thing for us fighting on foreign soil but it’s a different thing if you’ve got your missus and your kids as there well. If you took fighting the enemy too far then the victims became your family. So they then became downhearted or disheartened by the turn of events and they could see that nobody,

24:00 you know, all this talk about the American’s coming over to save them, the Americans had their hands full. They did send some Flying Fortresses there, which were quite effective but they lost a lot when Broome, and they sunk all the Catalina flying boats and other flying boats which were destined to go back to Java to pick up the remnants of 1 Squadron that were waiting for them, and of course all the planes were destroyed

24:30 in the raid on Broome and Flying Fortresses on the ground. So it was a fairly hectic time.

So Sumatra, how long were you on Sumatra for?

Oh, it wouldn’t have been more than about twelve days.

And were you in continuous action for that twelve days?

Only if your plane was serviceable.

25:00 I’d be down on the strip ready to go off and the crew ready to go off and one of the engineers would come in and say, “ I can’t get this pump to work,” or “I haven’t got a spare, it will be tomorrow before we cannibalise another aircraft and take one out, put one in, so the op’s off.” And you’d still sit around waiting

25:30 till somebody else says, “Oh, look I’m short of a navigator.” “Right, off you go.” So it was a bit of a scratch teams depending on the circumstances. Although quite a few planes came back with, there were a couple of RAF Hudsons there and they came in on one engine

26:00 and the door opened and three fellows jumped out and there was blood all over them and one fellow had his arm in a sling and so on. They’d been badly shot up and the plane was still there three days later and was still unrepairable. So that was scene that we became familiar with. Getting out of P2,

26:30 of course, we hadn’t given all our planes and there was no question of flying out, but we were told to evacuate, everybody from this P2 airfield, and there was a railway line that ran from that place down to a place called Oosthaven or East Harbour at the bottom of Sumatra, it’s got a different name now because they’ve turned everything into Indonesian,

27:00 and there was the straits between the island of Sumatra and Java and that’s were we had to cross. So we marched to the best way we could and we got to the railhead and everybody piled on board, some on the roof and the carriages and everything,

27:30 and they set off and they came to a bridge and the story was that the bridge was mined so the engineers said they wouldn’t drive the train over the bridge and a fellow called Doug Scott, who was an engineer with some government department in South Australia, in fact they not only wouldn’t drive over it, they nicked off, they said, “Were not going to have anything to do with it.”

28:00 So Doug Scott and somebody else got in the engine, worked out how the controls were operated and they drove across or somebody walked across and said, “I can’t see anything there unusual, no bombs around.” So Doug drove this great train across all the way down to West Harbour. And when we got there the place was a shambles and around the wharf area they decided that any vehicles that arrived

28:30 were driven straight off. They set the engines going and put a brick on the accelerator and shot them off into the water. Others were, they drained the sumps, it allowed the engines to run until they seized up and all this sort of thing. People milling around everywhere some people saying they can’t get any water to drink. So I was with a group

29:00 of about 25, all my squadron and there were people down on the wharf and so on. So we went down to the water’s edge and there was a destroyer there, a Royal Navy destroyer, and it was standing there, out of the way from anything, engines running, so we called

29:30 out to the bridge, “There are some passengers here, if you’ll take us,” and he said, “How many?” So we said, “Oh, there’s about 20 or 30 but there is probably 100 of us here.” “All right,” he said, “I’ll come over.” So he picked us all up took us across the straits and dumped us in Java and we waited there for a while until some trucks

30:00 mysteriously appeared and they drove us to a place called, I forget, it will come to me. And they'd emptied out, to create barracks, they'd emptied out the local lunatic asylum. All the inmates were sent away. So we stayed there for a couple of days and then we were moved to somewhere else, barracks.

30:30 And then it became pretty clear that the game was up and more and more people got across by various boats and so on and they did a very good evacuation job. There were a couple people in my squadron that had a bad time in this respect, they were told to go to a place, which was about 20 miles from P2

31:00 where there was an aircraft engine and they had to get hold of this thing and wait there until an engineer officer arrived and then they'd be expected to dismantle it and get the various part. So they went down there and nothing happened and nobody turned up to tell them what they wanted, so they waited and waited and waited.

31:30 And then they saw an army truck, so they stopped it and the fellow said, "What are you doing here?" and they said, "Well we've got this engine," and he said, "Forget it mate, the Japs are only, at this stage only about 40 miles away." So they'd have been left there and been captured. So they hopped on the truck and joined the queue waiting down at the wharf at West Harbour. These are just

32:00 small personal incidents. But, I wasn't involved in that, but they were good mates of mine and they told me all about it and they were seething with what would have happened to them.

So what was it like to realise that you were in a losing battle, a losing war, given that all the propaganda, I guess, had been that it was unlosable, I mean, for you personally and your being moved on, you know,

32:30 **like back to Singapore and then to Sumatra, how much were you told about what was going on?**

Nothing, nobody knew anything that was reliable because rumours were always the order of the day and some of the rumours were absolutely fantastic, "I believe by Wednesday there will be a 7 Squadron and Flying Fortresses arrive and will knock these blokes over," a whole heap of rubbish.

33:00 So we didn't really know anything and we thought oh, the officers will know, and the first officer I met, wasn't my skipper, I didn't see him again until we got back to Australia, they said, "Oh, have you heard anything, we haven't heard a thing." So there was a scarcity of genuine news but we took a hint from the

33:30 appearance of the Dutch, the Dutch civilians. They knew that it was all over, or would be all over. And they were pretty down cast and all the happy talk went straight over their heads, they knew better. The Dutch living in Java, they'd been through a lot of harassment,

34:00 not against their persons, but they had relatives in Holland and when we were in Surabaya on the way to Singapore there were huge posters around city streets and on walls and so on, inviting, in Dutch, to give generously to the Prince Bernhard Spitfire fund

34:30 and then there were other posters saying "Forget Rotterdam never" because Rotterdam was declared an open city, in that the Germans bombed it and killed thousands and thousands of people. So they had relatives back there so they had been through psychological damage before the Japs started

35:00 and all they could see was disaster. So that was the scene and if we knew what was going on it was a sense of disaster from what we saw around us.

So your intelligence section, did you have one?

No, no. That might have been with the

35:30 headquarters people. And some of the headquarters people were the very last RAAF people to leave Singapore Island. And there's two or three of the survivors written about that which I've reproduced in my newsletter. But, they were lucky to get out. They were in the Cathay building, which was the tallest building in Singapore at that time. And they were able to keep a watch out for

36:00 bombers and so on but they really weren't doing any good. And at this stage the airfield was being shelled so you couldn't possibly use it, and they were told, "Look, get out and there's a ship down at the wharf so get yourselves down there." So they went down there with a party of about 30 and the ship had sailed.

36:30 So they went back to the Cathay building and this happened twice, no ship there. So then somebody said, "Well, there's another ship coming in." Well they went down there again in the evening, pretty irked because the Japs were still shelling and bombing and this ship, a smaller ship turned up

37:00 and the skipper said that he thought he'd make a last run but he didn't even know whether the island had been taken by the Japanese, that's how game he was, he just thought he might be able to help. So they all piled on that and that was the last ship out of Singapore. And these headquarters fellows, mostly medical people, including the

37:30 medical officer in charge of this group, he died only a few days ago. So they were pretty dicey days. And they said that on the way down to the wharf the scenes were incredible, buildings bombed, dead bodies lying around, the water supply had been cut off, fire brigade couldn't put the fires out because there was no water pressure and children wandering around

38:00 stunned from bombing and losing their parents, it was horrendous. But they remained together and very, very fortunately got out. And they went to Fremantle and they were very fortunate at that because they passed

38:30 through the straits between the two islands, that I mentioned before, Sumatra and Java, and it was only the following day that the Japanese fleet found the allied ships and sank most of them, and flew into Perth. So, if they'd been a bit later they'd have probably been, and other ships, they saw in the distance other ships on fire as they moved away.

39:00 So they were extremely lucky to get out. But I mention that because that gives you some idea of the chaos that prevailed. And the title of that book, which is written by one of our members, Don Hall, is Glory in Chaos. And I can tell you there was chaos, not only in physical chaos but in the command structure and

39:30 the general inability to appreciate the reality of the situation. Some of the orders of the day that were issued by the commander in chief on Singapore and you read them today and you want to burst out laughing because they're so utterly divorced from reality. And some of it was just plain lies, to keep people happy in Singapore they were issuing communications saying that the

40:00 counter attack had been successfully concluded against the Japanese in Kota Bharu and they'd been thrown back into the sea. Now we knew that was a pack of lies but I mean, that was the sort of stuff that was getting around. So when they were challenged on this, they said, "Well, you know, we don't want the civil community to be alarmed." They got a lot of women and children out

40:30 which shouldn't have been there anyway, off the island. But those that left it too late were killed at the wharf because there were quite a few ships bombed still while waiting at the wharf and some of them were just standing out from the wharf after they'd loaded all these people and they all went down. So it was a really chaotic situation.

Tape 6

00:32 Well, I just took it all in and it was rather like, I was asked by some lasses we met at the last Anzac Day, they came along to help hold our banner up, you see, because it's a pretty heavy thing and there's eight air cadets or girl reservists or something and they said,

01:00 "You know, about the war and all that, were you frightened?" and I said, "Yeah, of course, everybody's frightened," "Well, how did you handle that?" and I hadn't thought about that and I said, "Well, it's to do with training. If you are well trained and you get into this repetitive, always doing things the same way, you can do it in the dark," and that sort of thing. You fall back on that. You feel some fear,

01:30 and then you think, "Now, what should I be doing? I know what I should be doing because I've done it and done it and done it." So you keep going over your gear, over your actions, checking on this, checking on the sky, all these things and then of course you're flying at 200 miles or plus an hour so your not looking at the same, sort of, scene every second so you keep going over it and over it and over it. The only thing I never conquered

02:00 was sweaty hands. Your hands sweat, even though you are not personally feeling fear, and fear is mostly you feel in your stomach, you just turn over. But once, it only used to take a few minutes, once I got back to my routine and what I should be doing, looking for, reporting and so on that disappeared and I only had my sweaty hands and keep my eyes busy.

02:30 So whatever scene, even though, we came back once and they'd bombed the oil tanks at the navy depot and huge plumes of black smoke descended on the island, even the sight of that, it wasn't a shock, you expected that there'd be something like that if they were going to bomb us.

03:00 And that was another piece of bad news, but it didn't overwhelm us. It was just another little problem. And of course, blokes together tend to minimise seriousness. And in fact, if you get too serious, somebody says, you know, "This fellow's losing his marbles." So you've got to joke and actually get a little bit of fun

03:30 out of somebody else's discomfort, and there was plenty of that.

You said earlier in your training that you know, you had quite a realistic attitude, you didn't expect to survive the war?

I didn't go looking for it, mind you, I just felt that it was going to be that sort of thing where one was likely to crash or be shot at or killed and so on and you'd assume it would happen to other people then

you thought,

04:00 “Well, why am I so confident it would never happen to me?” but I didn’t brood on it. I just thought, “Well, it will happen somewhere and I won’t make it.”

Did it cross your mind when you were up in the plane?

No, no, no, I’d never think about other things. I never even thought about my wife or my parents or anything, it just stopped and I was

04:30 just dealing with what was happening there and then. Even after I was posted missing after I had that episode on the beach, because we were posted as missing and of course they got the usual telegrams and all that sort of stuff and then of course 24 hours later they got another saying, “He’s not missing any more.” So with great reluctance I wrote a letter

05:00 to cheer them up but of course, I couldn’t tell them anything about the circumstances and just chatted on with the formula. The formula when you’re in the services and away from home is this, “What the hell am I going to write about? I can’t write anything the censor doesn’t like the look of.” So your health, my health and the weather, so the rest of the letter was about those mundane things. But I was going to tell you about this business

05:30 with P2 with the food. I don’t know, we were supplied with water buffalo, we had this water buffalo that had been killed and they used to stew these up and they’re probably nutritious but they were very stringy, like chewing string, and then they ran out of dead buffalo and we were living for about three days on pineapples, and there’s one thing you can say about a pineapple, no matter how sweet it is, it’s got an acid that attacks the corner of your mouth.

06:00 And after about the second day, on a diet of pineapples, every time you smile or laugh, you break open these little sores and your talking to someone who has blood running down the corners of his mouth and he’d been watching you doing the same thing. So we got to hate pineapples. When we were on the march to get out of P2 to this thing, some of us

06:30 broke off because of a halt somewhere and we found a small village and it had a shop in it and we thought, “God, fancy a shop out here.” So we went in and we had Dutch guilders to spend and we poked around and he had some sweet bread rolls, so we bought him out of bread rolls and one of the others of the party he started poking around amongst the shelves and he moves some cans aside and

07:00 behind it was a half a dozen bottles of Tasmanian beer. Now how the hell do you get Tasmanian beer out in Sumatra, you know? We bought the lot and even though it was warm we scoffed the lot and it was the nicest thing that had happened to us for a while. So that was our shopping expedition on the way to West Harbour.

That was in Sumatra?

That was in Sumatra, yeah.

And Java,

07:30 **how long were you in Java for?**

Look, I can’t recall. I left there on the 18th of February and I got my service record there, which is a joke because there’s so many errors in it. I’ve achieved the impossible, I’ve been in two places at once. On the very same day that I was ready to leave Java

08:00 I was posted to, and actually presented myself to a training station in Rhodesia, I did a six weeks course there and I went somewhere called Gilgil and somewhere else in Egypt and then mysteriously into Darwin. Well I’d been in none of those places at that stage. It wasn’t till later in the war that I ever went to Darwin. So what’s happened, no doubt, it’s all handwritten,

08:30 some clerk’s picked up the wrong bit of paper and entered all that stuff in, including where I trained, it had me trained at Somers and I was never in Somers. So historians who love documents had better watch themselves, because a lot of that stuff is just error, it’s not malicious or anything, it’s just an error. Apart from that, it’s nice to know that I’ve been to Gilgil.

09:00 **Ok, all right, so from Java, you came back to Australia?**

Yes, back to Broome. From Broome I eventually got a lift down to, I was held up in Broome because Americans seemed to dominate Broome at that time, and they were keeping a radio station going and they were short of radio operators, two or three of their people feel ill and they came around to where we were sitting in a tent waiting to

09:30 catch a ride out of the place, and asked for a radio operator and I finished up doing about four days working the radio for them and servicing their radio equipment and then I quit right after Saturday because one of my mates had found a DC3 about to go down to Fremantle or Perth so he

10:00 said, “Drop all this and let’s go.” So I said good-bye to the Yanks and zipped out down to the field and hopped on this plane and that was me out of Broome. From there I got home to Adelaide.

So that was the situation, you just got as far as Broome and you had to find your own way?

Oh yes, yes. Well, there was majors strolling around telling you, you were probably a deserter, it wasn't a place I wanted to hang around. Then of course shortly after that it was raided by the Japs

10:30 and all those people killed.

That's curious, I mean, why were they saying that you were a deserter?

Well, there were a lot of people accused of that who may well have been deserters, we don't know. But, if you got away from a battle scene then the blokes who didn't or the blokes who were where you'd got to, for instance, a lot of our people were evacuated to Colombo

11:00 and that was infested by RAF and British Army people and when they got off the boat, they were christened the 'Singapore Runners' and yet these people on Colombo had never fired a shot or even seen an enemy and they were accusing our fellows of having run away. Now we met that

11:30 several times and while the war was going and in Malaya, Aussies were accused and our squadron was accused of running away, so they held an enquiry and found that the story originated with a Royal Navy paymaster. So they got this bloke into the enquiry and said, "Well, you know, you

12:00 wrote this letter and this is how you described the Australians running away, now, what did you see? Anyway he broke down and he said, "Well, I was told this. I didn't see it." So then he asked permission to withdraw his letter and they didn't let him do it so he finally made a great apology and he was reprimanded for it. But there were

12:30 those sort of stories getting around. I think we were angrier about that than we were about the Japanese. But, there was no basis for it.

But, I guess, given that kind of propaganda, on a senior level, that was being said about having control of the Japanese.

Well, I think that after Singapore had been bombed

13:00 once or twice then the tune changed. There were no stories about half blind Japanese pilots and all that rubbish, they all subsided. Funny how, I don't know, the general person who was in charge of the British forces, he'd been given a job to do but not the tools to do it with and so all he could do was to try and put the best face he could

13:30 on it. But they hung on to this propaganda far too long. And that if anything made things worse, because you're telling fibs so that the population wouldn't be alarmed then when the population saw that there was a basis for all these stories they then started at the originator of all the fibs and saying, "Well, why did you feed us all this garbage?"

14:00 And that's a good question.

So what condition were you in physically when you arrived in Broome?

Well, we were pretty lean and our clothing wasn't in the best of shape and we'd all lost a lot of weight and we looked like scarecrows. I had my service revolver and a tin hat and that's all that I had,

14:30 my only possessions. And everybody was pretty much in the same, a few fellows got a few things out, but, really, you couldn't take a lot. This is another bit of story, when they started to pull people out of Singapore to take them to this new headquarters in Bantul in Java, a lot of British officers

15:00 were told that they were to move to this new head quarters and that the 8 Squadron would fly them out to Java, it didn't affect my crew but it affected the other crews, and these fellows turned up with their golf clubs, great boxes of junk and you know, all their possessions they wanted to get them on the plane, so fortunately our skipper went right up to them and he said,

15:30 "Just walk on board or I won't take you at all," and all this stuff was literally on the side of the airfield. But there was this touch of unreality on the people's parts to think that you'd use a service aircraft to take all your golf clubs and polo clubs, if they had a pony they'd have turned up with that. So they

16:00 were still in dream world even when times got a bit tough. So that was us. We looked like scarecrows but a few good meals when we got home and a bit of a scrub up. But my wife, my first wife, she was a bit uncertain about my appearance because after I'd been home about two or three days and I said to her I wanted to go into Adelaide

16:30 and buy something and she said, "But you'll have to change." And I said, "What's wrong with me? I've got a tin hat. I've got a revolver." She said, "Yes, but that makes you look conspicuous." So she protested about that. But a that stage the other shocking things were to come back to Australia and discover how out of touch most people were

17:00 and the thing that jerked them into reality was the bombing of Darwin. I think that, "Well, there's a war going on in Europe and there's another war going on in Singapore but really it's got nothing to do with

us, not very much," and so they just carried on as usual. And then the shocks came when first of all the enormous number of Australians who were taken prisoner, that was a great shock. But when they bombed Darwin,

17:30 even though the government's ability to not disclose how many casualties there were but the word had got out and suddenly people were aware, "This is the Australian mainland, really been bombed. People have been killed. This must be serious." But I was astonished how, living with the in-laws at the time, how, well, they weren't all that much interested

18:00 in what was happening up there. I couldn't believe it, but that was general. So, it was a bit of a shock to come back to…

What were the reports in the media like, were you able to read any?

Most of it was wrong. Then that article, the newspaper article that relates to the bombing, we were credited with saying various things, that's all baloney.

18:30 The journalist put words into our mouths and when we got the newspaper with that cutting in it, Geoff Hitchcock, who was the skipper, he was furious because he'd been made to say things which he never would have said and he thought it made him look absurd. But that's how things were. But when we complained about it, they said, "Look mate, propaganda in this war is just as important

19:00 as the truth or even more so, so let it go through to the keeper." But that was pretty much happening, it was all happy talk. Anything that was done that looked as though it was a minor success would be blown up out of proportion. Because it was still Europe where the real war was and so there'd more

19:30 stories about heroism and fighting and the Spitfires over the English Channel than there was about anywhere else. They didn't want to write about failures. So that was what they did. And I think the Russian front got more headlines for a while than anywhere else.

20:00 It caught up with them.

So what was your next posting?

Well I got posted to No. 6 Squadron, Hudsons, doing similar work, out of Richmond, New South Wales. And our job were sea marine reconnaissance and convoy duty, convoying ships

20:30 going up the east coast. Did quite a few of them and sometimes they had an escort of American destroyers. We had a bit of trouble with them because their ASDIC [Allied Submarine Detection Investigation Committee, but generally refers to submarine detection equipment] equipment would detect whales. We could see the whales, they would signal us saying, "We've got a contact," and we knew what they were talking about because we could see

21:00 the whales flopping around in the water but they actually saw it as an asdic contact and they sent unpleasant messages saying, "Are you Aussies to frightened to attack the submarines?" or some nonsense like that. But eventually we were able to persuade them that they were whales on their annual migration up to the Gold Coast. But they were, sort of, gung-ho,

21:30 they were all for dropping depths charges every five minutes. They simmered down as they got used to it. But on one of these patrols we saw the remains of a merchant ship that had been sunk, obviously torpedoed, and for about three or four acres there was all this floating debris out of the ship, you know, personal things in boxes and so on and the ship had gone down.

22:00 Then a few days later we saw the submarine and we couldn't believe it. I mean, I don't say the water was glassy but it was just no breaking waves just a gentle swell rolling like that and there's this periscope and it's stuck up like a great, black broom stick moving through the water and it was even leaving a wake. Now we'd seen whales so often that we could tell the difference between a whale

22:30 and anything else and we'd seen submarines, our own submarines, so we knew what periscopes. Well, we were 2,000 feet and just decided that we'd attack straight away. So we stood off a bit and at 500 feet we were going to drop bombs on this periscope

23:00 because we knew from our briefing, there were no allied submarines anywhere in the area, so anything we saw was an enemy. Well we had a guy in the crew who had never flown with us before and he was delegated to drop the bomb and they had a gadget down in the nose of the plane and it was called a Mickey Mouse and this was a timing device

23:30 and by pressing various buttons and turning knobs you could arrange how the bombs were dropped. You could drop them one bomb every five seconds, ten, twenty and so on, or you could drop them as a salvo, let the lot go together. Anyway, he was told to do them in a boom, boom, boom, boom, you see, and he said, "Righto." Anyway he got excited, he could see the head, he could this periscope, so he pressed the wrong button and the

24:00 whole lot went but it lobbed exactly where could see this periscope. But we were a bit low and we were lucky we didn't blow ourselves up because the plane went "Whoosh" up like that. We also had as a passenger the squadron's medical officer. Now medical officers are not supposed to involve themselves

in any combat situation. His excuse was that he'd been in the squadron for so long and

24:30 he hadn't a decent flight with anybody so please could he come and Geoff said, "Well, medical people are supposed to be neutral." "Oh," he said, "look, I'm doing a study on the stress on air crew, so this is part of my study." Of course he didn't know he was letting himself into this situation. Anyway, we circled the area where we'd dropped the bombs

25:00 and a lot of stuff came up and the poor old Doc got airsick so we did pull him up once to have a look at what we could see of this periscope, "Don't miss this, see, periscope." Well he got excited by that but after we'd done about half an hour circling he got airsick, so as a witness at the debriefing he was totally useless. Even when we'd

25:30 told him what he'd seen, they then ticked him off for being there anyway. So it was an interesting day. I sent off signals telling them what we'd done and what our position was and so on and they sent another plane out to circle this area and they never, ever found it. Well, what would you expect to find anyway if we'd sunk it.

26:00 But we were never credited later with the kill and the reason for this was we didn't report any spectrum from oil, which you might expect if you'd ruptured the fuel tanks on a submarine, you'd expect to see oil. But it wasn't conclusive because the thing could have gone down if they hadn't ruptured

26:30 and the water was very deep because we were a long way out from the coast. The other thing that discredited, failed to credit our kill, was that after the war they got into the Japanese Naval records and said, "We found no mention in the Japanese records of one of their submarines being in that position."

27:00 And I said, "So what, the mere fact that it's not, after all these records must have survived all the bombing of Tokyo and everything." And also there've been books written by the Japanese themselves, since the war, in which in which they deliberately concealed a lot of stuff and a lot of evidence of orders had been destroyed.

27:30 So we don't think that an absence of a record in Tokyo as being evidence that we didn't sink a submarine. But as far as the pressure was concerned we had and I think most people in the air force did. But we were a bit annoyed about that, we didn't get credit for the kill. But we certainly did it, absolutely no doubt that it was a submarine. Now, the day's drama wasn't over.

28:00 We headed back to Williamtown which the nearest base due west and as we got near Newcastle, we saw this ship, it wasn't a very large ship, a sort of small tramp, and bless my soul, there was a submarine following it. So we checked our charts and everything, yes, this was a non-Allied submarine area.

28:30 And we could see the conning tower but it was a fair way off. So we board down on it and of course the minute we started to make a lot of noise, he went under. So we got to the spot where we'd last seen him, we had no bombs to drop, so I got the alders lamp out and I signalled to the bridge of this little ship a message, "Sub following you,"

29:00 or something like that, and nothing happened and I sent it about three times and finally the bloke worked it out, perhaps he was a bit slow on Morse code, and I've never seen so much black smoke come out of a funnel and the thing practically lifted out of the water and he bored off. Well we searched and searched the area to the limit of our fuel, and it never showed up but I think that once he realised he'd been spotted, he got the hell out of there.

29:30 But two subs in one day. It was three subs, not for us, but there was a Dutch squadron based in Canberra, sank a sub way out to sea from Canberra. So two kills in one day. Interesting, interesting, oh, we were very chuffed about that. But again there was another silly side light on it, we

30:00 used to carry a machine called a Syko machine, S-Y-K-O, and you'd have a plain English message say, "Attacking submarine," and you'd put all this into the Syko machine, fill it out on it, and then you had a card for the day and you'd put the card in and then you'd have another set of letters to correspond with the message you were coding, you see, and that's what you transmitted.

30:30 Well it was received at headquarters at Richmond and they couldn't understand it. Everybody had forgotten that all these messages are sent in Greenwich Mean Time so they were using the wrong card, you see, and it took them a while to wake up to what had happened and then of course they started sending

31:00 us all sorts of instructions and so on. The time we'd worked it out and the time it had taken them to work it out, they were all irrelevant. So Geoff asked me to send off some ironic responses. But one of the people in the op's room, the fellow that put the wrong card in, was Kingsford Smith, not the one that got lost of course but his nephew. So we

31:30 ribbed him a bit. That was that. Then the next move was, what alerted all this in the first place was the bombing of Sydney Harbour, the sub attacks. It was like attacking a beehive there, planes were out everywhere. And we operated from there, then we up to Brisbane and we operated from there doing shipping convoy.

32:00 Then the squadron was ordered to go to Horn Island that's up, next door to Thursday Island and then

from there we staged up to Port Moresby and then when the bloom went up at Milne Bay, we moved down there. And we were right in the middle of all the action. At one stage up there were two airstrips at Milne Bay, one we were operating on and the other

32:30 had got to the stage where the Japs were actually on one side of the strip and the AIF were on the other and they were shooting at one another across the airfield and that's how close they got. And we were told to bomb the Japanese in different places and couldn't see anything, it was all jungle underneath. So the army fellows would fire flares and we had drop bombs 500 yards

33:00 ahead of the flares, so bomb up, take off, wouldn't even bother to pull the wheels up, fly along the line of flares, drop the bombs, land, bomb up again, and all the planes in the squadron were doing the same thing, it was just a flying circus. We never knew whether we'd hit anything but the army

33:30 seemed to be happy about it. It was about this stage that, it used to rain terribly up there, night and day, you'd be sloshing around in it, our tents, you had two iron beds in the tent or if it was a big tent it'd be four and all your possessions were on the bed because

34:00 there'd be water running through the floor of the place and you'd be sloshing around and wherever you went was wet and the airstrip itself was made of metal, interlocking sheets of perforated steel, very wide, and whenever a plane landed it would compress this into the mud underneath and gradually there'd be a space like that between the metal and the

34:30 muddy wet ground underneath and it was very difficult to keep your footing on this. Anyway, it was pouring with rain and we couldn't find a ground crew and we had to refuel and we had a bloke with a 44-gallon drum with a hand pump and I was on the wing putting the petrol into the wing tank and he

35:00 said something and I turned around to see what it was about and I slipped off the wing and I crunched down on this metal strip and tore the back of my leg. Anyway, that became infected and I also got malaria, so half the crew were down with malaria and they put me in an army hospital where I felt sorry for myself but I found there

35:30 blokes with bits off them, lost their arms or so on. And all treatment was hourly doses of quinine and by the time you'd licked it out of your teeth they'd give you another lot. That was the only treatment I had. And then I said that my leg was a bit sore and they looked at it and it had blown up like a balloon and so

36:00 the overworked medical staff, all they could think of to do was put a hot water bottle on it, which they did and they forgot that the metal bit would be hot too, so I finished up with a burn as well as a wound and the rest of the crew came around to see how I was going after a couple days and I said, "Look, I'm going to die in here, so get me out of it." So they brought my clothes and

36:30 we just walked out of the place and a few days later I went back to Moresby and got treated there and came back to the squadron.

So that all happened at Milne Bay?

That was Milne Bay, yes. 'Cause that's really where the action was, later on it became, we were still doing reconnaissance work but then we did some of this biscuit bombing and dropping supplies of food down to some of the outer allies,

37:00 all the places in the mountains and so on. There was one place, Mount something, Mount Hagen, I think it was, where the air field is on a slope like that, so it's not bad landing because you're running uphill but taking off was a bit hairy because if your engine fails you go straight down and over this precipice. So trips to Mount Hagen were quite

37:30 interesting. And the weather up there, of course, was lousy, it was raining all the time and clouds and with most of the clouds you got great rocky mountains inside them so you really did get off course. But we did see something of what the AIF were doing on that Dakota trail and they were heroes, real heroes and there's some stories about

38:00 General Blamey's performance and I've heard them, I didn't hear them myself, of course, but a few of the blokes who were there verified the substance of the occasion but this all arose because he accused these blokes of being rabbits, and that's hard.

In what circumstances did you come across those

38:30 **guys, is it the 39th Battalion your talking about?**

Oh, I forget what they were. It was because somebody in our squadron had a brother-in-law or something in the RAF and I think this fellow was down for some sort of treatment and they got talking and I imagine.

So you were just doing land raids, land operations at Milne Bay or were you doing marine?

Oh, well, we were doing

39:00 reconnaissance because the idea was to find out how strong the Japanese forces were, so we went

looking for them, and then we used to do regular patrols up to New Britain and there was a place on the southern side of New Britain called Gasmata and the Japanese had a big base there. So we had three runs, there was the milk run,

39:30 which nobody ever found anything, but it had to be done, and there was the grocer's run, which you just kept bombing and there was the butcher's run. And although nobody ever got shot down over Gasmata it was like a beehive. People went up there and had to take photographs, all were sent at the same time of the day so that the shadows would be the same in the photos, you see,

40:00 and of course, three days out of five there'd be no shadows because it was all overcast and raining but fortunately there was clouds so you had somewhere to hide once these fighters came on, that was the butcher's run. So we had to do three runs. So we had to maintain that. And then of course the fighting in Milne Bay didn't last all that long and it was the first time,

40:30 as you probably know, that the Japanese were checked anywhere on land. It was an army operation and the books on it only refer to what the army did but the air force was very prominent there, the Kittyhawk squadron, the 75, 76 Squadron, they fought off the Japanese air and we did our best on the ground.

Tape 7

00:32 **Let's sort of, dissect those and if we can see what each of those involved for you and the crew.**

Well, the duties at Milne Bay were mainly to maintain, on request, any bombs that the army wanted, but the main duty still so long and something

01:00 that we'd become very familiar with and that was maritime reconnaissance. But you had to do it in a methodical and orderly way so that you knew exactly where these people had been looking and if they'd found anything, report it accurately and so it went on. Now, there were three standard runs, patrols that we used to do. One was called the milk run because nobody ever found anything there,

01:30 simply because there was nothing to find. Then there was the grocer's run, which involved dropping supplies or whatever to the army and the butcher's run. The butcher's run was so called because it would take you right up to New Britain and had a base the southern side of New Britain called Gasmata and it was very well defended with Japanese fighters and they had bombers there as well.

02:00 So you had to go and take photographs on certain days and usually at the same time of the day so that the sunlight would cast shadows, which would be consistent with previous photographs, you see. But against that there was very often no sunshine because of the cloud cover or rain, so you pitted yourself in hazardous as it were, flying over their airfield,

02:30 all in vain because the photographs weren't any good.

So who was responsible?

Intelligence. That vague, unknown, unseen authority which issues – they issue their requests to the air force to do this job and out of that our orders are written or given. So

03:00 this was a daily occurrence for the squadron but not for individuals because you wouldn't go out day after day after day, but I'd say every two or three days you'd be one of these sort of missions. And we didn't lose any aircraft, but how much intelligence, any valuable intelligence we brought, you don't know, but sometimes a nil result is

03:30 still valuable from an information point of view. Then we went back to Moresby after Milne Bay had settled down, although, I must say, at Milne Bay the aircrews were treated as being something special. When you were out flying you took a heap of biscuits, hard biscuits and some cans of bully beef

04:00 and you kept alive on that plus water, but for breakfast we had something special, the cooks would feed these hard army biscuits into a hand mincer, they'd crush it all up and put it on a plate, pour boiling water on the top of it, a bit of sugar and some powdered milk and you had porridge, and only the air crew got that. So we

04:30 were given special treatment to keep our minds on the job. So it wasn't a very pleasant place and with the rain and the slosh and all the rest of it, we were glad to be out of it. Moresby itself, on Jackson Field, which was the name of the airstrip, that got bombed fairly regularly. We were camped up on the hillside because it's quite a wide valley, we were camped up on the hillside.

05:00 The first thing you do when you get there is that you dig a slit trench. So as soon as we arrived, tents up and you get the tools out to dig a trench. Well we dug down about, well in our trench there were four of us and we dug down about four feet, and we discovered a line in the soil of rusted barbed wire

05:30 from World War I and we checked on that later on down at some government office and they said, "Yes, that was all fortified with barbed wire in World War I." And there it was preserved, if you touched it it

all fell apart, but it was all clearly seen as barbed wire going right through. That was slit trenches, and we used those pretty frequently.

06:00 **So how in long were you in Milne Bay and Moresby?**

Weeks, weeks, yes. Oh, no it was months in Moresby. We did get bombed in Milne Bay, very heavily, and we lost a few planes down in the revetment. You know what a revetment is? Well, it's a U shaped mound,

06:30 earth mound, and the idea is that it protects the planes from the blast of a bomb, which diverts of course, upwards, but of course, if it's in the open side of this U shape thing it couldn't protect itself. In fact, the one that was bombed in Kuantan was in a revetment but the bomb must have hit in front, you see, and that took the full force. So,

07:00 we lost planes in revetments and some bombs fell among the airmen's lines and nobody was killed, they were in their trenches. And there was a bit of an incident there, there was another rumour getting around that the Japanese were going to bomb in the night. Now how anybody underground could possibly know a thing like that, I don't know. But a group of airmen decided that they would check it up,

07:30 and they left the camp just around about dusk and parked themselves somewhere a mile or two away so they wouldn't be in the camp if it was in fact bombed, and nothing happened. But when they came back they were really in hot water, but they said, "We only followed the Yanks." And they

08:00 said that there were hundreds and hundreds of Americans that had done the same thing. That was the first and only occasion in which I could say well, yes, some of our blokes did run away, but then I suppose, getting in a slit trench is a way of avoiding trouble as well. But they left their place of duty,

08:30 that was for sure. But that was the only occasion throughout the whole war I ever saw anything untoward in that way.

That was Milne Bay?

At Milne Bay. I must say every one of the guys that did were newcomers. They'd never seen or heard, until the previous day when they'd witnessed this bombing and they were scared stiff, no doubt, they'd never seen an angry shot fired or anything.

09:00 That was their first experience, just out of training school, just delivered to the squadron and then next day they get bombed, so you can imagine they were a bit nervy. After this, I'd been flying at this stage with Geoff Hitchcock for 15 months, which is a pretty long spell for a crew to be together, and

09:30 I got posted south, oh, I had a bit of a recurrence of this malaria and they sent me back to Horn Island and I lived in medical section and they only had one patient, that was me, and this was a miner's home up on a high hill and the mine was nearby, he wasn't working it of course.

10:00 And he had a Freelite, and a Freelite is a wind-driven generator and there's always an easterly wind around Horn Island and this thing had a filtered propeller and it made this awful racket and I lay in bed doing nothing, and you don't feel like doing anything when you've got malaria just listening to this damn thing going round and round. So I was pleased to get away from Horn Island. So I told a few lies

10:30 and said I was feeling better and didn't need any more quinine. Then I got a posting to 67 Squadron back here at Lavington, which I guess was a bit of a recognition of the fact that I'd been a bit sick. Anyway, I was back on operations there because we were flying Ansons, which were very good planes for our anti-submarine work, it carried four smaller bombs.

11:00 But, slower aircraft and you can really do good marine work. So we were on convoy patrol duties and also reconnaissance. And we'd go down to various places on the south coast in Gippsland that had some temporary airfields and then operate of there and refuel and then go out again. I did that for quite a while

11:30 and then I was posted to 75 Squadron I think, in Nowra, in New South Wales. Again the same patrols and reconnaissance patrols and also shipping convoys. And we set out one night to pick up a convoy, which we'd been given the position of,

12:00 and we had to pick it up and stay with it for the duration of our fuel and so on. Anyway, we had a skipper there was a fellow called Jim Swan, he later went into TAA [Trans-Australia Airlines] when I was there, as a pilot, and we had another bloke assigned to us and we'd never flown with him before, he was a navigator and

12:30 he did an air plot, because again it was another one of these nights of rain and heavy low cloud and we never found the convoy. Maybe the convoy didn't want to be found, but anyway, we were watching the fuel situation and Jimmy decided we'd give it another half hour and so anyway we swanned around making

13:00 square searches and we never found it. And then Jim realised that the navigator had done what we call an air plot and that can be a bit dodgy and admittedly, the weather was such, you couldn't take any

astro shots so he said, “I think we’d better go home.” It was pretty obvious after a while that we were

13:30 lost. So it was just a matter of heading west to hit some part of Australia. And as we found the coast, it was almost identical with the experience in Malaya, rain, poor visibility, in darkness and Jim said, “I’m going to put her down on the beach,” and I said, “I’m telling you now what’s going to happen Jim,” and he said,

14:00 “Oh, I think we’ll be right.” Anyway, put the headlights on, came in, landed, and we finished about 50 yards out in the surf, not upside down. So we fished ourselves out of that one and sat there till dawn. I did get a message off that we were doing

14:30 a forced landing, because I was radio operator on the thing and that was acknowledged, so at least I knew where I was. And I also sent out a long signal so the direction finders could, they did pin point us pretty well. And that was near Forster on the east coast and we weren’t all that far from an airfield.

15:00 Anyway, by the morning this tide had washed, had receded and left this poor old plane stranded there. Of course, everybody was out having a look at it, including the local civil defence people, I forget what they call themselves, but they were sort of, reservists, army reservists. Here’s this plane, loaded with ammunition,

15:30 “Can we have it?” the sea’s going to get everything. They’d only been allowed five rounds a month of practicing in firing their rifles, so here was all this air force ammunition so they raided it and loaded up their guns and they shot it at everything that was going and they reckoned that was the best crash they’d ever seen. We went and we got picked up

16:00 later on from the airfield by the crews that were there, they call them, oh they have a particular name, and we were taken back there and this navigator, who I think he’d failed to navigate us properly, he overcame his concerns and

16:30 he borrowed one of the guard’s rifles and he used some of this ammunition that the army blokes had pulled out and it included some incendiary bullets and he said, “I’ll have a go at this.” So he fired one into

17:00 the scrub, which started a fire and it, was threatening some dummy aircrafts that were parked around this airfield. So, he said, “We’ll get a tractor here,” so he started loading up these fire extinguishers onto this trolley, you see. And I was disgusted, I just walked away from him.

17:30 Anyway, he demanded that he drive a truck and he took off and all these fire extinguishers fell off and started squirting stuff everywhere. He burnt two of these dummy aircraft and set fire to all of these scrubs. That was the end of that day. But, before that, there was a period in which I was flying with Geoff

18:00 again, after New Guinea, that’s right, before I went to 67 Squadron and we used to, called OBUs, Operational Base Units, and small staff, mechanics, some armour and general hands. And on one occasion we were to run patrols, B and C patrol,

18:30 and we landed at Moruya, there was an OBU and through the night, we were staying in a pub, it was the only accommodation, ’cause the accommodation at the airfield, they had people there and there wasn’t any beds, so we went to the local pub and we were woken by some gunfire, heavy gunfire. So we thought, “Well, that’s not friendly.” So

19:00 we all woke up, got dressed in a hurry, borrowed the publican’s car, drove out to the airfield and what was happening, there was another Hudson there from our squadron, what was happening was there was a ship being attacked by a submarine and I’ve got a photograph of the ship over there, and they didn’t use a torpedo, they used a gun on the

19:30 hull of the submarine to shell this ship and they killed the captain and a couple of the crewmembers and damaged some others and they’re buried, their graves are still up at Moruya. Anyway, we started up, trying to warm the engines, because the people in the sub would have heard us because it’s so close to the water,

20:00 and we saw one of the crewmembers afterwards and he said, “Well, when your engines were heard starting up the sub stopped shelling and they went away.” But it was pitch dark of course, and we didn’t have much to guide us, no moon or anything. So we fired a few Very shots [flares] off to make an illumination but all we could see was this ship,

20:30 which was in bad shape. Anyway, we searched around but there was no way of finding the sub as a target and then of course it was time to clear out and we had some aggrieved messages from the pub owner because we just took off and we’d forgotten to return his car, we thought somebody

21:00 else would do it. Anyway, he was unhappy about that but that was one of our visits to Moruya, which was a regular run and I remember on this particular event we got back to our place at Schofield’s, we were away from the main airfield we were at Schofield’s farm

21:30 and we used to take off from there. Because the idea was to disperse the air force so if it was attacked

we wouldn't all be together. So we went back to Schofield's and the CO said, "Where have you fellows been?" and of course, we were delighted to have a great success story of how we'd saved this ship and he said, "Well, where's the bloody oysters, you're supposed to bring back a sack of oysters from Moruya." So we didn't get much credit from him but that was a

22:00 regular run and they all brought back oysters so that was another failure on our part. So that was Moruya. Then the 73 Squadron ended, searching there that ended on the beach.

What would have happened, I mean the navigator obviously erred?

I don't know,

22:30 you never know, somebody just gets a posting, somebody from the orderly room comes down, hands you a piece of paper and it says, "By this order number so and so, you are posted to X Squadron or wherever, report for travel documents at the orderly room," and you never see them again. But it would probably go on his record, you see, if he was reprimanded.

23:00 One other thing I didn't tell you. When we left Richmond to go up to Horn Island and to New Guinea, we were staged through Townsville, it was a very busy place, and we got an order to take a plane, a Hudson, and fly it to Darwin and leave it there, hand it over to 13 Squadron.

23:30 And the CO said, "The squadron's on the move, we're about to go north, so get rid of this damn plane and get back here pronto because we don't want any mucking about, so don't go swanning around in Darwin and all this, get back." So it was a long flight and we got there and we handed the plane over and they said, "Go, in the transit camp" and this was a big area,

24:00 about 3 or 400 tents in it and so we were told that the drill was you see the movements officer about getting out and then you go to the guard house, give them your tent number and if you know what plane you're going out on, what time you had to be woken. So we said, "Righto, where's the movements officer?" "Oh, he's over yonder.

24:30 His name is Morton. Oh," he said, "you better go and talk to this bloke. He might be your brother or something." So anyway, he was my cousin and his nickname was Bo, B-O, and he was a famous South Australian footballer, Bo Morton, and of course, he didn't recognise me or anything,

25:00 but anyway, we introduced ourselves and we chatted about the family and he said, "What can I do for you?" So I told him what my CO had said, and he said, "God, I've got 300 other people want the same thing." So he went through his book and he said, "Well look, you're on an American plane that's going to somewhere or the other, you can get to Townsville or wherever they're going and it's leaving at five in the morning so you've got to

25:30 be down at the airfield, they won't wait, you've got to check in a quarter of an hour before the flight and it's up to you to get yourselves there." So he repeated this business about giving your number to the guard house and what time you had to be woken, so we did all that. Six o'clock in the morning, because we were dead tired and we went to sleep, six o'clock in the morning the guard woke us, "Oh God, we should have been woken at four o'clock." "My piece

26:00 of paper says six o'clock and it's six o'clock and here I am, I don't know anything about your four o'clock." So we hastened down, the plane had gone. At half past ten, the word came through, the plane had crashed and there were no survivors. So that's what I call my two and a half crashes. The last one being the half escape. So when we went back to see my cousin, of course,

26:30 he didn't know that we hadn't caught the plane, so he was a bit surprised to see us, and a bit mortified, and so he arranged for another flight but we had to hang around for about two days to get it but we eventually got back to Townsville in good time. But that was another close one.

So was that an accident?

I imagine so.

27:00 But it might have been engine failure, who knows. We never got any details except there were no survivors. It was only in the air for what, about four hours and they went in. So when I say, I've been ahead having survived the war, you can see why. I've used up a little bit of luck.

A good benefit for sleeping in?

27:30 Well, it was not deliberate. But that was something that I forgot to mention. But, I had a succession of interesting appointments after, well, I went on several mine-laying missions, I flew with a CO's crew. I wasn't a crewmember in the general sense of the word, but I did a bit of training with

28:00 the squadron as a signals officer but, I was determined to go on operational flights so I could see for myself or hear for myself what the conditions were like for radio, and this was well worthwhile because there were some blank spots and we had to go out on the frequencies that we were using to cover these blank spots and so on, so the mine laying was pretty good stuff and this was particularly so

28:30 when my cousin, Rhys Evans, who, he was the bloke that we went down to the acquitting office the day

after the war broke out, he was a navigator in 43 Squadron, I was in 42 Squadron, and they were on a mine laying mission and they dropped one of their mines and it went up and it blew off big chunks out of the wing and damaged the plane and that, and they just saved themselves from hitting the water and

29:00 to get back, under these conditions, to their base, they had to throw overboard, guns, ammunition, bombs, anything they had just to lighten the plane and the engines cut out as they landed. So that was a hairy one. So I knew this and so it was in the back of my head when I went on these mine-laying missions. And these were

29:30 sort of, dangerous, they were very long. I was in one flight – it lasted for 27 and a half hours. See the sun come up and go down and it come up again. The idea was to bottle up harbours on these islands where the Japanese were to starve them out because at that stage depending on their ships coming in to supply them with food

30:00 and these mines were vicious things, they had a number of delayed action gadgets in them, so that if you dropped the mine and it wouldn't be capable of being armed and therefore blow up unless a certain sequence of things happened. For instance, they had soluble washers, each would take one day to dissolve, so that you could put in seven washers and it wouldn't be armed for a week.

30:30 Then it had a trigger in the thing depending on acoustic disturbances such as a ship's propeller and another set of magnetic triggers that the magnetic signature of the ship triggered it off and these all had delays in them. So when you dropped the mine the Japanese would try and swoop them and they'd swoop and swoop and swoop and the next ship went boom. Now to do this you had to have

31:00 a sort of a harbour and had a datum point and this was usually a prominent feature of your harbour, say a hill or something like that and intelligence people would always pick a hill at the beginning of your run. Now, a lot of planes would be engaged in this. The first plane in would drop his mine after five seconds, after ten seconds, he only two

31:30 and then you'd carry on and drop it after 15 and 20 seconds, so these things were spaced. Well, of course, the Japs weren't stupid, then they'd reckon that hill, wherever there was hill that'd be a good place to put an ack-ack gun. So some of our fellows were shot down and beheaded when they were captured. So it was an exciting operation.

Sorry, what planes

32:00 **were you flying here?**

Catalinas, flying boats.

Sorry, just to settle that you were flying Catalinas out of?

Melville Bay, yes. So that was interesting and I survived that.

You were saying you were involved in signals there as well.

I was the squadron's signals officer 'cause I'd,

32:30 I've missed a couple of laps, but a spent a bit of time at an operational training unit at Sale and that was pretty, I was in a testing performance unit, testing Bristol Beaufighters when they came out of maintenance and that's where I did a bit of flying by myself, with another fellow, the pilot.

33:00 So, he was a survivalist, so he would have been able to put this thing down and get it off the ground. So I did a bit of unofficial flying and later on I did a bit of official flying. Anyway, I got sick of Sale, it was a hotbed of intrigue and veterans were coming back from the UK in different states of health, most of them were alcoholics, or had the shakes. So I applied for what they call a general duties,

33:30 that's flying general duties signals officer, and I did a course at Point Cook and passed that and I was appointed to, when I graduated I was posted to this Catalina Squadron. And just when I was getting used to the squadron, I disgraced myself there in one respect. The intelligence officer had to go to Darwin and he had the key to the safe

34:00 with all the secret and confidential documents. Now, normally the only time the safe would ever be opened would be whenever he pasted a heap of amendments into the expressed book and he said to me, "Right, now you take over the intelligence section while I'm away in Darwin." And I said, "How long will you be away?" And he said, "Oh, only a couple of weeks." "All right." So I went down to the wharf where he was getting on the launch to go out to the flying boat,

34:30 and he handed me the key to the safe, he said, "Oh, I'd better give you this, in case." So I put it into the pocket in my shorts and I forgot that it had a hole in it and it went through the hole, through the gaps in the planks on the wharf into 30 fathoms [one fathom = six feet] of water, or something like that. Anyway, we fished around, we could never find it, and there were too many sharks around to go diving. Anyway, as luck would have it

35:00 they needed to get to a document in the safe and the reason for this was that when you went out on these mine laying missions and you got into trouble you had to go for what they called a roger point and

these were arbitrary selected places on the map and you'd head for that and put down if you can and they'd send an aeroplane out and pick you up if they could. And of course, it was important

35:30 that the location of these roger points were only known to the book and the crew of the day. We had a report that one of our planes was in trouble, where's the book with the roger points? In the safe. Who's got the key of the safe? We had to cut it open with the acetylene torch. The CO was furious

36:00 and of course when the intelligence officer came back, there was his beautiful safe with a big hole burnt in it. So my name was mud, dirt for a while. Then I got a posting back over to Darwin to a fighter control unit. This is one of this underground things, all the things you saw in the films are true, people pushing wings around on a big table map,

36:30 operators of radio sets who had their earphones on passing messages to the pusher and it was a real drama thing because we had a lot of radar stations around Darwin and when they picked up data we had to express it on this great table. So, that was an interesting episode and of course,

37:00 the defence of Darwin, that's where the fighters that were based in Darwin, mainly the Spitfire wing, if ever there were intruders, they would be alerted and get up, that was the way it worked. So that was interesting.

So what were you doing, sorry, fighter control?

I was the signals officer.

So what were your specifics?

Well, there's a good point. You see in this in this training

37:30 I had at Point Cook I had mastered, and everybody else passed, of course, I'd mastered the problems of big transmitters. You know, half the size of this room because they could broadcast to America or anywhere, and I could troubleshoot any one of them. So when I took over this job of signals officer and we had a staff of about 300 people, most of them were in some form of signals

38:00 because of the nature of the work. I took over the office and my predecessor had flown out to somewhere or other job, to another posting, and I said, "Any moment someone's going to come in here and say, 'Sir, we've got all this trouble with this transmitter. Van you come and have a look at it?'" And of course, this is just down my alley, I had all these things by the throat.

38:30 Sergeant came in and he says, "Sir, there's an airman here who wants to speak to you." "Oh," I thought, "here comes the transmitter." And I said, "What's your trouble, corporal?" "Well, there's some Yank down there sleeping with my missus and I want compassionate leave to go and fix him up." So I said, "Oh, oh, oh." I hadn't been trained for anything like this. So I thought, "Well he's not going to

39:00 be very much good around here if he's worried about his missus," so I signed his form for compassionate leave. Then the word got around that I was an easy touch. I got a bit suspicious when three blokes were having Yank trouble with their missus. So I bailed out of that one, I said, "I think you can go and talk to the padre [chaplain] about that 'cause this is not my territory." That was my first week in command

39:30 of this technological centre was dealing with human problems and not technical problems. Then because somebody else of greater seniority came on the scene, it was decided that he should take over this fighter control unit, which had a bigger personnel array and

40:00 I would take over the fighter will and a fellow called Black Jack Walker was the CO for that. He was a great character, he'd been involved in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea firing gun fighters and won a couple of gongs for leading his squadron in that. But he

40:30 was one of these flamboyant fellows, I think if he'd been driving an MG or something he'd have a scarf fluttering in the wind behind, you know, one of those dare devil types. Anyway, I got into a bit of trouble with him, the sergeant knew that I knew some people down at headquarters and he said that he wanted to get posted to somewhere where his cousin was in Townsville, so I said, "Well, I'll talk to them about it," and

41:00 I did and they said, "Well, if you reckon he's a good guy and we can arrange a posting." But, between my negotiations something else had come up and the sergeant decided he didn't want to go. So I ticked him off and I said, "Look you've messed a lot of people around, they've arranged all these things because that's what you wanted and now I've got to back track on a lot and I've sort of, worn out my good will down there."

41:30 So he didn't like being ticked off so when I was away somewhere he said went to the CO and told him a mendacious story about how I'd mucked him about or I'd spoiled him, something or other I don't know, he made it all sound very tragic and in the process I'd said something which had reflected badly on the CO, that was Black Jack Walker, so he said

42:00 "I want to see you," and, "All right."

Tape 8

00:30 **So Black Jack Walker?**

He said, “I want to see you nine o’clock in my office and this is serious.” So I went to his office at nine o’clock and at half past ten he sauntered down from the mess, I suppose keeping me waiting was part of it all. So then he launched in on me and he said that I’d insulted him through the sergeant and so

01:00 I went through all the events as I understood them and he didn’t believe me, I’m sure and he said, “At the very least you should have presented yourself with an apology.” And I said, “Well, at that stage I didn’t even know what I was seeing you for.” He said, “You don’t seem to realise the seriousness of what you’re saying.”

01:30 And I was standing at ease, you know, hands behind my back, feet apart like this and he was standing, I guess, from here to the door away from his desk because he had a place where people stood when he wanted to talk to them. And he also flew with this bowie knife strapped to his leg, so he pulled out the bowie knife and he was flicking it with his thumb and I guess, he really believed that I was being

02:00 antagonistic or whatever to him and he said, “You need to be taught a lesson.” And he went whoosh and the thing went through the floorboards between my legs. And I had a feeling he was going to do this and I thought, “I’m not going to bloody well move, even if he hits me I won’t move,” because then the roles would have been reversed.

02:30 Anyway, I just stood there so he said, “I think we’ll take a break.” So I thought, “Well, should I pull out his knife and hand it back or let him dig it out?” So I just turned on my heel and I let him dig it out. Anyway, he calmed down a bit, in the interim and he started questioning the sergeant and decided there were a few holes in the story so he called me back and he said, “Well, it seems that the whole thing

03:00 started with a misunderstanding about the sergeant wanting this and you doing that and you shouldn’t really be pleading with other people’s problems.” Anyway, he decided to call it quits. But by this time the word had got down to headquarters and when I was posted to headquarters to do this staff job, I’m greeted with, “You’re the bloke that Black Jack Walker chucked a knife at.” So I had to overcome those,

03:30 they thought I was going to be. But I made a mistake there, I took advice from the fellow that replaced me at the fighter will, he said, “Always have a notebook that will fit in your shirt pocket, and,” he said, “at one end of the book write ‘things to ignore’ and at the other of the end of the book

04:00 on the outside write ‘things to take action on’.” So I went to my very first conference and I had this book and I went to my very first staff officer’s conference in this castle down at (UNCLEAR). And it was convened by the chief signals officer and the CO of the whole place, and every time they said anything that was of interest to my duties

04:30 I pulled out this book and I wrote it down. Finally the chairman said, “Lieutenant Morton, are you taking this conference seriously?” I said, “Of course, of course.” And he said, “Well, why, oh, why are you taking everything down in a book which is titled ‘Things to ignore’?” I had to live that one down. But that was interesting. Then the war ended and they decided to send a signals party over to Timor,

05:00 to Kupang, which is in West Timor and it had been in Japanese occupation for a long time and the idea was to have a signals unit there was for the benefit of planes which were going to fly to Singapore and back to Australia to bring home POWs [Prisoners of War] and they wanted a link on Kupang because it was landing field in case they needed it.

05:30 So, I had a team of about 25 blokes and we went over there by ship and got into a landing barge and it was a dicey place to run in because the beach was sloping like that and the surf was hitting it and so on, so you had to pick your moment before the barge went in and then jump off and fall in the sea all sorts of things. Anyway, we got them all to shore and there were only my lot and

06:00 a couple of thousand AIF people there and if the Japs had changed their mind and decided to carry on the war they’d have made us mincemeat. But, they observed the terms of the surrender at least. So we set up our radio gear and had everything working and we used a lot of Japanese labour, first of all,

06:30 to fill up slit trenches around the airfield and to clear up some war damage. So we used work parties from the Japs and it was quite interesting that I got resistance from one group of about 50 that had been assigned to me. Nothing seemed to happen,

07:00 you see, and the officer in charge of them said he never understood anything. Now, I didn’t speak any Japanese and he may not have spoken English but you can adapt a few words like, put a U on the end of it like ‘screwdriveru’ or ‘plieru’ and somebody will twig what you’re on about. So I got all these groups except this one, the guy wouldn’t, he never understood anything. So I took him aside,

07:30 and with sign language, I sort of, “What is the problem?” and it turned out that the area they were supposed to occupy, the concentrated area, the area that was occupied, an area where they had baths, you know these things they heat up and cook themselves like lobsters

08:00 were outside the bounds and the men were resentful about this and the world would change if I would allow them to get access to these baths. So I approved all that, just laid out something on a bit of paper in case they were pulled up by the AIF and suddenly the world changed, they were running to do the things

08:30 I wanted to do. The next big deal there was the generals of all these islands that were occupied had to fly in to Kupang and attend a formal surrender ceremony where the terms of the surrender were read out by a Japanese-speaking air force officer,

09:00 and they had to lay, the idea is, they laid their ceremonial swords on the table with the Australian flag and you know, a real show and all the AIF there to witness it. Well, I had to go away somewhere about something and it had been impressed on all our people that the Japanese were obliged to hand over all weapons, which they appeared to have done.

09:30 Anyway, as these generals flew in, in their big bombers, one of them incidentally taxied into an unfilled slit trench that remained there, the generals got out of the plane with their ceremonial swords, you see, and the warrant officer that I'd left in charge, he said, "Japanese, no arms." He says, "These buggers have got swords." So he confiscated

10:00 all their swords, and they protested violently. When I got back, this was going on and they were all surrounding this WO [Warrant Officer] and gesticulating and these translators saying, "You can't do this," and he said, "I can do this because there no bloody arms to be brought in." Anyway, I said, "Really, I think the idea is that they hand these things over and make a big show of it, so, I suppose he's got a souvenir or something." But anyway they handed them all back.

10:30 And then they were driven off to the football field or what was used as a football field in Kupang and they in fact, laid their swords on the table and I think they were allowed to keep them after that. But it was a pretty solemn occasion and the first time I had ever seen a Jap so close up and weeping and it was a great humiliation. And some I believe later committed suicide.

11:00 But, another story. So, that was really my last function and then not long after that I was discharged from the air force and immediately regretted it because I'd not understood what the new civilian life was going to be like.

11:30 I couldn't see myself going back to a drawing office. I guess because I'd realised that some of my previous employers were small minded people and I thought that I'd been working an area where there'd been bigger minds and bigger issues and important things and I just couldn't face it. But then, what was I was going to do?

12:00 So, then I began to wish that I'd stayed in the air force, because I did have that option. Then I rethought that and I thought, "Really, what it is that you're looking for is the comfort of what's been your home." You get free food, free clothing, free housing, free medical attention, the camaraderie

12:30 of the officers' mess, you know, a lot of values in that. But it was totally a soft option so I decided that I'd done the right thing in getting out, but what was I going to do? So, then I applied for a rehabilitation-training course and I went and did an aptitude test with a psychologist

13:00 and he said to me, "What would you really like to study?" and I said, "Law." "Oh, law, right, and what else?" and I said, "Well, I've been involved with signals, so something to do with electronics, I suppose," "Right, never mind." So he asked me a lot of other questions and I was ticking little boxes for hours. Finally, it came up, his analysis of me

13:30 was that I showed the greatest aptitude for law, something else and dentistry. Anyway, I got a course and the only one that looked like I was able to take up was a signals thing. So, I did a course here, I came over to Melbourne,

14:00 did a course that led me to a first class radio operator's certificate, that's for ships or aircraft and also a licence to operate a broadcast station, a radio broadcast station as a technical fellow. I did the course, because I'd done radar as well

14:30 in the air force and then TAA, the government announced that they'd created this new airline TAA. So, I applied for a job as a radio operator and navigator in that and I got the job, mainly because half of TAA were ex-air force pilots and I knew most of them. So, I was

15:00 doing flying as a radio operator from here to Perth, sometimes twice a week and then I was navigating and radio on charter flights to New Zealand. The New Zealand service was manned by old Empire flying boats, which were equivalent to the Sunderland and they were pretty slow and if they struck head winds

15:30 they wouldn't have enough fuel to get to New Zealand and they'd have to turn back to Rose Bay. So, the service was pretty spotty and important visitors to New Zealand, occasionally you'd have three attempts to get to New Zealand. So, they chartered TAA DC4s to fly to Auckland and we ran that service for a while. So, that was good. Then I was made Chief Ground Instructor teaching

16:00 new pilots navigation and meteorology and other aspects of airmanship and all ground type subjects,

and that was good. Then I had, it was sort of a doldrums, the company wasn't expanding because it was a socialist airline, you see, the socialists had created TAA and a lot of business houses

16:30 simply wouldn't fly it because on the principal that it was a socialist airline. And we often used to fly backwards and forwards to Perth and the only passengers that they had were government employees or bringing migrants back from Perth to Melbourne and Adelaide because to get a quick turnaround of migrant ships

17:00 they'd dump passengers off the ship in Fremantle and turn the ship around and do another lap and then they had to get them either by train or aircraft over here because that was where they wanted to go. So, we were flying these people and this was rather unpleasant because not only these people, as I say, from Greece, a whole planeload of Greeks, women and men and a few children,

17:30 and they said they wanted to migrate, go to Australia and they'd come down from some mountain village, they'd never seen a flush toilet in their lives and you know, pretty primitive and landed in the airport lounge there and had to wait there or report till the ship came in. Well, these people had never flown in their lives

18:00 and here they are at Perth airport, waiting in a lounge and this was the very first lot to be flown out, and Arthur Calwell was the Minister for Immigration and he flew over there and he made a great speech in front of all the dignitaries and welcoming them and the usual razzamatazz and these miserable Greeks were standing there, not understanding a word of it and then

18:30 it was time for them to go and the crew was already out on the plane and we only had those steps up into the plane and they had these great searchlights, which were normal for the airport, shining on the aircraft and when you got in the light you couldn't see anything but there, suddenly the buildings disappeared, you see. Now this poor Greek women, she was frightened to go to the toilet and she was the first to leave

19:00 the passenger lounge to get out into the aircraft and she wanted to pee and she looked around, no, can't see anybody and she looked back and they've all disappeared and so she got down on a step underneath the tail of the plane and relieved herself and a great cheer went up from this assembly, crew wondered what had happened, great kerfuffle.

19:30 Anyway, they all got in and they wouldn't go to the toilet. They just piddled on the floor in the aircraft and it got to be so fetid that the air hostesses came up and said, "We can't stand this any longer." So the skipper said, "Have you fed them, given them something to drink?" "Yes, yes, done all that." "All right, they've had their lot." So the hosties [hostesses] came up and stayed up in the cockpit area and when we landed at Parafield

20:00 on the way back here, the ground crew at Parafield pushed the steps up, paced cheerfully up, opened the door and went 'whoof'; it was a horrible smell. But that was the very first migrant trip we did, but mostly it was every man's hand was against the socialist airline. But proved themselves to be, it was well run. And then they bought

20:30 against a background of doubt, they bought these Convairs and were built in San Diego and they bought five of them and so I was in the first crews that went over to pick them up and fly them back to Australia.

21:00 So we couldn't come back via the Pacific cause we didn't have the range, so we went San Diego, Chicago, Montreal, Goose Bay in Newfoundland, a place called Narsarsuaq in Greenland, which you had to fly and land on a glacier and then to Iceland where we did our first and only blind landing, in complete fog and there was no option because

21:30 we couldn't fly on and from there to, that was at Reykjavik, and then we flew from there to London and we had about a week around there showing off the plane and then we flew from the… to Rome and then to Cyprus

22:00 and then to Basra, all very interesting things and at Basra we found the airport lounge filled with people and they were all Jews and they'd contracted, back in France or Germany or something, with this charter company to fly them to Israel

22:30 and the plane got some troubles and had to land and the only place was Basra and because they were Jewish and this was a Moslem country and think there were wars, it was 1947, the Iraqis seized the plane

23:00 and held the passengers, I don't know what they were going to do with them, ransom or something. Well, these people had been there for three weeks and they were pretty desperate and they kept calling out to us, as we walked in, "Will you take a message to somebody?" or, "Will you post my letters?" and the guards brushed us off. So, one of the members

23:30 of the crew said, "Look, we want to be able to help these people somehow." So he said, "I think I've got the answer." So he went back to our plane and got some cartons of camel cigarettes and he said, "If we waggle these in front of the guards," who grabbed them and disappeared, so we finished off with about

100 letters to be posted at first opportunity. So they were very grateful. But we never, ever heard

24:00 what happened. But since we didn't hear of any great tragedies, I presume they were eventually released. But that was one of the incidences on the way. Then we got back to Melbourne, through Darwin and one of the features of the Convair was the first, really, non-jet aircraft built, after the war.

24:30 Because DC4s were a wartime product, these were designed and built. They were very powerful engines, they could take off, if need be, on a single engine. Our great enemy then, I say enemy, great opponent, that TAA had of course, was ANA [Australian National Airlines] or Holyman Airlines

25:00 and they put out these stories that these planes were going crash or never make it to Australia. Anyway, the Head of Operations of TAA, he was the skipper on this flight, Don Chapman, I've got a photograph of that over there, he said, "Look, we're going to show these

25:30 bastards." So we were landing at Essendon, because we were operating out at Essendon then, and ANA was way down the other end of the runway and we were up this end. So we landed like this and we came in very steeply and we put everything on it and dropped it right at the beginning of the runway, and it had reversible props, which was something new,

26:00 so that they could be in a pushed back position stage and your landing run was very, very small indeed. So, we were able to sort all these doubters down the other end by landing, running along, off and we parked in front of the TAA terminal. So that was a great triumph. It was a great plane and when they finally sold them as other planes became available, they

26:30 got all of their money back for the original purchase. But we were stuck in San Diego for weeks and weeks and weeks. First of all, the planes weren't ready and then we wanted modifications and then there were arguments about customs and all that sort of thing. So we got to know people in San Diego, including a bloke who ran a radio parts business, and I saw him because we wanted to buy a bit of the stuff for our company

27:00 and we became friendly. He took me to his home as a guest, met his family and Dick and I have been friends, and still are friends ever since and we've visited them, Pam and I, about five or six times and they have been out here and stayed with us. So out of that rather unexpected encounter, we got good friends.

27:30 **Sounds like your experiences in wartime had a very, very direct bearing on what you did.**

Oh, look, this TAA I enjoyed because it was virtually air force without being shot at and also there were people that I knew from the squadrons that I'd been in. This fellow, Jim Swan, that landed on beach at up Forster,

28:00 he was a TAA pilot. So we knew one another and we didn't have to explain ourselves when we met, it was different with strangers. And there was some nice people in TAA despite the fact that it was a socialist airline. There were no politics in the company and we got on very well.

Al, I know we could go on with the rest of your career because there's a lot there

28:30 **but maybe we should just wrap up on a few of the wartime stuff. Looking back, what were for you, because you've been just about everywhere from Malaya down, what really for stands out most as the highlights or the low lights?**

I expect that the first encounter with an enemy is something that lodges pretty much.

29:00 I mean, I couldn't distinguish, at this distant, individual patrols or recces that that we did because there were so many of them and most of them finished up the same, you never found anything, weather could be different and other things but basically your role didn't change all that much but, when you're shooting at people down there and dropping bombs and so on

29:30 and bombs are being dropped on you then this is something that you don't forget. Each of those stand out as a separate experience. Although, it's interesting when I went to New Guinea, to Milne Bay particularly, the veterans amongst us were quite unshaken by the bombing. We knew what to do, we knew the sort of things that would happen,

30:00 the noises you'd expect to hear and it was only the newcomers who got rattled. So to that extent you can get used to even fearsome events. So I would say, in answer to your question, those first few weeks will always live in memory and yet, I suppose, I was hero situations

30:30 later but it didn't have that same impact as the first times we encountered the enemy.

You told us about flying up to Kota Bharu with you being fired at and returning the fire and possibly knocking out that gun, was there ever any, I'm not saying that obviously you were doing maritime patrols, the recces out at sea, but were there other times

31:00 **when you encountered Japanese aircraft, be it fighters?**

Yes, we did, but not under circumstances where we could do one another any harm. On day one, in fact, when we started to head north after we'd had instructions to look for this alleged platoon of Jap ships, across our path flew a bomber and it wouldn't have been higher above us

31:30 than the height of this room and I could see that red round bell and the tail gunner clearly in that instant and then he disappeared. He came out of the cloud and then into the cloud. But it just flew over us. And our plane rocked because of the effect of the air on us and I couldn't get a shot at him and I yelled out in the intercom

32:00 to the skipper, he made a violent evasive action but it was all over by the time he even knew about. He didn't see it. And so that was a close one.

You did mention the work you did from, I think, it was heading back to Singapore I think it was, Myer or Muar where the army was?

Muar River, yeah.

32:30 **Was that sort of, it seems that there were times when you were working independently but other times where it was in combination?**

This was an air force ordered operation in support of the army, but the target was Japanese troops crossing this river and on either side of it. Once we dropped four bombs and sprayed everything that was in sight, it was all over. But, then they sent their fighters

33:00 out and they got one of our blokes.

So you never really had any fighter escort, I mean, there was never protection?

No, no, no. It was sort of hit and run thing. And the fighters were assigned defence of Singapore Island or I don't know. We all shared the same mess. And we heard stories but, the rationale behind what we were doing or what

33:30 they were doing was never discussed because we never knew where the orders emanated from or if we knew where they emanated from, we never knew the reason or the tactical situation that we were given that job. A bit like taxi drivers who go where the passenger wants to go. But, we pressed home on all the attacks with a fair bit of determination, as I told you about the bloke who dropped the bombs one at a time.

34:00 Our blokes were go, go when it came to the job. And of course, we'd learnt enough from previous experience to know it wasn't likely to be hazard free. But there you go.

You talked about Cyril, was he the one who called you sergeant?

Yes, that's right. I didn't call him Cyril.

No.

But he was Cyril.

34:30 As I say, he was killed up in one of the islands. He just went out and didn't come back. He might have been in something like Gasmata, run into a hornets' nest. But he was, at that stage, operating out of Darwin, when he got back.

35:00 **It sounds like you were flying with, would most of the crew have been English?**

No, they were all Aussies.

But it sounds like this RAF culture had, sort of, ..?

Not amongst the aircrew. And any remarks I made about RAF did not apply to the squadrons because they did as well as we did within the limits of their serviceability

35:30 because they had servicing problems. But the crews, in fact, there was one guy who pressed home an attack in Blenheims, across the border into Thailand and it was heavily defended and he was shot at in the air and from ground fire,

36:00 he was very badly wounded, he pressed on with his attack, delivered his bombs, he encountered fighters again and it got back to base and he died before they got him to hospital and that was RAF. There wasn't a single Aussie involved in that.

36:30 And we had great admiration for their crews. It was their administration and general lethargy. See, when we went to Singapore, the squadrons, the Australian squadrons kept the same work hours that they did when they were down in Melbourne or Canberra, and word came from higher command

37:00 that that's not done here. That it's dangerous to the health of white people to work in sun after midday. And the RAF just stopped work at lunchtime and never resumed till the next morning. And our commander said, "What a load of old rubbish," so we started at eight o'clock in the morning, knocked off for lunch,

37:30 had an hour and worked till half past four and we did that all through the war. And yet, even after the war had started the RAF in Singapore kept the same working hours. And if you wanted anything done that required RAF equipment, “There’s nobody here, they’ve knocked off.” Couldn’t believe it. And nobody suffered any ill health from working.

38:00 It was uncomfortable because it was a humid place, as you know, and frequent rainstorms at four o’clock, you know, but we took that in our stride. But the RAF blokes were ordered to stop work at midday. So, there were differences. But that side of the RAF we scorned but the aircrews and what they did they

38:30 were as good as we were. And just as brave and just as silly, I think.

You told us about how when you took island hop and got back to Broome and there was that army major who ignorantly labelled you deserters and was unaware of what had been going on.

Well, all he knew was that there was a war going on in Indonesia and, “Why aren’t you blokes back there?

39:00 Why are you flying in here?” I suppose it’s a natural question. So we were sort of a bit shaken when he had no smile or greeting or anything like that, “Bunch of refugees.”

Was that an attitude that persisted for some time?

No, we only encountered it then. But I tell you what, one of the other things that I didn’t mention, when I finished a stint with the

39:30 73 Squadron at Nowra and I got this posting and I couldn’t understand it, it was to a war-bombed unit, and I thought, “What’s this?” Well, there was an airman, soldier, sailor and a nurse and it was an inactive service attached to one of several units, they had a number of these teams and there was a civilian and his job was to go around to factories and address the

40:00 staff to urge them to buy war bonds and we were there to give a two or three minute talk about our war experiences and it worked pretty well because these people really supported these war bombs. But there were two organizations where we met a hostile reception. One was the employees of the PMG [Postmaster General’s] Department,

40:30 the Post Office, Postal Worker’s Union, they were all left-wingers and the New South Wales Railways Workshop, a lot of people employed there. And they were ordered out to listen to this spiel, but because it was an ideological thing with them, and this is after the Russians had come into the war,

41:00 and we thought, “Well, they might have been anti-Russian before this but now were buddies because we were all fighting the same thing,” and this was after that, and the hostility, and it was summed up by, after the little nurse that talked about her experiences in a hospital in Egypt. This voice rang out,

41:30 “It’s your bloody war, so get out and f….n fight it,” and we didn’t sell a single war bomb there. And so we said, before we went to any other of these places, we said, “If there’s a bunch of lefties in there, we’re not going to go.” But elsewhere the reception was very good and the nurse’s story was pretty tragic. She told us about casualties

42:00 and conditions that the soldiers were brought in.

TAPE ENDS