Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Campbell (Lofty) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 3rd December 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1339

Tape 1

00:39 **Okay, we're recording now, so if you'd like to give us that brief overview of your life experience, and we'll start from where you born and what year.**

Yes, well I was born in Warrnambool in Victoria, on 11 November 1922, and my first recollections

01:00 of, was at Framlingham, which was the original selection of my great grandfather, 1860s, when my first school was in Framlingham, western districts, about 18 miles from Warrnambool. Then the next school was George Street, Fitzroy, my father had opened a business in Fitzroy, we moved down there, and this would have been in 1930,

01:30 31, and the Depression, the business went bust. So we went to North Melbourne, Errol Street, they're very interesting schools, both of them. East Preston, no longer there, South Street, East Preston. Then out to Bundoora, which is on the Whittlesea Road. The school has gone now, but

02:00 I went there until I think about '34, and moved to Rockbank on the Ballarat Highway side of Melbourne, did my final primary schooling there, it was only a Merit Certificate. Left school, started working, casual labouring around the district and working on farms, team stream I suppose you'd call it, general…

02:30 you had to be a bit of everything, a shepherd. For instance, the teamster would be in charge of all the work on the horses, the harness, the equipment, and you had to do that. The same with the sheep. But then I worked with a firm that was making straw covers for champagne bottles, very interesting. It was operated at Sydenham, and

03:00 actually it was very…in those days, it was very good money, I was fortunately blessed with good reflexes and physical fitness, so that any job I did I was sort of what they call a 'gun' on the job, and in the days when a trained, say wireless technician, something like that, would be getting round about four pound a week, I was earning six,

03:30 six pound 10 a week on piecework, making these straw covers. It was very good. And Dad had his own place at Rockbank and we worked together, as self employed, with the trucks and mainly operating around the piggery. And that was quite interesting, we had the only piggery that I know was sewered, which is one of the things about farming, getting rid of

04:00 the manure, and it just went down the sewer, so that was handy. And it was only two miles from the largest big market in Australia, the pig market, which is why Dad picked the spot. From there, that's when I joined the services. In the middle of '41, I applied to join air crew, I was rejected on ill health, never got the real reasons, what they told me I had

04:30 very bad chilblains, they sent me to a specialist in Collins Street and he said, "You've got poor capillary circulation, we don't know how it would go at high altitudes, lack of oxygen, so it's not worth the risk." They suggested I could do something else in the service. "No thanks," because the work we were doing, we were doing army contracts and things, so it was what they called a protected industry, I didn't have to join or anything like that.

05:00 And I continued on working with my Dad in partnership until in '42, September, I joined the ground staff and was selected as a technical trainee after the entrance interviews, and that's when I started my RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] service, in September '42 as a technical trainee. It was very interesting, I found it very good because I was always interested in technical work, I had done a little

05:30 bit of work with beam radio, with drop beams at one time, and only casual jobs as an assistant rigger. But joined in Melbourne, went straight to Adelaide into a basic course in Adelaide, back to RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology] or Melbourne Tech as it was in those days, did an electricians three months training there, they called for volunteers for radio

06:00 and I volunteered for that because I was interested in it, and they were short of radio people and I went

to Sydney, did a crash course, what they call the wireless assistant's course, and gave us a crash course on equipment and back to Laverton which was 1AD [Aircraft Depot], aircraft depot, worked in ETS [Erection and Test Squadron] there, on Vultee Vengeances [Vultee Vengeance dive bombers], they were just getting them and we

06:30 were fitting them out because the Americans used…their gunners were just gunners, they were not wireless operators, and the pilot did all that, and when we had to put the controls to the – because our people were WAGs [Wireless Air Gunners], wireless operator air gunners, and that was the first job I had. Then…it was very interesting there though, we worked on a different number of planes and equipment. From there I was posted north

07:00 to number 4E depot in Adelaide, which we knew was going to the north-western area which was central Darwin area, and that was in September '43. And went to Adelaide and then without going into detail I was there a bit longer than what I anticipated, and finally I got up to Darwin and – 11 Signals, which was the main signals transmitting station

07:30 for the whole area, all the outgoing and incoming communications went through it, we were adjacent to headquarters, which meant we were on our toes, because it was a vital installation. As I've said to the family and different ones, although there weren't any enemy around us as far as we knew, we knew it was always possible, and when you're going down to the transmitters at midnight on dog watch on your own, you sort of

08:00 hope that the commando guards were still around and watching. Anyway, that was okay, from there I went to 4RSU [Repair and Salvage Unit], which was repair and salvage, or repair and service, they call it both titles, and that was because I'd done the work on the aircraft at Laverton, they were short of people with aircraft experience. So that was very interesting for me because I love flying, I wanted to fly, and as I've

08:30 said they knocked me back. And being a servicing unit we did all the twin engines, aircraft equipment from Darwin, 2 Squadron and 1 Squadron, 18th Squadron, Mitchells and Beauforts, Hudsons and so on. But while I was with them I went out on a special group covering salvage of aircraft in the Kimberleys, which was another very interesting break.

09:00 Found out later reading some books, and they got diaries from the Japanese, a Japanese party was about 35 miles away from us in the Kimberleys and no-one in Australia even knew they were there. They were looking for our airstrip, actually. But they went south instead of north and never found us. It would have given us a surprise I suppose. Anyway, back to 4RSU, and I was there a bit longer than most of the chaps until I was tipped off by one of my friends in the orderly room

09:30 that the sigs [signals] officer had me down as a key personnel, couldn't go on leave until my replacement was on the unit, so I had to use a little bit of tact and suggest to him that it's a good idea if I break somebody in to do the job I was doing so that I was able to be released, without telling him that was what I was doing. But it worked out all right. Came south, across to Townsville,

10:00 that was very interesting, but I won't go into the detail of that. Down to Sydney in one non-stop flight, an old DC3 [DC3 Douglas Dakota bomber] with no doors on it because they'd been in New Guinea dropping paratroops. Sitting in there was a bit cold, flying, you only go up to about 12,000 to get out of some headwinds. Got into Sydney after nine o'clock, dark and interesting

10:30 story there, we got picked up by tender after one of the – an officer who was with us, who I'd done a favour for on the way down because the poor old bloke, he was a chemical warfare man, we had gas at Darwin and he was up there with that, and I'd travelled a bit up there and I knew although it's hot on the ground, when you get up for a couple of hours it's pretty cold, so I always had two blankets with me. And I could see him going blue with the cold so I gave him my blanket and

11:00 he returned the favour, he got on the blower [radio/telephone] when we landed and there was no reception for us, no tenders, no vehicles. Anyway, the interesting point there was the next day, and I met up with a Beaufort crew from New Guinea, and this is the interesting point, the captain of that crew was trying to get home to his family in Perth for his 19th birthday and he'd done one tour of bombing operations as a captain.

11:30 I thought that was quite outstanding, and people then realised just how young the fellows were. But I was getting home quickly on compassionate leave because my Dad was pretty ill. Anyway, he made a recovery and I worked in Melbourne then for a while, fitting out radio vehicles, and they transferred me to sales, which was what they called BAGS [Bombing And Gunnery School], bombing and

12:00 gunnery school, and once again it was just what I wanted because we were putting equipment in the planes, and the CO [Commanding Officer] said everybody who put equipment in had to go up and test it and flight test it, not just on the ground, so it was an opportunity to get up in the air again and get me hands on the controls, if you had a considerate pilot. I did that with one of the pilots I was with, used to play football in our footy

12:30 team, he knew I'd like to have a go at the controls, it didn't happen to everybody, but – which was good. Then of course the big bomb [atom bomb] was dropped and we went on leave, which was the best thing, the CO wanted to get rid of the problems, I don't know how many people were at the station, but they're all celebrating the end of the war and he had enough on his plate I think. And then they sent us to

Tocumwal,

13:00 my own thoughts on that is that it's a big station, had all the equipment, service facilities there for a large number of people, and it was a long way from capital cities, so all the people had nothing to do, time on their hands, which was not a bad idea to send us up there, fill in time. Didn't appreciate that much, and you know, our work at home on the business was – needed me so I took leave without

13:30 pay until my discharge came through. Went back, discharged, and what was I going to do then? I got real interested in the technical side of things and I enjoyed it, was good at it, and approached a firm, the first firm I approached was Hartleys but they were just a retail organization basically and did most of the servicing by

14:00 contract I think, out to maintenance people. And then there were people called Kingsleys, it was a radio communications manufacturing firm, components and did a lot of contract work for the services, Navy, Army, Air Force, we used to use their equipment, the air force was called an AR7 [Air Receiver 7] I think that's air receiver, the Navy called it something else, the same thing in the Army. But

14:30 anyway, they gave me a position there in their assembly and test division. It was quite good, in St Kilda Road just opposite the shrine was their site. I used to ride in from St Albans where we had our property, which was quite good. Going along all right there although one of the things that happened, the original

15:00 founder of the company, H Kingsley Love, dropped dead with a heart attack and they were just not sure what they were going to do in that time. My brother in the meantime had bought a property in Gippsland, and a guest house on it, and no power, because in those days just after the war most country areas didn't have power away from the main centres. I went down to

15:30 wire the house, set up a, you know, battery-operated motor generator and did that, found down there amongst the hill blokes, the hill men, your planned – Strzeleckis [Strzelecki Ranges], that it was good therapy after a few years of the services and so on, and I just enjoyed that, it was like one working holiday, and I stayed down there and did a bit of local radio repairs for the people. But

16:00 mainly I was involved in the timber. And as I've said to people, I knew which side of an axe to drive a peg in, and which side to cut a point on the peg and that was about it. But the old bushies, as they call them, they were very good, they were considerate and I finished up in I'd say one of the last big timber felling, and when I say big timber felling I mean the felling of big timber, not a big operation, but mountain ash up to 250 feet, up to six feet in

16:30 diameter, you go up on pegs and put a scarf in, and I found myself doing that, standing on a four by two [a wooden plank], 14, 15 feet from the ground. I was sort of – served all the timber industry so I designed my own spot mills, small mill, two-man operation, and set that up, spent three months setting it up with no

17:00 income and then the first of the mini-recessions in 1953 occurred. I'd married in 1951, as a youngster, and so I decided I had more responsibilities, my working holiday had to come to an end, and so I joined the PMG [Post Master General's Department] as it then was. Had no trouble, I went and had the interview, PMG in Spencer Street,

17:30 headquarters at the corner of Bourke Street and Spencer Street, interviewed by three engineers. They said, "Oh, very good Mr Campbell, you can start as at Shepparton on Monday morning as a technician with Radio Australia." But my wife's people were down in Gippsland so I decided to start down there, actually as a linesman. But after talking to the engineer down there he

18:00 said, "If you start as a linesman, there's a technician's position coming up in Yarram, and you can have that." So I finished up, without going into detail, after a bit of leaning on people, I got the technician's position in Yarram when it came up, although they were going to give it to somebody else, but I'd convinced them they'd promised it to me. And that was very good as it turned out, because out of the blue

18:30 Dad got seriously ill and was dead in 12 months, and it would have been very difficult if we'd been up at Shepparton career-wise because we would have had to come to Shepparton and use my radio knowledge up there. But I went ahead and had some very interesting times with them in Yarram and enjoyed it very much, did some relieving work in Leongatha, Morwell, Forster, out to Wilson's Promontory to radio links to Tasmania, very good.

19:00 Then they advertised in the Commonwealth Gazette for instructors for a new technician school they were going to open in Ballarat, and I thought, "Oh well, I'll put in for it," not thinking I would get it, I thought I didn't know how the Public Service worked, I thought they'd have their own people from training. Anyway I was accepted and we came to Ballarat in 1958. And we've been here ever since, but I didn't just stay in the school, they had us

19:30 as instructors, but not on a permanent basis, we were still temporary positions, and I knew people in the radio side, and just talking to them and Jack O'Shaunassy was supervisor of engineer, radio and television, he was very keen for me to go over to television, as he said, most of the television people were very young and inexperienced, they were very good technically,

20:00 because they'd come straight through the colleges and tech schools, but he said we've got to have someone with a bit of maturity because visitors come to the stations. The upshot of that, I did transfer, I was appointed to a television transmitter that was being installed in Albury, or out at Mt Baranduda, just near Yackandandah. We stayed in Wodonga and drove out every day, doing the work. But I

20:30 left my family here and we kept our house in Ballarat, because they were at school here and I was very disappointed in the Albury, Wodonga area as far as education was concerned, there was very little there in those days. The tech school was, you know, just taught you the basics, there was no science taught with it, it didn't equip any of them to go further if they wanted to, if they wanted to go on to tertiary they'd have to go to Wagga, I think Wagga was the nearest.

21:00 Anyway, I transferred back to Channel 3, which is the one servicing the western districts here. And I came back to Ballarat. Then a few changes came around, interesting, public service, my wife said to me, "How do you think, you know, back at Ballarat, how long will you be there?" And I said, "Well, it's a permanent appointment," in my ignorance, "I'll be there as long as we can work out this

21:30 shift work, if we can handle that." And within a month a little note arrived from our engineering office advising me that they'd reclassified the positions, and as such I was now an overpaid unattached officer and under regulations I could be nominated for any position with the Commonwealth for which I was qualified. And they suggested one position at Darwin.

22:00 Anyway, all that aside I decided, well, that didn't look too secure and they were clambering for me to come back to the training school. And I just said, well, I'd come back to a permanent appointment, which I did. A somewhat considerable drop in actual cash take home, but I came back.

That's actually – that's really good, because we've now sort of covered well into the post-war.

22:30 **Now if we could take you back to your childhood days and the Depression, ask you some questions, you can give us very detailed answers, as you will. Can you give us an explanation about your parents, their background and what they were doing with themselves?**

Yes, very

23:00 fortunate that I've got a pretty good understanding of the background of both father and mother. My father came from – he was born in Australia, and his father was born in Skye, Scottish – in the Western Hebrides, Campbell, and his mother was a McWilliam, they came from Wigdon Shears, they gave us all this info, and they settled in the western districts

23:30 and bought Lake Warrnambool. The original selection was taken up by my great grandfather of Framlingham, the original selections were very small but he was very successful and industrious and he finished up with a couple much larger properties. Then Dad himself, his mother died when he was 12, and it's a question mark which I've often

24:00 tried to work out here, at some time he worked in Warrnambool, he told me he saved his money and went to Scotch College as a day boarder. He said, "I remember the bank manager being upset when I drew my money out to get on the old ship to go to Melbourne as a young teenager," about 19 or 20, going down to the big city with all that cash on him. But anyway, he went as a day pupil to

24:30 Scotch College, had a wonderful record there, I've got the letter I found after he'd died from the vice principal of Scotch College, who was a Dr Ingram, saying that his scholastic achievements were unequalled in all his years that he was teaching. He also had a letter from Professor Murdoch, which I found, stating that any of Murdoch's – that's Rupert Murdoch's father of course – he was a tycoon in the

25:00 newspaper business, and just to his various editors that if the bearer Gordon Campbell submitted any works it was to be looked at favourably. Anyway, he – whatever motivates people, and he met my Mum when he was going to Scotch, and they went back to western district, and I was born in '22, and Dad was on the original farm, is my

25:30 recollection, and the mystery to me was why would a man go from there, to start a butcher's shop in Fitzroy, in the early '20s, like '23? Until I was talking to some of the relatives down there and I found out that one of his uncles had two butcher shops in Warrnambool when he was a young fellow, so I think that answers two questions. He must have done some work with his uncle, and learnt,

26:00 because it's a skilled trade, it's not something – you'd have to be an idiot to go and try and open a butcher's shop unless you knew what you were doing, so he must have felt he knew the business. The other one was how would he save enough money working in a men's outfitters – they wouldn't be getting any more money then than they do now, but he obviously – I'd say he was working with his uncle in the business. But that's Dad, he came from Scottish parentage. And

26:30 on my Mum's side, over from north of England, Northumberland, Durham, came here to Ballarat, they came out here to make money in the colonies, did all right too I think, for a while. The Scots of our generations were all gone. But they had their own bank here in Ballarat at one time, John Robson, he was a leading figure in the musical side of Ballarat in the early times. St Paul's

27:00 Cathedral's got a plaque, he went to England and selected the organ in 1859 I think, to put in the

church when they built it. But they – my understanding is the Depression in the 1890s, they had a lot of paper money, they were sharebrokers and stuff, whatever, and so they didn't have too much money left. And the other side, the Cravens went over to

27:30 Heathcote, McIver's Creek, which was a gold rush, and had two hotels, a flour mill, a big store, and used to have coaches running right up to Beachworth along the Murray [Murray River], sawmills at Gunbower, one of the Cravens married an Evans from Echuca, and if you've been to Echuca the Evans Sawmill, that redgum exhibition place was Evans Brothers Sawmill which they donated to the historical

28:00 society. Geoff Evans's descendant is still there. But I was fortunate that I had parents who talked about all this to us, I know other people and they don't know anything, their parents never told them any of their background of where they came from. But then things weren't easy, the best years were when Dad was – his butchery business was going very well in the early '20s, and he

28:30 developed a problem which is pretty common these days and no real problem, but in those days x-rays were rather in their infancy, it was a compacted wisdom tooth I think they call it, it didn't come out of the jawbone, it was in the bone, and he went back to his personal friend's doctor was in Warrnambool, Dad was staying in Melbourne, and they hacked it out of his jaw, and he was hospitalised for quite a long time and for the rest of his life he had this

29:00 hole in the side of his right cheek where they'd gone in and they didn't do a skin graft and cover it over. But then he was, as I say on the farm, and that was the happier times as I recall it, I was very young. But then he decided he'd go back and try his butchering again, 1930. Well 1930, '31 the Depression really crunched and

29:30 you know, people were just – there was no money anywhere, and things were pretty tough from then on. But he was fortunate, he met a chap named Hubert Miller, one of the Miller brothers, they were known as Money Millers, owned a lot of properties, they owned Block Arcade in Melbourne, Australia Arcade, Australia Hotel, and they owned a place called Mill Park which is now known as the suburb of Mill Park,

30:00 but they had 2,500 acres, 12 miles from the centre of Melbourne. I believe that had been brought down, originally they owned from there right up to Yan Yin Reservoir. And in talking to Miller, he convinced him that there was a future in marketing pork, I don't know why he had this fascination with raising pigs, but he always had. And he said, you have the property out there, you can raise your own pork,

30:30 you have the shops, you have the outlets, and Hubert was sold on this and Dad was to be the manager for this operation, and we moved out to Mill Park. The house we moved into was still being maintained by the National Trust near the Redleaf Stables and we were only out there a month, something like that, and Hubert killed himself in the hunt, they had the Findon Harriers also owned by Millers, and they used to operate

31:00 from that Mill Park. And his horse fell at the double jump and he was killed. Because all the agreements were verbal Dad was left on a limb, but at least he had his family in the Depression out in the country where we had milk and eggs and fresh air and exercise. And we stayed there for a few years until he got a position with a – well we came to Rockbank,

31:30 people named Cockbill, Willie Cockbill, William Cockbill was a councillor of Melbourne City Council and John Cockbill and his brother, they ran Cockbill's. They owned this property at Rockbank, and it was I believe the biggest piggery – we're back to pigs again – piggery in Australia in its day, they had tram tracks and big steam boilers and all this sort of thing, and preparing food, and that's where

32:00 we moved and Dad stayed there until we'd sort of left primary school, my older brother and myself, and he didn't like the idea of us just drifting – sort of working here and working there, so he got a property and that's when we sort of moved back into partnership with him on the property, working with him. And it wasn't easy, but I've got to say, I think my mother had

32:30 a terrific disposition, she had every reason to feel a little bit cheesed off coming from a reasonably wealthy family, it had been well established and then just going round with very little, but I never heard her complain at any time, she had a good outlook. And Dad never did – towards the end of his life he got a little bit bitter,

33:00 things weren't quite as fair as they might have been, but he was pretty, you know, quite happy, he kept us – well put it this way, if he was dissatisfied he didn't pass it on to us, he realised – it didn't make us bitter or anything. But we were very proud, as you can see it never hurt me, I'm 81 now and I'm thankful I'm as fit as I am and

33:30 still able to – feel I can do something, until I start. But if you want any – would you like any details of the work I was doing, or…?

Actually yes, as well, I'd also like to know, when you were living in the country, did you get a lot of people from the city coming out that way?

No, we – one contact we had with Mum's – she had three sisters,

34:00 they all lived – two lived in Melbourne and one was – her husband was a vermin inspector, noxious weeds with the Lands Department, he travelled around a little bit, he was up at Beachworth when I

became aware of what was going on, but they'd come up only once a year or something, you know, to visit. But when I was in contact with them, Warrnambool in those days, Framlingham was just out of Warrnambool,

34:30 it was a big thing to get from Melbourne to there, not a lot of people got up to Melbourne. Looking back on it you can see where Steve Rudd, the chappie who wrote the Dad and Dave series and that, it was very true to life, the big trip was show week, you know? And Dad and Mum would go to the show. Well, we weren't able to, not that we wanted to, but

35:00 Dad never had any interest, he wasn't showing cattle or anything, he was working, but our next door neighbours, I remember one instance with old Steve Rudd, they'd go down and one thing they'd buy the new car, I remember they came back with a new Chrysler from some show. So mainly it was the local people round about. It's very interesting the way in which they're all

35:30 self-sufficient, you know, the community was self sufficient. You look back and it was by today's standards so primitive, but the people enjoyed it, you'd have wandering entertainers coming through like minstrels of old, there'd be one-man comedian nights or somebody with some sort of a slide show and singing a few songs and talking about what was on there, and

36:00 they'd fill the hall with the locals. Very interesting too, one neighbour happened to be Danish, they'd come out and settled, and that was an interesting contact with them, Mum and Dad were good friends with them and we spent time with them at different times, a different culture, different outlook on things.

36:30 They went back to Denmark before the Second World War, unfortunately for them, although they survived all right. Dad was in contact with them after the war again. But there, you know, the area it was mixed farming and wood cutting in the forests, the Framlingham Forests, it gets in the news occasionally, it was not far from where we were. The school,

37:00 yes, it was I suppose typical of country schools, about 30-odd pupils I'd imagine, in my grade there'd have been around about 10, eight children. And it was interesting, the old teacher would get his fiddle out of the standard country school cupboard, and we'd have our music session, he'd tune it up. He was an Irishman, Jim Moore, who'd

37:30 play Come Back To Erin or something and his daughter would get out and sing, but he did a great job , they were very humane, human people and he made contact with everybody in the district, because he lived there and took part in everything that was going on. Unfortunately today with transport like it is, even if there is a small country school, the teacher doesn't live in that area, doesn't know the people, he doesn't know the parents

38:00 really, except for when they come to parents' meetings. They go up in their car and go 40 miles back to one of the major centres. But apart from that there was all the normal – looking back Dad and Mum had their normal disappoints of all small mixed farming groups. They never passed it on to us, but I remember them saying once they thought they were going to do all right with the crop of potatoes, I

38:30 don't think it was as bad as the potato blight in Ireland, but it didn't turn out like they expected, and things like that. But that's just normal farming. More from the Depression, hardships I think we were very aware of it when we came to Melbourne. But it was a bit of a change for a country chap.

You must have seen a lot of sustenance workers.

Well, very much – Dad

39:00 himself would not, he was one of those that felt he wouldn't go on sustenance. And looking back, he was right, it was forced labour, slave labour camps really. But having mentioned that I'll just follow that through. The friends we knew, and it was in East Preston, being English migrants, and George

39:30 came from Newcastle, Geordie, and he joined and went on the sustenance, and he had to go up to the Mount Macedon area where all those pine plantations were originally started by the sustenance workers, and they were there for three months. They were not allowed to go home, no matter how they got there, whether it cost the department or anybody anything, that was beside it [beside the point], they had to stay there for three months. Now I can remember in

40:00 '36, in '36 the Olympic Games in Berlin, and we went round to – Mum visited his wife and we were listening, she had a little radio, but legally she was not supposed to have a radio, that was a luxury. If you were on the dole you weren't allowed to have a radio. And they had snoopers walking around the streets listening

40:30 to see if – and we were on the floor in front of it, my brother and myself, listening to the Olympic Games, turned right down, but if you heard somebody walking down the footpath, you'd turn the whole thing off, you know? That's unbelievable, isn't it, today?

Yes. I'm very surprised, I didn't know they did that.

Yes, that and – some of the other amenities, I'm not sure whether it was ice chests, certainly refrigerators, they were luxuries, if you

41:00 had them you weren't entitled to the dole. And when you think of

I'll just have to stop you there, sorry, because we've run out of tape, we'll have to change the tape.

Tape 2

00:33 **All right, now could you pick up where you left off, you were telling us about the sustenance workers?**

Yes, well in this instance, as I said, I remember quite clearly that – Mrs Thompson was her name, was that frightened that the inspectors who used to patrol the street, might hear, and if she heard footsteps she'd turn it – switch if off at the

01:00 wall. And that's what I understood, she said that if they had the radio and he came in, they'd lose their right to the dole, and also if they had a refrigerator which they didn't have, because very few people had them I those days. Which was a surprise, I haven't seen that written anywhere, but that was the way they were living, and I know for a fact that George, her husband, who was up in the Myrtleford

01:30 area, on the ovens and planting pine trees, for three months he wasn't allowed to come home, and if they tried to get home by getting on the rattler, you read the stories of them, the goods train had the special police on board with their pieces of hose, like you see in America, and they'd put them off the train pretty quickly if they caught them riding in the truck or ...

Like a rubber

02:00 **truncheon?**

Yes, just a piece of hose, not the plastic hose we have today, but canvass and rubber, just to move them on. It's hard to believe, but that's what the situation was. And just talking to him before he passed away as he was older, they used to supplement the food that the government gave the camp, because they were in a camp like a military camp type of thing, it's a cookhouse,

02:30 I think the local farmers might have lost the odd small pig or goose or duck or WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK from their farmyard, the fellows were still pretty – had a bit of initiative. However, it wasn't good. The winter time down there, you can imagine was not good. Of course this went on everywhere. When I was working at Kingsley Radio one of the boys there, Bill Taylor, they were talking about the shrine and he

03:00 didn't have much time for the shrine at that time, he said, "I just remember it mainly because it was built by the fellows that came back from the First World War on the dole, so a lot of it ...," he said, "That was their reward." But the Yarra Boulevard was largely put in by people on the dole. And down in Gippsland the Strzelecki Ranges out from the seaside of the ranges, a lot of the roads were put in by dole workers. And

03:30 I think even the Great Ocean Road they might have done a fair bit of that. No harm in them doing that, but I don't think they were satisfactorily or suitably rewarded for what they did. It was tough times.

Do you remember many blokes who were going, you know, door to door, just begging for jobs?

Yes, strangely enough some of them

04:00 actually made a successful go of doing something different. I remember one place I went into with Dad, it was in Preston, I don't know how he came to come across him, but he and his wife were making of all things pickles, and then he'd go round with a basket selling these jars of pickles. And he got his contents of the ingredients more or less for nothing, he'd go to the

04:30 Victoria Market and get the reject cauliflowers and what he needed off the storeholders, just for taking them away instead of them going to the tip, take them home and his wife apparently was a good cook, and they'd boil these up and bottle them and sell them. He seemed to do all right. George Thompson, the man I was talking about, he was on the dole, he tried to do something by making

05:00 carpets, those rag carpets, and that was another thing they tried to do. That wasn't successful because people were short of money, they'd buy food but they weren't going to buy carpets, I don't think. And I remember in North Melbourne, we lived in Shepland Street, and it's just one of the few little old streets that still seems to be there, and I drove past it in the last 12 months or so and there's I suppose a half a dozen of the houses left

05:30 which had the little veranda fence which was on the footpath, and the veranda came right to that little fence, with a gate in it, and you went into the house, which is where we lived in a similar type of housing. But I can remember people trying to get a bit of money doing magic. I remember one chappie came home and said he can toss and do all sorts of tricks with little wooden balls and

06:00 things, roll them around, basic magician things, and he used us a bit amazed, just looking at him, but apparently he used to do this round the pubs and that, trying to get a shilling or sixpence I suppose, it'd be worth it, you could buy a meal for sixpence. Which was one of the things that I suppose with the no demand, and I remember the price of things was very cheap. But there was a lot of

06:30 that busking, it's not a new thing, they used to do anything they could to try and hope somebody would throw a penny in the hat for them.

So they'd be working on the streets down in Warrnambool?

Yes, along the streets. And this was mainly in Melbourne, you know. Warrnambool, the country areas were I think cushioned to a certain extent, because you had food in the country, that's

07:00 why as I mentioned earlier when Dad was out at Mill Park, he stayed there even after Hubert Miller had died, and the agreement they had for the business fell through, he had four children, my sister was born, there were four boys and one girl. But while he was there he had milk, he was able to have his own fowls, so they had eggs and milk, and fresh air and exercise for us, which

07:30 was a bit different than being between Smith Street and Brunswick Street and Gertrude Street and Johnson Street in Fitzroy, there wasn't much fresh air, but you got plenty of exercise so that would keep you out of mischief, but apart from that it was very, very tough.

How old were you when you moved down to…?

I was seven and came down, my first experience in Melbourne was okay. I didn't

08:00 realise at the time, but Dad was thinking of coming down, and he came down in the – it must have been the end of '29, and I came there with him and he left me with one of my mother's sisters, my aunt, her hubby was an employee of Myers in the city, he was the manager on the first floor as I remember, finished up managing the first floor of menswear. But they lived in Middle Park, had a nice

08:30 rented home out there, and one of my other aunts who was a spinster, a school teacher, right through, was never out of work, so they were fairly comfortable there, and I spent three or four months with them. I was never sure how long, but I know I was there in April because I remember them taking – Anzac Day was a big day, Ted was a Gallipoli veteran, and we had to go in and see Uncle Ted in the march,

09:00 so I was there from you know, New Year through until late April anyway. But then that was all right, we moved into business and it was great fun in the shop with Dad, I used to like to operate – I was going on eight then but…

Did your Uncle Ted talk to you about his experience at all?

No much at that time, I learnt more as he was older. He came back from the war, and he

09:30 was a really good vocalist, very good singer, and my aunt was a music teacher, and he had his own show on the ABC [Australian Broadcast Corporation], called The Wanderers' Quartet, that's right, in the days of the old barbershop quartets and they were very good. He did work with a chap named Charlie Vaughan who was a well known vaudevillian and not because he was Charlie Vaughan but he did a lot of work on the Tivoli circuits and the

10:00 old radio shows and that sort of thing. So he was very interesting, he never talked much about the war, he was wounded twice in Gallipoli. And one of the annoyances with repatriation, that he died of a heart which was strained, they always said from Gallipoli, the boys had tried to pull those howitzers [Howitzer cannons] up, you know, those sand hills from the beach

10:30 head and that. But when he did my aunt couldn't get a cracker from Repatriation [Repatriation Department], they said, "Oh no, it wasn't a war problem," you know? Which the doctors felt was, but that's beside the point, I suppose. But in some of his photos and comments when he was older, it was pretty torrid of course there,

11:00 and then he went to France and there was some nasty fighting there, but he never talked about it a great deal.

When you say when he was older, how old were you?

I was 18, 19. He talked to me more when I joined the services and I'd call him and talk to him, I think from one serviceman to another then. Because the gap between the First World War and the second wasn't all that great,

11:30 really. It seemed a long time to us when we were kids and in the '30s, and the First World War chaps would come and we thought they were old people and that was a long time ago, but when you think it was only 12 or 15 years before – so it was pretty fresh in their minds. But he was fortunate inasmuch as he apparently was good at that work and he was employed right through the

12:00 Depression. As I said, and the aunt who was teaching, she'd been teaching all her life, and his wife was a music teacher and she always seemed to have somebody who wanted to learn keyboard, pipe organ or

piano, she learnt old Dr Floyd who was a well known musician in Melbourne for years and years, I think he was 90-odd, he used to still have a session on 3LO [Melbourne radio station].

12:30 But that meant they – and they helped Mum a lot of course too. I know that now, you know, they'd come out and they'd always have a box of something there, some goodies there for us. That was after Dad had gone broke in the business. At one stage, you've got to put this together, and I think back myself, I didn't realise at the time, when he'd left his own

13:00 business we moved to North Melbourne from Fitzroy, because we were in a fairly big house there and the rent I suppose was more than when we moved into a smaller one, there was an old German, used to make German sausages, liverwursts, Mr Lutz as I knew him, and he was in a little shop in a side lane in North Melbourne, and Dad used to go round and help him, and he'd come home, you know, with some saveloys or stale bread, because a lot of

13:30 bread went into sausages, I found out as a young bloke, they'd get all the bread from the bakers that was too stale to sell, and that went into the sausages. Well Dad would be getting that and he wasn't getting any pay but he was getting food for us.

Get paid in bread?

Yes, he'd bring the bread home and a bit of German sausage. But you look back, as I said, I was just fortunate that perhaps

14:00 one, I was only eight years old, seven or eight years old, and two, my parents never complained, they didn't grizzle, they didn't drink alcohol, I don't think helps at all in those situations. From my observation even today, if people are in trouble and they drink, have a few drinks, it lightens the load for a start and then they get to a stage where they start crying in their beer, as the saying goes. They

14:30 get self pity and it doesn't help in this situation. But that was just another little instance of how people survived there, and Dad was doing that just to get something in kind that was good for us, and survive. And I think you moved from houses because you didn't have rent, the money to pay for the rent, that was that. And in all reality, it wasn't very

15:00 difficult to move because people didn't have much to move. Just more or less your clothes and a bit of bedding, and didn't worry about furniture because you could get it for virtually nothing anywhere anyway. I remember when we went out to Mill Park, Dad had an old Renault truck, it had been a taxi turned into a little ute type of thing, went into Northcote or somewhere,

15:30 to – came home with beautiful teak tables and chairs and everything for a few shillings, just no good to anybody, people had gone bankrupt and they'd just take whatever they could get for the furniture they had. And so that was that side of it. But no, different things. There were scams, people going around trying to get a few

16:00 shillings. I remember one was an American Negro, and he came round and he had this magical solder, fix up the saucepans and pots and things. And he showed us how good it worked, a week after he'd done it they all fell off again, you know, that sort of thing? But he'd gone and he most probably got a shilling here and a shilling there.

How did he do it?

I don't know what it was, I don't think it was

16:30 magnesium, but it was like magnesium because it'd burn and melt, it seemed to settle on nicely, as a kid I was watching and it was great, you know, and it was OK for a while. It didn't actually bond obviously, it just stuck to it for the time being, it was long enough for him to get out of the way anyway, he'd be somewhere else.

If it was magnesium it would be a spectacular kind of flame as well.

Yes, it was

17:00 burning with a bit of a bluish flame, you know, he was on to something. But that was just one. Another genuine one was a chap named Leo Daffy, Dad and Mum were always over-generous people, anyone who came along and was down on their luck, even though they didn't have much, they were just asked in, you know, have a cup of tea and make some scones or something,

17:30 which I think housewives, country housewives in those days in particular were – could whip a batch of scones out, and they were pretty good. This chappie came around would you believe, on a pushbike, at Mill Park which is I think 12 miles from the GPO [General Post Office], he lived in Northcote or somewhere there, he'd go to the fish market, and he had a baker's basket,

18:00 just fitted between the handlebars of his bike, and a bit like the chap making the pickles, he'd get whatever fish he could get for minimum amount, and he'd push out on the Thursday with the fish in the basket, tea towel over the – bit of cloth over the top of them and push that all the way out to South Morang and try and sell them to the houses, you know? And I remember him calling in home, and

18:30 talking about another family who we knew. He said, “He asked me if I can change five pound.” He said, “He knew damned well I wouldn’t have change for five pound,” five pound would be a couple of week’s wages in those days. It was just the – he thought one way of asking for credit. “Yes, I’ll take some flathead or whatever it is, and can you change five pound?

19:00 Oh, I’ll give it to you next week.”

I’m interested, because I live in Fitzroy, I guess I’m interested in what it was like to grow up around there? What sort of things did you do for fun?

Well you know the George Street School? You know George Street, I think it’s what’s called an ethnic school now, or a special school for

19:30 I think – I always said it was the toughest school that I was in. As you know, there’s no ground in it and it’s all bitumen, and not a very big area at that, what is it, two storey? I just forget now. But it’s either a multi-storey building set in this block with bitumen all round. Every recess there’d be a number of fights on, there were just

20:00 standard. And suddenly you’d see a group of kids in a ring in a bunch, and there’d be a couple in there having a go. So I learnt body language very early, I think you’d appreciate that I think, you learn that when you’re around those parts, you learn to read body language. You learn what’s acceptable behaviour without being part of a group or anything without calling drastic attention to yourself, and the first thing we learnt as country a

20:30 boy was how to get on the trams and get into the city without paying the penny or whatever it was, a halfpenny or something you were supposed to have to pay to go on the cable trams, used to swing up Gertrude Street, Dad’s shop was in Gertrude Street, and I was a youngster. His original shop in Johnson Street is still there, just down from Nicholson Street, about 15 or 20 shops down. But the kids who were in charge, they said, you watch the bloke, the connie [tram conductor],

21:00 if he’s on the dummy, you hop on the grippy car and you watch him and he gets the fares off them in the dummy and when he swings onto the front part, you drop off. And if it’s going slow enough you jump on the back of the dummy car or you wait for the next tram, you know?

Hang on, what’s the dummy car? And what’s the grippy for?

Yes, well the old cable trams, the motivation on them, they got their power from a cable,

21:30 and the grip car had a device which went down through a slot in the road to where the cable was running under the road, and the grippy as he was called, had this lever which he pulled, which engaged a cable, it just clamped onto the cable and pulled the whole thing along, not very fast. The dummy, as the name implies, was just a car hooked onto the back of

22:00 the grip car, it was enclosed, the grip car was open, you sat at open seats each side and across the front, and they were the standard, they used to run right down to Spencer Street, down Bourke Street to Spencer Street and right out to Northcote, up the Ruckers Hill. So that was the main transport, we used to go in, Mum and Dad kept a pretty tight

22:30 eye on us, but you had to get around, and you poked around, had a look at the place, go down to the old Lyceum Theatre where the Wild West shows used to be on, in Bourke Street, and the kids – they’d wait here and they used to have continuous shows, started in the morning and they’d just run through three, or whatever it would be for the day, and wouldn’t stop. But pass outs, so you’d stand there, and

23:00 when the chaps are coming out, “You got a pass out mister, got a pass out mister.” They’d give him a pass out and then you could go in and see the picture. So he’d take his pass out and go back into the pictures. Another way of getting in to see it. But on the tough side papers were a penny halfpenny, and The Age of course was the main employment one, they had an office in Collins Street, I think it was, down from

23:30 Swanston Street. And I can remember going down with Dad, he walked down from Fitzroy because it was only a penny on the tram but pennies weren’t around and people couldn’t afford to buy the paper either, and it’d be full of people in that office, The Age would be there on the table, so different pages opened up and pinned up on the noticeboard like a wall, and people would be

24:00 looking at it and watching, trying to see if there’s anything there, which was the tough side of it. I also know as a family later, in the ’30s, you know, later on in the ’30s when I was working around Rockbank, it was very interesting from my point of view, at that age you’re very observant, and all stratums of society were coming out looking for work, you know, to

24:30 get money, and Exsource was an employment agency in the city, Exsource Employment Agency, and I was never in there but they’d tell me that they’d walk out, they’d all be sitting in there in the room waiting, and they’d come out of the office and write on a blackboard, you know, two casual labourers wanted for a farm in somewhere or other, and one instance, I’ll just give you an idea, Joe Trethowan had a thrashing plant in Rockbank,

25:00 travelling around thrashing, and they put up, you know, some bag sewer wanted for a thrasher at

Rockbank. And they'd come out, and this chap came out and I was working with Joe, actually he was a friend of Mum and Dad's and I went to school with his son, one of my first jobs was working on this jolly thrasher, and the dirtiest job you could get. Eleven pence an hour, it's an interesting salary,

25:30 and that's what I was – that was adult wage although I was only 14, 15, doing this job, I got the same as the others. I remember the fellows saying, bloody coolies wages [virtually slave labour], working for this, but it was the best they could get, they still had to stay – but they got their meals, all their food. Accommodation, well they slept in the shed of the farmhouse, wherever the thrasher was, you know, they'd have their swag and put it against the stack. Anyway,

26:00 this chap came out and Dad was working on the bag sewing, which was the best job on the thrasher, because it's always in the clean part, they don't want the rubbish blowing and getting into the bags of oats or barley or whatever it is they're thrashing. So the breeze is blowing across you there and keeping all the dust and rubbish off you, and Joe brought this chap out, he'd come out from Mitchells, he'd picked him up at the station, and Joe was the boss. And he said, "It's about twenty to twelve, you might as well

26:30 wait there and start after lunch." Okay. And they were stacking seven-high, normally they stack bags five-high. Seven's a bit of an extra lift. And Dad wasn't a young man or as big as I am, he was about five foot eleven, average height, and not a – this chap was sitting there on the bags watching, and when they started up after lunch, Dad said he got the

27:00 surprise of his life, he said this – Joe was watching, he said this bloke started to sow a bag, and Joe came over and he said, "You've never sewn a bloody bag in your life, you're fired. Go off over there, I'll take you over to the station when we knock off." And he came past Dad and he said, "I've just got the sack. He said I haven't sewn a bag." But Dad always thought – that was the toughness, that bloke had come out from Melbourne, hoping to get something. I

27:30 don't think he was a bag sewer, but that was what you had to do to get a job, you had to try and con your way. And Joe told us after, what he was looking at, and I can't really demonstrate this, but if you're not familiar with bags or bag sewing, but when you're sewing, if you're right-handed – he started to sew from the left-hand side of the bag, which meant he had to take the needle out of his hand to hold it here to

28:00 ram the stuff across the bag to get a nice tight bag, you see, whereas he should have started, being right-handed, should have started at the right-hand side so that he could just – and his left hand was free to – and that was what Joe said, he's not a bag sewer. But that was just the toughness of it. He might have sewed bags, but no-one had shown him the better way to do it, you know? Another instance, on the toughness there is this same boss, Joe Trethowan, a terrific

28:30 fellow actually, very hard and to survive you had to be hard I think, it was only 11 pence an hour but he had to get the 11 pence from the farmers too, he had to get it done at the right time at the right price. But we were pressing hay and it's an interesting little story, he wanted a cook, he had a little cook house in the cabin, we slept in this cabin, there was only four of us or five of us in the crew, his son Bernie, the same age or a little bit older than myself, as I said we went to school

29:00 together for 12 months, and a couple of other very interesting characters, all of them, I could talk about any one of them. Anyway, he got this cook, we wanted a cook, and we were working away, came morning tea time and we were watching the cook, he was not a very big fellow, and he's working around the front of the cook house, a little wooden stove in the front. The next thing he's coming across with a banana box, I don't know whether you know what a banana

29:30 box is, it'd be about 800 millimetres long and you know, 300 wide and deep, and it's clearly a large box. Morning tea, I said, "Oh boy, we're going to get a decent morning tea Paddy," to Paddy Conley was the chap that was working with me on the straw stack. He said, "Wait till we get it lad, you never know, it mightn't be much inside the box." Sure enough, he put it down and we

30:00 stopped and went over for morning tea, tea towel over the top, and there was a plate of little drop scones in the middle. Well, unless you worked with these fellows, they've got appetites. Paddy said, "Oh, they look lovely, I'll have some of them." And he picked up a handful, that took about a quarter of what was on the plate, put them in his mouth in one bite, you know? But we got to know this poor little devil, he was a migrant from Scotland, he came out, he'd never been a cook in his

30:30 life, but he'd worked in kitchens as a kitchen hand and done things, and he was – "Oh, I can handle that, I know how to …" But he turned out all right. As I said, Joe was hard but if a fellow was a trier, he'd give him a fair go and he helped Jack and he finished up doing all right. I don't know what happened to him, I know he joined the Army and last we heard he was in the ambulance service in North Africa. But

31:00 just another instance of do anything to get the job, and you had to have a little bit of initiative sometimes, if they asked you can you cook, "Yes, I'm a cook." Take your chance on it. But very interesting. As I said I was fortunate in most ways, my health was good, although I had one break, and that was another instance of the toughness

31:30 if you didn't have the cash in hand. I developed pneumonia and I'd had measles I think, it was infectious, they said it was an infectious disease in those days, they don't seem to worry too much about it now, but immediately the kids at school would be all quarantined and couldn't go to school and that,

and pneumonia – and I know my Dad had to go up to neighbours and

32:00 ring up for an ambulance. And they were aware of the situation and he said to Dad, “Gordon, have you got some cash in the house?” And Dad said, “Why?” He said, “I don’t think they’ll take Don in the ambulance until you pay them for the trip, they’ll want the cash up front.” And Dad said, “I don’t know, you contribute, you do things for ambulances.” “No,” he said, “A friend of ours had that

32:30 experience.” And anyway, he loaned Dad some – made sure he had the cash to – and sure enough when they came they asked for the cash. And I remember Dad getting pretty stroppy about it. He said, “You mean to say you’d leave the boy there if I didn’t have the cash? He could die, you know?” Which I would have, because I was very bad. But I managed to pull through and that was just when war was declared, I was in Fairfield Hospital when war was

33:00 declared.

What was your reaction when you heard about the war?

I think we – my brothers and myself and Dad – pretty serious discussions we used to have, and I think we knew that it was imminent you know, it could happen. But I thought well, just took it for granted, I thought that I’d be in the

33:30 air force, because I was very interested in planes and always had been, I used to make models, but most of the – it was design rather than build, because I didn’t have the money to buy the balsa wood and things to make it with, so I made a couple and used to do a lot of planing and working out and always with an ambition to build my own plane when I was younger, and even designed it all, used to read all

34:00 the theory and that on aeronautics and aviation and planes. And one of the interesting things, I was designing my little Flying Flea [hobby aircraft] and keeping a narrow cockpit and one of the troubles was to keep the joystick and keep it narrow and still have room to move the joystick. And I worked out, I thought, “Now if I articulate this,” mind you I’m only 15 doing this, or

34:30 16, “if I articulate it and if you put a bike sprocket on the bottom and a bike chain round it, the cables can go out to the overheads and you can just bend the top half across and do that work, and backwards and forwards for the elevators.” Forgot all about it, in my old sketchbooks, get into the first Spitfire [Supermarine Spitfire fighter plane] I saw, and guess what I saw? The same thing.

Tell me, were your

35:00 **parents religious at all?**

Yes, not religious as bible thumpers, but we used to walk three or four miles to church. Dad was Presbyterian, Mum was Anglican and was told she was a backslider when she married a Presbyterian, although they were married in the Anglican church. So we were Ecumenical. I sang my solo in the crypt of St Mary’s in Sydney, in the concert, and sang in the mass at St Mary’s. I sang at,

35:30 what’s the – St Hilda’s at the university, you know, it works in partnership with the Catholic boys’ part of the university. But St Hilda’s is the girls’ college there. No, but they had that basic grounding. Mum’s people were as I say Anglican–

36:00 very – never miss, she had a wonderful voice, singing, and I think she sang every hymn in our Anglican book from memory without anything. Before she died I remember her beefing out some hymn there, but Dad himself, one of the reasons he went to Scotch was to go into the ministry, but he never did. As he said

36:30 himself, he couldn’t be such a hypocrite, that was his – he said he couldn’t live up to what he felt the minister should. But I think he was wrong, I go along with the people that say you try to do the right thing, if you can’t do it that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t still try to do it and try to encourage other people to do it. But be that as it may, he used to do a bit of lay preaching at times and

37:00 he was a very good scholar in the dead languages as they call them, but I never believe they’re dead, Greek and Latin. Although it used to help him get a feed now and again. I remember walking into a fish shop in Smith Street, and there was a great battle, I think it would be the Themopoulis or one of those and he said something about it in Greek you see, and the fish and chip chap started talking to him, although Dad’s was Classical

37:30 Greek. But apparently he spoke it quite well and he interpreted it quite well. He got a piece of fish and chips with the chat. But no, different ones used to come and he helped them, even after the war, and during the war. A chap named Natoli, an Italian migrant came out and all the boys went to Xavier and Anji was the oldest

38:00 boy, and he was studying law at the time and there was a lot of Latin needed to understand and so on. I remember Dad helping him with his coaching and that, which was, you know, that was a big conundrum with my father, why he didn’t take advantage of those qualifications? I remember the

38:30 primary school teacher, having dinner with them there one night and I suppose it was about 1936 or something like that, and Dad was still managing this piggery. He said, “Gordon, I can’t understand, you

should be the senior language master at one of the colleges in Melbourne with your qualifications in Greek and Latin." But you can't understand what motivates people and of course suddenly at 61

39:00 you're still not very communicative when you're 60, not as far as your family's concerned. I've noticed, and you possibly would have noticed in interviews that when people get on in their 80s and so on, they tell their grandchildren things that they never told their children about their life and why things happened and why things were done. So Dad didn't get to that stage of explaining those things to us, why, that's what I'm saying. But he

39:30 was a walking dictionary for us, you'd ask him about some word and he wouldn't only tell you the word, he'd tell you where it was derived and where it should be used and where it shouldn't be used, and all the rest of it. But however…

Were they strict parents?

Pardon?

Were they strict?

No, I only remember Dad getting cross with me on a couple of occasions, I think I deserved both of them, for sure. One day I left the animals without water,

40:00 and he wasn't very happy about that, and he gave me some corporal punishment and the biggest thing he made me realise how severe it was for the animals. A very understanding person. I mentioned earlier that he had this letter from Professor Murdoch who was Rupert Murdoch's father, when he left Scotch College. And he had a letter from Ingram who was the vice principal of Scotch College. And this

40:30 letter he asked me to copy it out in our flick books, we didn't have the facilities you have today for duplicating, and he had apparently decided – because we were growing up – that he should use this, and he wrote an article for The Age and I guess it would have been I think one of Murdoch's papers, and asked me to, you know, just copy it in the flick book,

41:00 and then and then post the letter off. Which I did. And he wondered why he got no replies or anything from this paper. And he opened up the flick book, and you know what I'd done? The first page of his letter with all this from Professor Murdoch, was still in the flick book. I'd put the damned thing in the envelope and posted it off without the introduction. And you know, all he did, he had the habit of going, "Tch, tch, tch,"

41:30 he just looked at me and he'd go, "Tch, tch, tch, tch," and I wondered, "What was wrong?" God, I'd have been tearing my hair out, I think, you know, "Just imagine…what a blow," he realised and just made a giggle of the whole thing.

Very understanding.

No, but one thing we…

Before you start, I'll just get you to…

Tape 3

00:41 **Now with the lead up towards the war, tell us what you knew about Germany and Japan, and were you expecting it?**

Yes, more from the European side, Germany. We used to take a pretty keen interest, and Dad was

01:00 always interested, and we'd discuss it. We knew that – we were pretty sure, yes, it would happen, there's no doubt about that. There was an acceleration of the munition factories out here, as we always said the Depression never really started to ease until they started to build munitions, make munitions, and Maribyrnong and

01:30 those places, Deer Park, became more active and a lot of fellows who'd been out of work got jobs at Maribyrnong working in the munition factories, Bendigo Ordnance Factory. So yes, we were pretty prepared for it really. We knew something was going to happen.

So it really wasn't until the war started that the Depression ended?

02:00 Until we started making munitions and things, because we were preparing – the war hadn't broken out but for sure the people knew it was going to happen, and they were doing everything they could to try and gear up. And I think this is accepted in some circles that it was one of the – why they procrastinated. In Britain they knew they weren't anywhere near prepared for

02:30 Germany, so they were furiously trying to do something behind the scenes, without telling anybody about it to cause panic, but I think it was – I'm firmly – well my observation was that the employment situation did not improve until in my area, chaps I knew were getting jobs at Maribrynong or Deer Park

Munitions and Explosives.

And what year was this roughly?

03:00 This would be from even ’37, ’38, the war broke out what, ’39? They were, at least two years before they were starting to…

So before this, those were on sustenance were they?

Yes, dole or casual work you see. Mind you, there was large percentage of workforce likes the casual work, and they still do today. But when you’ve got responsibilities of

03:30 course it’s different, if you’ve got a family and you’ve got children. Single chaps, it wasn’t so bad, they’d go picking fruit, go up to Shepparton and pick fruit, then they’d go up along the Murray on the grapes, which would follow on, and so they had it all worked out, they’d follow around. And the organised ones even had – a couple of them used to come regularly every year to the harvest, hay harvesting,

04:00 had their own sort of mobile home, like an old panel van, be worth a fortune today, a small fortune if you headed for the old collectors, and they had a bit of a bunk, and all their worldly possessions in the back, and they’d come to the harvest. The harvest down there was earlier than the harvest up here, they’d be finished down there by Christmas, and they’d come up to Daylesford afterwards, and so on. But no, the ones who were battling to get work

04:30 were on the dole or in very insecure jobs, and when they got jobs at Maribyrnong or Deer Park, ICI [Imperial Chemical Industries of Australia], they were very thrilled to get that, comparatively well paid permanent secure jobs. And that was to my observation when the effects of the Depression really started to ease

05:00 up a bit. Some of the experiences of people in the Depression, I remember a lot moved up and lived along the Murray as you might have found out in interviews, because the Murray had fish in it and rabbits, different people have said they don’t know what they’d have done if they hadn’t had rabbits during the Depression because they virtually lived on them. Even though we were working all the

05:30 time in different jobs, the rabbits were still a large part of the diet. It was also, we found it was good fun hunting, as we called it, you know, even if you did wreck a few stone walls around Rockbank getting the rabbits out. We had an old dog who was expert at that, he’d go along and he’d just stop and point at the rocks and you knew there were rabbits in there,

06:00 so that was all right. And that was just the norm I think, for there. But the people who were out of work in Melbourne, if they didn’t have any contacts outside Melbourne, the city, when you’ve got no money in your pocket, there’s not much you can do. Most of the houses used to originally have lead

06:30 flashing around their chimneys and on their ridges and that sort of thing. A lot of them disappeared because they could sell that to the scrap metal people. We moved into one house and all the doors had gone, they’d been used for firewood, by the previous tenants. So those things were very tough, but that was in the – you know, about ’32, ’33. I remember

07:00 going with my mother and we were in Preston and Dad was out at Millers, before we got the house, he’d go out there, and firewood of course was a problem. And they’d been building some spec houses in East Preston and my brothers and myself would be picking up the chiselling left from the morticing and that sort of thing, put them in little bags, put them in the pram to bring home to have a

07:30 bit of a fire. Dad used to – the first few times out there until we got out, because there was wood at Mill Parks, no problem, and he set off from there, to walk from there to East Preston with a bag of firewood on his back, you know, that’s the sort of thing you read about the old peasants doing in Europe 500 years ago or something. When you look at some of the pictures, some of them still have to do it today too in some areas.

08:00 But there are not too many people in Australia have to resort to that sort of thing today to survive. But the appreciation, we knew it would be coming because we’d seen them getting a few more planes from Laverton, firing them and your Wirraways [Wirraway training aircraft] and constructions, they’d started the aircraft manufacturing at Fishermen’s Bend.

08:30 at Fishermen’s Bend.

Tell us how old you were when the war started.

Well, I was born in ’22, and in ’39 I’d have been 17. I wouldn’t have been 17, my birthday’s in November, I’d have been 16, I’d have turned 17 that November, and I was – as I said I was in hospital at Fairfield, and I remember the doctor who was working was a major in the army and I used to have all these

09:00 air force aviation books, not air force books but aircraft, Dad used to get those when I could, and read them, and he said, “I suppose you’ll join the air force now.” And I said, “Most likely.” But I nearly died there, I was a pretty thin specimen when I came out, very weak for 12 months or so. But of course the war – things I can remember, standing out in those early days was

09:30 we thought the Wirraway looked pretty good when they – we'd seen them out flying and testing, and watching them, and a chap came out from England, they brought him out to report on their aircraft production. Edward Ellington was his name, Sir Edward Ellington, and in those days the quickest way to get to Melbourne from England was to come by boat, get off at Fremantle, and then come over across by train. And he did this, and

10:00 I remember the planes from Laverton, we lived at Rockbank near the railway line, as the train came along they met him with all these old antiquated planes flying along over the train and around it and that, and then he gave his report on the Wirraway, he said it was not a fighter plane, at the best it was an advanced trainer. And he really canned it. And the powers that be got stuck into him, you know, it

10:30 makes you lose – it hasn't changed of course, they'll never admit they're wrong or …

This is when you were in the air force?

This is just before I joined, we were very interested. And they said, "Oh, he's only come out here from the English aircraft industry to rubbish us, and so should we buy them?" Well fancy comparing a Spitfire – he came out from looking at Spitfires and Hurricanes [Hawker Hurricane fighter plane], and sees an old Wirraway. I was fortunate enough to have a few flights in the

11:00 back seat of one, and if you got up to 250 knots you were going well, you needed a bit of a downhill run, a bit of a dive to do it, but there it was, they said, "Oh no, the Wirraway's good," but it's only because the poor devils that were at Rabaul never even cleared their guns, they were shot of the sky before they were able to get a burst in. So that was just part of it. No, I joined in, as I said earlier, I went

11:30 in and went through my tests and they said everything was okay, I was suitable, they reckoned I'd make a good air gunner, they reckoned I wouldn't be able to read or something, I suppose, if I didn't have a college education in those days, you know. But then the final medical check they knocked me back, which was the most disappointing day of my life, I walked from Lanes Motors up

12:00 in Russell Street to Spencer Street Station to get the train home, with tears of disappointment in my eyes, you know, I was just so dead keen, I wanted to be there. I'm pleased now that I didn't. And went back and I didn't accept the offer of going into ground work, ground staff because I was in the protected industry in the business partnership with Dad doing contract work in the

12:30 Army, and anyway not too much in between there, we were – everyone was very involved with the war really, the older brother, he was accepted into air crew and after he went off and then he was doing his training I suppose it must have been nine months. But I joined the air force in September, September

13:00 1943 – '42 I should say. It was July '41 I wrote to them and asked for a form to make application for air crew, and anyway in September '42 they accepted me in as ground crew and went in as a technical trainee, as they classified us. And

13:30 because they were fairly rushed to get trainees through because we had to have about a minimum, roughly nine months training, whatever technical trade we did with instruments, electricians, radio, whatever, they shot us, me and the batch I was with, straight to Adelaide to the trade school in Grenville Street, which meant I didn't do any – because they called it 'rookies'

14:00 I didn't do any drill work, bull ring work. Originally they'd go up to Shepparton or Rocklands and just do nothing but drill and PT [Physical Training] and drill and PT for a couple of months, until they were sick and tired of it. However, I was always a good shot, growing up in the country, or just out of Melbourne at Rockbank, had a rifle and did a bit of shotgun work, but shotgun

14:30 cartridges were pretty expensive even in those days, you did most with the old pea rifle as we call it. And you became a very good shot with that. But trained in Adelaide which was quite interesting, we billeted in a place at Manuel College, and two shifts, the early shift went

15:00 through till the afternoon, and then the evening shift started, I'm not sure what time it would have been, say we knocked off at half past eleven, so you'd go back, I suppose half past three or something like that, we must have started. Marched home from Grenfell Street in Adelaide down Frome Road, wake all the lions and things up in the zoo, we'd be whistling or singing or something, and they all started roaring,

15:30 knowing all the locals. They told us on parade, when you get back from nightshift, we advise you to put your beds down first before you have a shower, because geez, you'd have a shower in the dark because they'd switch all the power off, put the lights out at midnight, and we had to jump into bed. And they had one Reveille, which was 6.30 for the early shift, and we all had to get up at 6.30. So the maximum sleep we'd have in bed would be six hours, and we had

16:00 about 40 on sick parade one morning. The only time I've ever fainted, and I passed out, I was what they call a marker, being my height and the tallest person's usually the marker, and you can never be late on parade because the first order would be, "Markers, fall in," and you had to double out to your spot and being a 'C', I was in A Flight, I was the first one on the

16:30 point, and I'm standing there, we were just shaping up, and we had a lot of injections and vaccinations

and what-not, teeth ripped out, and I'd started to say something, "I feel a bit…" and the next thing I woke up in sick bay and they'd carried me over. That caused them to have a look at it, with so many on sick parade, so they allowed us to have another couple of hours so we could at least get seven and a half

17:00 hours sleep. We had a different breakfast call, which was an interesting little sideline. But once again, having worked pretty hard through the '30s, what some people were finding pretty tough, I didn't find tough, you know? Which was good from my point of view. Enjoyed Adelaide. Any high-

17:30 lights there? You learnt not to lend people money, which was against the regulations of course too, to lend money, it was an offence. One chap had a very sad story, he'd had his wallet picked, he reckoned, I've always had a bit of – being single and didn't indulge overly or anything like that, I didn't blow all my money, and lent him whatever it was, a fiver or something,

18:00 came to the last day, a pay day and I was ahead of them being in A Flight we got our pay first, waited for him, no sign of him, went to the orderly room, have you seen so-and-so? Oh yes, he got special compassionate leave to get paid early, and he's left. The old boss in charge of the place, an ex-policeman, I remember his name, old Green,

18:30 he said to me, "Why did you lend him money?" I thought, I knew it was an offence to lend money, I thought now do I dob myself in? I said, "Yes." He said, "You and about umpteen others, have all been here looking for him, let it be a lesson, don't get sucked in. He was a pro." But anyway, that's just of the little things.

He never got caught?

No, no never. I nearly caught him in Sydney. One of the boys knew and as I said I went

19:00 to Melbourne, Melbourne Tech and did electricians, and I volunteered and went to Sydney and got there and a chap said, "You know that so-and-so," I won't mention him by name, "he's here? I saw him going around with a clearance paper." If you were posted, you had to go round to get your clearance paper and get cleared from all the different sections, if you had anything out or borrowed or issued. So I went to a couple of places and, "Oh yes,

19:30 he's just been here." So I went straight to orderly room. "Just missed him, he went out about a quarter of an hour ago, he got his final clearance and was picked up." So I hope he got through it all right.

What were the people on leave like, when you socialised with them?

Adelaide was wonderful, they had two places there called cheer up huts one and two. One was just near the

20:00 station, you could go in there and get a meal for nothing, and just walk in, especially on the weekends, when you're on leave you'd go in and they'd have a dance on Saturday nights, but a bit of a sing-along on Sunday night, they didn't believe in dancing on the Sundays, a lot of people were very religious Protestant people who thought that wasn't the right thing to upset people on Sunday. But they were very good, the hostesses were

20:30 good, friendly, and it was all done on a voluntary basis I understand. Farmers would donate produce, potatoes, whatever it might be. Someone would donate some lambs, like a farmer. Butchers would do them, butcher them voluntarily, carriers would pick up the stuff from the station and deliver it, and the cooks would come in on a roster basis from you know, professionals, and put in their time there.

21:00 And the girls, the big stores like John Martin and Myers and things, they'd staff it on bases. And I found them very good there. I had an extra home-away-from-home there because my older brother, as I said, one of his mates, a chap named Gordon Cashmore, I didn't know at that time, but his Dad and two of his sisters lived in Adelaide, and

21:30 the first day we got in there, it was a Sunday, we got in early in the morning and were poking around and got home that night, and a chap sharing a billeted room with me said, "Oh Don, a girl was asking about you." I said, "Be so lucky, I don't know anybody in Adelaide." He said, "No, it's you, she asked me if there was a Don Campbell in the…" He said, "Her brother is with your – in the air force with your brother."

22:00 So Mabel turned out to … I thought she was terribly old, she was at least 28 or 29, but they were a lovely family, and they lived out at Wattle Park. So that was a home for me, you know, for the weekends, we'd go out and have dinner. Or we'd go up into Morialto [National Park] looking around.

22:30 Otherwise there was always good help and volunteers for everybody, I found them very pleasant people and got on very well with them.

What year was this?

This was in '42.

Singapore wouldn't have fallen by then?

The first raid on Darwin was in February '43, wasn't it?

23:00 **No, ’42 .**

’42, yes.

February. It was about a week after Singapore fell.

Yes, 19th February. I know it was the 19th, and I was there for the last raids, the last raids on Australia was 11th November, my 21st, so it had to be ’43, that’s right. And I was up there in ’43, so I was there twice in Adelaide, I was in Adelaide in ’42,

23:30 and I went back there through embarkation depot in 4ED [Engineering Division], going up to Darwin. And yes, my birthday, my 21st, I was on guard duty, and I’d just got back onto my bunk and they tell us the red’s on. I can remember that. But didn’t see much of anything, some got fairly close, but they were asking me about this you know,

24:00 when they decided to give us the Gold Card [Repatriation Health Card – For All Conditions], I never made any fuss, I was pleased to come out of it as healthily and as fit as I did, and when they said all those people who were under hostile fire or in a hostile area were entitled to the Gold Card, and they wrote and asked me, you know, how many planes we shot down and so on, I said, “Well, depends where you got your information

24:30 from, as far as we normal airmen were concerned. If you listened to Tokyo Rose [Radio Tokyo newsreader Iva Ikuko Toguri d’Aquino], none of their planes were shot down and we were all blown to smithereens, but if you listened to the butt in the mess, well, we shot down half the Japanese Air Force and so on, but I said, “All I know for a fact is that you knew it was on, you were in the trench, you kept your head down and hoped for the best.”

When did you go to Darwin?

25:00 I went up in ’43. In September ’43.

What was your specific role in Darwin? Tell us about that.

I was a wireless maintenance mechanic, I went up as a wireless assistant, and I was trade-tested to a wireless maintenance mechanic in the field, as they say, on the job. And went up, it was a long trip, it made you realise how big our continent was.

25:30 We went to Terowie in the standard Adelaide gauge, and then we waited at Terowie until we had enough for a convoy to go north, and then we got on the Leaping Leaner as they call it, the Alice Springs train. Went to Quorn, the CWA [Country Women’s Association] people, the Country Women’s Organization there, boasted they gave a

26:00 full meal to every serviceman that went through, so we had our dinner there, although it was 100 [degrees Fahrenheit] in the shade, we had a hot meal of corned beef or something or other. And we went on through places that were just names to me, Oodnadatta and so on and so forth, and some distance out of Alice Springs the old boiler ran out of water, the train, so we had to pull the fire and we sat there until they brought out water. Fair enough, we got into Alice Springs,

26:30 don’t remember much about it, a lot of talk about Darwin because the evacuees, a lot of them were brought down to Alice Springs from Darwin. Then we got into trucks, I’m not even sure how many – I think we were only day in Alice Springs and we had a truck convoy and headed up along the north-south road. Quite an experience though, we were in semitrailers, had a canopy, a canvass over the top, and

27:00 I don’t know how many, but we were piled in a fair number of us, were half-lying all over each other to try and get a bit of rest, kit bags and the rest of it. And I think we had two stages on the way up. Elliott I think was one where we stayed overnight, and I remember the CO giving the routine orders for the camp, no gambling and so on, lights out at 10 o’clock, and then when he finished

27:30 he said, “There’ll be game on over outside the recreation hut,” he said, “But I want the lights out at 10.” So the two-up was on over there. Made my bunk, next morning picked my boots up that I’d been using for a pillow wrapped up in something, and here was about a six-inch long centipede wriggling around underneath the boot, so I thought…fortunately he stayed there. But got to Darwin, actually we stayed at Larrimah, a faster train

28:00 went – or the convoy went to Larrimah, had a few days there, interesting little sideline there, when you’re in transit you do the maintenance for the camps as you’re going through, you’re allocated duties every morning. And the first night there in the rec [recreation] room a chap came over, he recognised me, and he joined up the same day as me, and he had been a chief at the Korora Club, and he was telling me that when

28:30 they found out he was a chef and he was doing the rookies, he got out of the rookies, they drafted him into the sergeants’ mess as a cook. The sergeants wanted a chef. And then he said it wasn’t all that long before the officers’ mess found out he was a top chef, so he was sort of mysteriously drafted into the officers’ mess, and he was working in the officers’ mess at Larrimah. And he said, “Look, in the morning when they

29:00 ask for volunteers for this or that, come over to the officers' mess, you'll get better food and it's good." Anyway, I didn't get the chance because the next morning old WOD [Warrant Officer Disciplinary] came over and said, "Right, I want some big husky blokes today, we've got to get firewood." Because I was number one they said, "You'll do, you'll do, and you'll do."

29:30 We dumped off the last lot of wood at the officers' mess and the chappie there had made a cup of tea, this was my mate, and we were having a cup of tea and the major, as we used to call the WOD, I'm still not sure where that term 'major' comes from, but he was always referred to as major, the warrant officer disciplinary, and he gave me a cup of tea and that was our last load of wood, we'd finished you see, and my mate said to him, "Look, I've been thinking, you know we get a couple

30:00 of volunteers every day to come over and then we get a couple more, it's not really very satisfactory. It'd be better if we had somebody for a week at a time." He said, "Oh yeah, that makes sense. These blokes look all right, a couple of those would be right." The major knew something was going on, and he said, "Oh yes, that'd be okay." So the upshot of that was instead of going on parade every morning I'd go over there and have brekkie

30:30 in the officers' mess in the kitchen, with the choice of a hot or cold meal in the evening and a choice of sweets and so on. And while we were there we had a commotion in the airmens' mess one night, there was only about seven or eight officers in the little transit camp, I'd seen them putting their sight arms on, or their holsters on the…all go over to the airmens' mess, there was a strike on because the Mick and Vic as we call it, the

31:00 meat and vegetables, M&V, was running around the plate, they couldn't catch up with, it was always flyblown. And they were objecting and anyway the boys, the officers told them, you know, "We get exactly the same rations as you." They did, but it was cooked differently, that was the difference. But just another little sideline on service life. Got my first introduction really to being involved in the two-

31:30 up schools, one of the boys went over and borrowed sixpence off me to get two and six for a spin, and he walked away with over five pound, which is not a bad little return. He threw six heads or something, whatever it was. Never became involved myself, I never ever had a spin. I always found money too hard to get, I couldn't get enthusiastic about the chance of losing it. Nice when you win it, but you always seem to lose in the

32:00 long run. So that stood out. From there we got in the train to Larrimah and went up towards Darwin again, and that was very primitive travel because they were cattle trucks, and we were in the cattle trucks. Think we're going to Belsen [prison camp] or somewhere, but I remember some of the boys, it got that stifling they knocked some of the roof out so they could stick their head out and get a bit of fresh air, of course you got a face full of cinders as well from the old engine. But

32:30 I dropped off at Adelaide River, that was my disembarkation, and the jeep was waiting there to take me to 11 Signals, which was the radio station for north-western. That was good, I enjoyed it. The fellows were all good. In the technical trade, especially in radio, a lot of them were hams, that had been their hobby before they came in, and like all hams [ham radio enthusiasts] they liked to swap

33:00 notes, and you know, they were teaching us – I hadn't learnt Morse because I only did the crash course in Sydney, and the fellows said they were running Morse school and things like that, which was good. And we had a very good mess there, old Shorty Austin, not sure what his rank was, I think he might have been a squadron leader, but everybody knew him as Shorty Austin. And they wondered what was going on, they'd dug a

33:30 great pit there and got this fire going, and they'd gone out and shot a couple of bullocks, they were running wild, you know, because the farms were all evacuated, and the butchers did them up and they were getting ready for a barbecue. It was some sort of a good night, and a sing-along, which is great for morale, that was the whole point, the officers who understood that, you need a bit of relaxation and get on with it.

34:00 It was while we were there they used to laugh about the – one of the officers, the equipment officer, he always seemed to have to be down in Adelaide looking for stores on the full moon, we woke up to him, because the full moon was always when the Japs, they used to do most of their bombing on the moon, they preferred that. We always reckoned their navigation wasn't all that crash hot, they didn't seem to be able to see where they were, but they weren't the only ones with that problem, I

34:30 don't think, either.

What were you told about the Japs? Can you give us an idea?

We just got the normal propaganda you know, fellows with big rimmed glasses and buck teeth and that sort of thing, because we didn't get much out of what was going on. Well I don't know what information did get out from the prisoners and that that were taken, we didn't

35:00 know how they were being treated or what was going on there really. But we were just happy when we saw that we shot a plane down or something like that, it was pretty good stuff. The different little stories you'd get, I remember one Mitchell from 2 Squadron, happened to be up there, I still don't know why we were

35:30 at 2 Squadron, we did their maintenance but normally they flew the planes to 4RSU, 4 Repair and Service Unit, and this one, they'd lost a mid upper gunner, he was killed, got a bit of flak, got through, they had a flak net around them in the mid upper turret, but apparently it came up under and came into his back, and when the pilot – when they told the pilot you know, that

36:00 he'd been hit, he was killed actually, he did the nana [lost his temper], you know, he said, "I'll fix the bastards." And he put her down on the water and held her down below the level of the ship until he was right on it, and then let the bombs go, the skip bomb type of thing, so the bomb didn't hit the water, it hit the ship just on the waterline, and then he pulled her up, but he left it that late that under the wing there was a scrape back with red lead on it from the

36:30 mast on the ship, he just made it. They were a couple of events like that. Another day we were walking along and a Mitchell again, and Sunday we used to have off. And things were easing off a bit, and we were walking along with the maintenance, and I said, "Oh, we've got to go out there to the

37:00 bombing range one day, we might get a flight with them, they tell me if you go out you can go up with them if they're not too busy." Watching this plane at about I suppose five or six thousand feet up, and suddenly saw this unholy black ball and orange flame underneath it, and then we heard the explosion, and went through a patch of cloud that looked like a vapour trail, you know? I never realised he was on fire, and

37:30 I've seen it portrayed in movies but in reality you sort of found yourself saying, "Jump." But they didn't. In reality of course, what happened I found out after we were down here, one of the

38:00 boys in our RAAF Association, a photographer, he was an intelligence photographer with them up there, he said they were testing a photoflash bomb, and it photoflashed at the wrong time, it detonated as it left the bomb bay. You can imagine the concussion, the fellows in the back, they'd be all stunned, they wouldn't know what had happened. The pilot tried to

38:30 fly it down, but obviously the plane was damaged and he couldn't have much control. He did control it down, our boys had to go out and pick it up actually, because we looked after their – our salvage crew, and the chaps in the back jumped out without chutes, before it hit, because it was on fire. Which is what they used to do in the First World War.

39:00 They said before they had parachutes, if the plane was on fire it was better to jump out and die that way than to stay in it and get grilled as she's going down. And the pilot, when he put it in – the Mitchell wasn't the best thing for belly landings, especially when it's got some shoulder wing with the engines on, the whole thing collapses on top of you when you're sitting in front of it.

Did you know those chaps?

No, didn't know them, didn't know any of them,

39:30 but it's one of the things of course, once you're in the uniform, as I was saying to someone the other day, we were talking about Probis that I'm in, and this chap was saying he enjoyed the Probis bowls day, and I said, "Well it's like the war," I think Probians are just a social club, they're not money raisers or anything, they just get together to have a yarn and so on, and I said, "When you're in the services, if you saw

40:00 someone in uniform, you'd just behave as if you know him, you're all in the one – you talk and you fraternise, you know, just straight off. So it was all like as if you were one big group, which was something you missed. I used to remark, in the services if you'd get on a train or something going somewhere, if there was a girl there in service uniform, you'd talk like as if you knew her, you'd just start chatting and talking.

40:30 As soon as you're out of the uniform you do the same thing, they think you're trying to con them off or something, they either get friendly or they give you the cold – you know, almost call for the guard. But it's just that thing. So anyone in the planes you thought they were your mates, and you just felt for them, just the same as anything else. But that was a dramatic point, you know, and it just happens.

41:00 We lost a couple on our strip at different times.

What happened?

One was a Beaufighter [Bristol Beaufighter aircraft], I'd done the radio on it, but thank God there was nothing to do with me. From 31 Squadron, he was going – came down, had the test flight, to accept it, after a major overhaul, and it was funny, the old air

41:30 provo [military police] had been up for a flight in it on the test flight because he wanted to have a flight, and that was all right, he came back, and he got off and…

I'm going to have to get you to repeat that a little later, because –

We've just run out, have we?

Tape 4

00:32 **All right, we're rolling now.**

Right, well the Beaufighters from 31 squadron, did the major 240 hourly as they call it, the English system was based on the days, and you had 240 hourly was the major service, the Americans work on tens of hours, 100 hourly and so on. But anyway, on the test flight, our provo wanted to have a flight

01:00 so he went up with them while they checked it. When I say a test flight, it wasn't anything dramatic, it was just to make sure everything worked before they took it back to the squadron. They didn't stop the motors, he got out and the navigator hopped in the back, and he took off and he got up to about 80 feet I suppose, and his starboard motor cut, dead, and before he could do anything at that height she full throttled, keeled up over, we were just coming

01:30 up and we could see it going through the dust, through the trees. We thought, "What the devil?" It was the engine was out of it. And she ploughed into the trees, and the pilot of course was killed, the navigator was badly smashed up, he wasn't – but that was a dramatic one as far as we were concerned, because you normally don't expect those things to happen, whatever, motor failure just like that.

02:00 And of course poor old Pete the provo, he was a lighter shade of pale, and he was looking at the plane he just got out of and he sees it going in through the trees and a twisted heap of metal there, so it was a bit of a blow for him. But the ones we lost on the strip, another one was a Beaufort, that was a tragedy. A little bootmaker

02:30 on the place, he was due to go south that week, and he always wanted to have a flight before he went down, just go up, and they said, "If you go down there to the strip, they're testing this Beaufort." And how it came about, there was a Liberator [B-24 Liberator bomber] crew from 24 Squadron, and the Liberators were due to go on leave, and for those people that don't know, the air crew

03:00 people, their leave started when they left the station, if they had a fortnight's leave, they had a fortnight to do what they wanted to, but had to be back at the station, and so they could make their own arrangements for travel or whatever, and they checked with us and when they found out this Beaufort was there and the CO apparently told them, "If you can test it, give it its acceptance test, you can fly it down, it's got to go to Wagga." So we were coming to

03:30 work, our workshop was not far from the end of the strip, and saw this Beaufort coming around to land, and I remember saying to the blokes, "What the devil is he up to, he's trying to sideslip in or something?" Because normally you make the approach, you get lined up with the strip before you settle down, and he was still banking around, you could see he was going to be barely level by the time he… Anyway, he hit the strip, he wasn't level, and wiped his undercard off and slid along and

04:00 petrol on the strip, sparks, ignited, and he left a trail of fire behind him and of course as soon as he stopped sliding the back of the plane was enveloped in flame. Now the pilot and co-pilot knew the drill, they were crew members, threw the canopy off the front, but the co-pilot had to lift the pilot out because he'd broken both his legs when they crashed into the front of it.

04:30 But the poor bootmaker, who knew nothing about aircraft, he only knew the way out was the way he got in, which was over the back of the trailing edge of the wing. That was all enveloped in flame, and as soon as he opened the door, well that was it, he was burnt, although they had some foam going, and the fire didn't get into a really big explosion or anything, but unfortunately if he'd known to get out the front he'd have most probably been all right.

05:00 But that was not nice, the poor devil was yelling and burning, and we couldn't do anything for him. And he was due to go south I think it was the next day. But that was another unfortunate one. I never did hear what the official reason for the crash was, I think it was just pilot error, I think that the pilot had been flying Liberators, things was 100-odd foot wing span, and they tell me quite cumbersome, whereas the Beaufort,

05:30 while it was well it was a two-engine bomber it was pretty manoeuvrable and he most probably felt he could do things with it, but he couldn't. That was that.

Can you just tell me, when you mentioned that you had to go up in the planes to test the equipment, can you take us through step by step exactly how you would test the equipment?

Yes, normally, first of all how I

06:00 came to be doing this, radar was being fitted into the Beauforts, five inch screen, very big hush-hush stuff, and I wasn't officially a radar technician. The radar boy used to go up and test the radar to see if it was operating, I knew how to operate it, and on the first or second flight they did what they call a ground loop,

06:30 that means the undercart folded up and skidded and spun round and finished in the trees, and he wasn't very happy. He said, "I'm not ground crew, I'm not going up again, I'm not an air crew man, I don't get paid extra money for this." The signals officer said to me, "You could check that radar, couldn't you?" I said, "Yes, sure." He knew I was dead keen to fly. He said, "Would you mind going up?" I said, "No,

she's all right, I'd love to." So from then

07:00 on I used to go up and do the testing. Now in the run through on the last test we did, a chap named Wadey, Flight Lieutenant Wadey, who had an interesting history himself, an Adelaide man, he was shot down in a Hudson [Hudson bomber], he had terrible burn marks on his face and neck and shoulders, except where the goggles were, and apparently he was in the Hudson, shot down

07:30 by a Zero [Zero fighter] over Timor, and his description of the – I've read this in the history of the 2 Squadron, the Zeros found they could take the Hudsons best coming head on, because they only had the fixed guns in the wings to shoot it them, and the Hudson had extra petrol tanks in the passenger compartment to give them the range, and he said these Zero tracers were going past

08:00 him, hit the dash and shattered it and heard them hit his co-pilot beside him, and then the whole thing burst into flames because they hit the petrol tanks in the body of the plane, and he managed to get out and got back a month later, a fisherman brought him across to Darwin. And he used to come down to our test. Anyway this morning, I'm starting from scratch on this test day, I'm waiting at the plane, the jeep came down, he got out and I said,

08:30 "Have you got your sheet there sir? Haven't you got one?" "No." "It'll be right, we can stick together if we have to get out." Yeah, Buckley's and none [no chance]. Anyway, we got in and this morning he was quite chipper [in a good mood], whether he had good news or whatever. Went through his cockpit drill in a different manner, rubbing his hands together, and we took off and climbed up, and

09:00 I remember him saying, "Look at that, Mum," I'm sitting on the main spar seat beside him, which is where you'd sit when you weren't working, "Look Mum," he said, "No hands, no feet, slow climbing spiral in a Beaufort, that's damned good." Anyway we got up to – had to go to 12,000 feet to cut in his high speed blowers to check the motors on the blower, and he suddenly cut one motor, or feathered it fully, run on –

09:30 fly on one motor, fly on the other motor, fully feathered, bring them back.

What's feathered?

Fully – what they call fully feathered, was to propel an aircraft at a variable pitch – and when the motors stopped, they're fully feathered so that blade is in line with flight and it doesn't rotate. This is very essential when they're going fast, if anything happens to the motor if they can't feather it, it can rip the engine out of its engine mount trying to

10:00 turn, you see? There's also drag on the plane, whereas this way it just slides through, and they could shut down one motor, fly on one motor, then bring it back in. And the next thing, slammed it up on one wing tip, fully banked, went that way, and then slammed it back the other way, we went through a little bit of a circus like that, and then all that checked out and he let me do my work, which consisted

10:30 of just tuning in the radar, and you look around and you pick up the plane, all the aircraft were fitted with a piece of equipment called IFF [Identification Friend or Foe], identification friend or foe, and you could pick up the blip, and you'd see, it'd send this little code signal which was identified. You could pick it about 50 miles on the 100 mile range, you could pick up a plane, and

11:00 then it's getting closer you cut it down to a 10 mile range, and then five miles. And it was quite fascinating to me, when you first see this and you're just watching it on the screen, and then you look out and you see an old Liberator or something flying along where you expect it to be, because the screen tells you how many degrees off your plane's flight it is, and so on. Then I'd do my radio. We had a system called the AT [Air Transport]

11:30 5AR8, a company named by the boys, it's a 58, made by AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia], it was an Australian – it was only used in Australian aircraft, made by Amalgamated Wireless Australia, it was master oscillator controlled, which means it didn't have a crystal control, you had to tune it manually be metre and ear. So you'd get on frequency, you'd tune your master oscillator in on the

12:00 frequency, and then from there the stages, each one had to be tuned by watching, tuning for a dip or a maximum on the metre, depending on what stage you were on. And as I've said to people, if you want to feel lonely as – be up there, and then you call your station, and our call was 'Undue', and the system method was the station was Undue, my plane might

12:30 be Undue One, somebody else Undue Two, and you'd identify yourself as such. You tuned everything up, and, "Undue One calling Undue, Undue One calling Undue, over," and you get no answer, you wonder what's going on. And after you've tried all of them and you get no answer, you can go all through and you think, "I'm sure that's tuned right," and you tune it right through again. But it was just a bit different than the

13:00 jobs today, we had the crystal controls later on. If the crystal's in the known limits on frequency you don't have to worry about it. But that was – I can imagine how bad it must have been for the boys, you know, out in bad weather, hostile territory, trying to call in and not getting an answer. But it was quite – I always found it interesting. One little

13:30 interesting thing there, just before I left 4RSU, I'd encouraged the signals officer to – I was the NCO

[Non Commissioned Officer] responsible for putting the aircraft equipment back into it and then testing it after it had been serviced in the section, and I found out that I had been classified as

14:00 key personnel, couldn't proceed on leave until my replacement was on the unit. And – well a friend in the orderly room told me this, and I was wondering why I was there a bit longer than others who'd finished their tour and gone south. And so I suggested I should break someone in, and when I had him doing my work I was – Mac our signals officer, he said, "You can clean up some of these old too-hard

14:30 problems that are sitting around the place while you're filling in, waiting for your posting." And it just seemed strange that I can't – no explanation for it, I dreamt, as clearly as a bell, taking this piece out of a transmitter, taking the sections out, three sections, and there was a dry joint on the end of the resistor. I went down to the workshop and this transmitter had been there

15:00 that different people had had a go at, and I took it apart and there was the resistor exactly as I'd seen it in the dream. The only suggestion I have is that possibly I was standing talking to somebody who was working on that and my sub-conscious saw the thing, you know, but otherwise I've got no suggestion. But these funny things seemed to happen, you get a bit that way when you're up the troppo [tropics] for 18 months. But that was one of the

15:30 unexplained things that I experienced up there.

What were the living conditions like there?

Yes, very interesting. We were in a specially designed hut for the tropics at 4RSU, I was lucky I wasn't in a tent. And this consisted of a square frame put up and it had a GI [galvanised iron] corrugated, not galvanised,

16:00 just black corrugated iron roof over the square, the walls weren't vertical, if you could imagine, the side wall was tilted to about, nearly as much as 45 degrees, so there was a gap underneath, the air flowed through, about two foot high at the bottom would be off the dirt, out on the outside, and the inside would be two feet or so, down from the ceiling, from the top, so you had

16:30 a full circulation of air through it. But the weather never came in, you'd need a very driving wind for rain to come in. We had plenty of rain. Bunks, we were given a bit of latitude there, we had normal pareus [wrap-around skirt-like garment] things, but most of the chaps were pretty enterprising and by getting around the different sections you'd make up a decent mattress for yourself out of flocking, or something you'd get from an aircraft or packing cases, or whatever it might

17:00 be, might have been packed in something. That was all right, once again you were given latitude to show initiative, and we had a nice fly, a piece of old canvas, we felled a couple of saplings and put a fly in front of the hut so that we had a little table there made out of a rustic tree limb, put a top on it and

17:30 we could sit there and have a cup of tea before we turned in of a night, which was good. Normally on the station of course, south, you wouldn't, everything would be regulation, but we realised morale-wise up there letting the chaps do a few things like that I think kept them a bit more contented. One of the things which was a trap for rookies when they came up was water, having a shower.

18:00 The water came down about a quarter of a mile from the hill at the back of the camp, and it was above ground in black iron pipes, and when the temperature's 100 degrees Fahrenheit, you look at the temperatures, around Darwin it very seldom gets below 38, it ranges between 38 and 42 pretty well, high humidity. But the sun on this

18:30 pipe, it was just almost to the boiling point, and you'd get a good hot shower, but by gee, you didn't want to get under the first run of the water, that's for sure, you had to let it run a bit before – even after it had been running it was still warm, quite warm, because the pipes were so hot. And so that's when the boys would have a shower. Our main shower at this time of the year, I'm talking now November, December, January. Once again, if you see the weather forecast for Darwin, every afternoon there'll be a thunderstorm in Darwin,

19:00 thunderstorms. And a heavy shower of rain, really heavy tropical rain, so that was our shower time, you're ready to dive out into the shower with the soap and soap up and let the rain wash it off. And you'd have a lovely cold shower. Conditions, food, the first thing I noticed, and I thought this is strange, in the food we'd get this big bowl of green pea soup, and God, it's so

19:30 hot and sticky, but within a fortnight or so that's the one you were looking for, it had salt and the fluid, and it was really good. And powdered egg, it wasn't very exciting food on that score, but I was only saying to my wife recently, one of the things on a Sunday morning, we didn't have a parade, only the duty crews would be out and the others could have a

20:00 sleep in if they wanted to. And people coming back from the mess would say, "Eggs are on," and that'd get everybody out of bed, because they'd just dash up there to see if they could get a fresh egg for breakfast. We were a bit fortunate in radio section, we used to look after 18 squadron, now 18 squadron were the NEI [Netherlands East Indies], the Netherlands East Indies squadron, and they looked after

20:30 themselves pretty well, they had good Mitchells [B25 Mitchell bombers], the latest models, and they'd fly down the regular food run to Adelaide, they always had fresh food and stuff and they used to share

that with us, so we'd get some fresh food and that, which the others never got. They used to try and supplement the normal ration, they'd send the truck out and get a bullock or something like that so we'd have a bit of beef, steak on the

21:00 menu which was a bit different. The camp itself, had the normal I suppose, for those areas, problems, beer night, beer ration, one night I think it was Tuesday, one night a week there'd be two bottles of beer for everybody. And the non-drinkers could either sell it or give it to their mates, which meant that some of the mates would have more than their two bottles, so

21:30 you'd finish up with a bit of excitement going on in the camp. One night there was a – interesting, there was –like two dogs at a fence with a hole in it, they go up and down the fence, snarling at each other to get to the hole, they'd go past and – I remember one chappie came down and he was having an argument with someone in a tent behind our hut, calling him everything, come out here, then he'd go back and then the other bloke would go and abuse him, but they never seemed to get out at the same time.

22:00 Until one night, the .303 [.303 Lee Enfields rifle] went off and there was a great commotion, "Hello, somebody's shot." And I think someone had got a bit tired of it and put a bullet through the top of the tent to quieten them down. Didn't find out who fired the shot, but it caused a bit of consternation for a while. By the time they got all the rifles and had a look to see which one had been fired, they'd all whipped the four by twos through and had them nice and oiled

22:30 up so they couldn't tell which one had been fired. But no, in the camp itself to keep things going two-up was permitted, they always turned a blind – whilst in their regulations it was forbidden, a blind eye was turned. Another game they played was Crown and Anchor [dice game] for those that wanted a table game, and the old dice. The dice never seemed to be as popular amongst our boys as it was with

23:00 the Americans. They were great on their crap games, but Crown and Anchor or two-up was more the game for us.

Were you allowed to put money on?

Oh yes, there was always money on the go. A chap I became very good mates with, he was a bit older than me, one of the interesting characters you met, an old St Peter's boy from Adelaide, now if you know Adelaide, St Peter's is

23:30 one of the private schools in Australia. As he told me, every master at St Peters had to be a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge before the war, to have a position there. But he was an inveterate gambler, although he had his own business before the war, employing 60 girls in the clothing trade. But I saw him one night lose over 1,000 pound

24:00 in two or three hours on the Crown and Anchor. He'd won it that afternoon at the two-up and came home and had dinner and then he'd go over, there was a game in one of the huts, and he lost most of it, I think it was. But he was an interesting character, and this was an interesting sideline, people wouldn't – something that everybody wouldn't know. He came from a well-to-

24:30 do family, you might gather. And one of his aunties was a leading racehorse owner, the year after we were up there, and he was very much into the horses, he used to get the Sporting Globe, and old people know the Sporting Globe used to be the sporting paper printed with all the details and racing, training tips and all the rest of it, and we were going up to Darwin one day, he said, "Don, you don't drink much, you must have a fair bit of money in your pay book now,

25:00 and there's nothing you don't spend it on, you don't gamble and so on." He said, "Look, I reckon we could make a killing up here on the SP [Starting Price], we can take these SPs and make a fortune out of them." And tactfully I told him I wasn't interested, and he went ahead, and he was very successful with it. He had agents at every station along from our place,

25:30 Adelaide and near Adelaide River up to Darwin, we'd call them commission agents today, I suppose, and the hotline that they had from every squadron and station to be used in emergency was his connecting line with all his mates on schedule at a certain time on the Friday night, they'd all be listening across this reserved special

26:00 hotline, only to be used in case of an air raid or emergencies, and they'd be waiting at each station and he'd tell them what horses to put his money on next day. He was that good that after a couple of weeks the old SP on 4RSU, old Hammerhead, a lot of these fellows had colourful names, he was an old battler from Fitzroy area, and he was a local SP, but he wouldn't take

26:30 a bet off any of the radio – he said, "You're working for that bloody Rugless, aren't you?" Because he was done the first couple of weeks. But anyway, that was just a little sideline of the things that do happen, you see them in motion and you think, oh, that wouldn't happen in war time, it happens all right. Some chaps are enterprising, and it was interesting, they all reckoned that, "Oh, he's in radio section, he gets on the blower [radio] and he gets the information

27:00 from Adelaide," you know, but it's just that he gets Sporting Globe and worked it out for himself.

Did any of the blokes gamble with things other than money?

No, there was plenty of trading. Hammer, I just told you, Hammerhead, he used to go and trade with the Yanks [Americans]. Now the Yanks liked whisky, they liked beer or whisky, and we couldn't get

27:30 much whisky out there, but Hammer would get all the blokes that didn't drink, now I didn't drink much, but up there in the heat yes, two bottles a week was nice, but that's another story. But he'd get what he could off them, so he might give them three pounds for the two bottles, he'd go and swap that with the Yanks, and he'd get a carton of Camel or Lucky Strike [cigarettes], something like that

28:00 for a bottle that's cost him, you know, one pound ten, and he'd come back, and imagine what he'd get for the carton of cigarettes? Lucky Strike and Camel. The Yanks could get them for three and six in their canteen, and they cost us about 10 pound, that was just ridiculous.

On the black market? What would they go for?

Black market, yes, something like that, around the 10 pound or so. Another

28:30 sideline there, I was – allocated to go to Nadzab to do a course on a thing called LORAN [Long Range Navigation], long range aid to navigation, the Yanks were using it in the Pacific and bringing it in. And I was bit crooked on our doctor, old Benny Goodman, Doc Goodman from Bendigo I believe, because with a name like Goodman everyone called him Benny, so he said on the medical, he wouldn't clear me, I had tinea, athlete's foot on my toes.

29:00 "No," he said, "I don't want you to New Guinea, the hookworm and stuff like that, skin infection, you'd be asking for trouble." So he wouldn't clear me. They sent another bloke over there named Costello, and naturally he was called Lou, but I don't think that was his real name but we all called him Lou, a Sydney bloke. And he made a packet, he'd get his friends in Sydney, and the airmen flying down, to

29:30 contact them, and they'd bring whisky up, bottles of whisky up to sell to the Yanks at Nadzab, and go back with their kit bags full of Lucky Strike and Camel cigarettes etcetera, to sell in Sydney on the black market. So you can imagine, there was just a…And that's the way it worked, but I didn't get the opportunity to get over there and do that, fortunately, with my luck I'd have most likely got caught and lumbered [in trouble] or something.

Can we just pause for a minute?

30:00 But the different trading, most of the chaps in the technical areas, like fitters or whatever, air frames, engines, they were involved in foreigners. The foreigner is a name given to any little jobs that were done that weren't part of the normal air force work. One of the favourite ones was making rings,

30:30 and I think the amount of rings made out of the first air raid shutdown over Darwin, he must have been a big plane. They showed great ingenuity, they'd make them out of gerallium, and make an emblem to go in the front of it out of toothbrush handles, would you believe, like different coloured toothbrush handles, they'd cut them out and put them together and then clamp the aluminium or gerallium in on it,

31:00 then finish up buffing it up to a bright polish, and it looked quite nice.

What were toothbrush handles made out of?

Well it's just a plastic now, I'm not sure what the plastic was, a fairly hard clear plastic, amber, red, green, blue, you know, different things, and you'd put those together. Another favourite thing to make were the wings emblems, RAAF badge. Perspex, which is the clear plastic, the first one I think

31:30 developed successfully for aircraft work, cupolas and windows and that, but it's malleable and it's easily handled in heat, and cuts easily. One of the most favourite badges was the eagle emblem that we used to wear on our shoulders. It was a moulded eagle in flight, and you'd press that into the back

32:00 of a piece of hot Perspex and then make the indentation, the same as the eagle, and then they'd paint that with silver or gold paint, hobby paint and paint the back over with some blue or some colour like that, and put an araldite or glue pin on it, an anchoring pin, and make

32:30 a hole into an oval, polished up beautifully with this golden eagle with the blue background around him. They were very popular. And they'd have stalls at the recreation areas, and in the area of Darwin there were two major recreation spots, one at Adelaide River and the other one was up towards, about half way to Darwin. And when the army and all were there, you could have anything up to 15,000 people around those recreation places of a Sunday.

33:00 So that it was like the market down at St Kilda on a Sunday. They had stalls all around the place with fellows selling their foreigners. And some of them were very good. A lot of pearl shell around from Darwin, and they used to make up airmen's, you know, the pilot's wing badge or air gunner's badge, observer's badge, make the whole lot. The popular one of course was the full two wings for the pilot,

33:30 and as a matter of fact I had in my charge – at the 4RSU, was a mobile radio workshop, fully equipped with grinders and bench presses, like drills and drawers of equipment. One of the boys there, a chappie named Lewis, Johnny Lewis, came from up the western districts somewhere, he was also a radio mechanic, he had a contract with old Hammerhead

34:00 to make the basic – Hammer was an enterprising chap and he'd read all about Henry Ford and the rest of it, I think, or he had some instinctive business genius, he didn't have one chap making the lot, one chap would make the blank, and the next one would go so far, and the next one would – then the best technician would finish it off for him, and make this beautiful set of airmen's wings, RAAF in the middle out of mother of pearl, and they were really beautiful.

34:30 And this young Lewis said, "Can I use the truck?" And I said, "Why?" He said he wanted to make the basic blocks, he's getting so much for each one, they get these mother of pearl shells about as big as a small dinner plate, and cut it into rectangles to start with, the hacksaw, and then he'd go in the back and put the respirator on, once again for emergencies but he'd put his respirator on, and he'd

35:00 have a template drawn on each rectangle that he'd cut out of the mother of pearl, and he'd grind it down to the template on the grindstone in the workshop. There was white pearl dust everywhere, which was a bit of a nuisance, I had to put the pressure on him to make sure he cleaned the whole muck up when he was finished, you know? But that was just another way they traded, and everybody kept – everybody, the boss, you know, the CO and all, knew this was going on, but while the people were busy

35:30 they weren't getting discontented and upset. I was on duty, a mechanic with the generating plant at night, and not long after I'd gone to 4RSU, the 2E, that's the – the fitter 2E is the engines fitter, he came down to check the motors, he checked them on his duty, while I was watching the electrical side of it, and he's busy working away, and I'm wondering what he's doing, and he turned round, "Oh," he said,

36:00 "That's my day's work, I've just finished off two coats of roughs, I'll polish them up tomorrow." He made his two rings. So some of them were doing all right as a trade, he was obviously selling them, he must have been getting anything up to five pound or more for it, we were getting what, seven shillings a day or something? So it's not a bad little return on the outlay, that way. Another little incident, an interesting one, the full

36:30 story, there was a chap named Ox was his name, I don't know what his name was, but he was Ox to everybody, big hefty sort of a fellow from Adelaide, and he was due to go south. And he's on guard duty for the night, and this caused great consternation, somebody broke into L group. Now all the stores, the different sections, were alphabetically listed. L group was the clothing store, and a lot of socks and

37:00 towels and some clothing had been taken. Well Ox must have been the dumbest one too, because he was the one, he was on guard duty and he broke into the building he was guarding, and they went and found he had this stuff, he was going to take it down with him when he was going south. So he got a month's field punishment, which means he's still got to do all his work, no pay, and he's not allowed to have any amenities. Well, they were a pretty soft-hearted bunch and the old

37:30 provo took the easy way, so he had to move out of his billet, out of his hut, under the control of the provo. But they set the tent up where he could lie on his bed and watch the pictures when they arrived on the screen. But he started off, he was getting no pay, so he made a beautiful big machete knife out of a leaf spring out of a jeep, a beautiful

38:00 handle of leather and different things embossed into it, real professionally made, these people were top fitters, you know? And he raffled that from Darwin to Adelaide River, at threepence a ticket. That was all very good, but I found out afterwards he sold it to another bloke for five, he said he drew the ticket and the bloke that he'd sold it to for five pounds said he's got the winning ticket

38:30 by some strange…I thought, "I don't trust raffles after this, whether it's football, clubs, or where they are." He raffled it off, he said, "I made more money out of the raffle than I would have if I'd been getting my wages." So you know, there were sharp blokes everywhere, but it all added up to a bit of – everybody keeping pretty happy in the place. Another interesting little unusual event, one day I saw, our mail used to be

39:00 dropped down from a Tiger Moth [deHavilland Tiger Moth training aircraft], he'd fly along and he'd drop the bag of mail out. Well of course the Tiger can stooge along at about 60 ks [kilometres] and drop it over the side. Why on earth he did this this day, our airstrip was Pel Strip, and it's one of those strips running parallel with the road. I was talking to a chap just recently who was up there, he said, "You know they're all still in great shape," this was an American bloke I was talking to as he came through, and he said Pel

39:30 which was named after Major Pel who's the American pilot, which is another story, they were the only ones there to fight the Japs were the Americans in Darwin and they didn't do a bad job, they had tremendous courage, and they were nearly all killed, ultimately. But anyway, it runs parallel with the road, and normally you'd come along the strip, you see, and a little guard hut was at the end of the strip where the road went into the camp, just drop the bag and

40:00 skid along and that's it, go off. And this day for some reason he came, instead of going along the road he came in across. Now you imagine the strip and the road going across at right angles into the camp. Now so that it was camouflaged, all the dispersal bays for the aircraft that were being worked on, they went down our road, and then swung into the dispersal bays which were covered with camouflage netting and that, in amongst the trees.

40:30 Now to hold these nets in place you had to bring what we called a catenary wire, it's all down and it comes through, and it stretched right across the road and anchored onto a tree of something on the other side of the road, this three-quarter-inch steel cable. Whether they were too well camouflaged and he didn't know they were there, but he came in that way, he dropped the bag out, and next thing, bang, this cable hit, fortunately for him, hit just under the propeller

41:00 on the front of the engine of the old Tiger Moth, and just like a catapult, went boing, and then didn't break, it just threw the plane back in a heap on the ground. He got out, if it had come over the top it would have taken his head off, because it would have just slipped along the top, but it just hit the engine and bang. And something that didn't happen every day or on every station.

41:30 **Very lucky.**

Oh he was a lucky man.

We're at the end of the tape.

Tape 5

00:36 **When you got to Darwin, was there evidence of air attacks and things like that, that the Japanese and so forth...?**

Yes certainly, the residential part wasn't that bad, the post office of course, we've all seen photos of it while it was there, it wasn't demolished, it was hit in the middle and the middle part was blown out, the girls were

01:00 killed but each end was still standing, but the docks, fuel dumps, and in the harbour itself, the vessels, you could see the superstructure sticking out of the water at low tide, even at high tide some of them were still visible. The RAAF drome itself, the RAAF Darwin, it had taken a real battering, I think about a quarter of the buildings had been totally demolished,

01:30 and they and they were removed, you know, by the salvage group, you could see where they'd been. There wouldn't have been any building that didn't have, you know, I reckon 40 or 50 machine gun bullet holes through it, and most of them a lot more, and the central building, the boys said the Japs used to come across – the main centre of the building was lined up with the end of the recreation

02:00 field, it was just like a target range, coming along the cricket pitch and this two-storey block at the end. And that was very badly hit. But no, because there were no civilians around, they'd all been evacuated.

Were there many RAAF personnel who were killed?

Never got an accurate figure. I would say looking at the buildings there had to be, that's one of the things that came out first, they said there was virtually no

02:30 casualties, and I don't know what the actual figure was, I've got a book there which gives some figures. But I would say the actual death toll in Darwin, well no-one would know. They have the service figures but when you think of the vessels in the harbour, quite a few of those were evacuation boats, and no-one takes a head count when they're climbing on board boats and coming down from the islands, so I'd say it'd be anybody's guess, just how many people

03:00 might have been killed.

At what stage of 1942 were you sent out to Darwin?

I went up there in '43.

Was there, were there still air raids going on?

Oh yes, yes, yes, the raids went on, there were 68 raids on Darwin overall. And the last raid was on the 11th November, often recorded as the 10th, I knew it was the 11th because it was my birthday, and I was getting a bit concerned, perhaps I was losing my marbles, until I got the RSL [Returned and Services League] diary this

03:30 year, and on the 11th November it had the last Japanese raid on Darwin. Actually it was on the airstrip 4RSUs they were trying to get at, but as I said, Tokyo Rose said that they really got into us, but they got within half a mile I suppose of the actual planes and the strip. But no, Darwin, it was still on full alert you know, because at that time the Japs hadn't really been

04:00 rebuffed in the Timor area, they were starting to get rebuffed over in the – well the Canal been over and done with and fighting in Rabaul and New Britain, they were sort of starting to be on the retreat. But in a book I was just reading recently, A Clash Of Wings, one of those videos, and they're talking to Kenny who was the American Air Force commander southeast, and

04:30 he said up until the time in early, middle '43, "We sort of did what the Japs let us do." He said after that,

"They did what we made them do," so the pressure was on. And Darwin was interesting to me. I had one experience which was – nothing to it, but it made you realise what it could have been, I was rather foolish. I

05:00 decided to walk from Rapid Creek along to a place called Leed Point. Now Rapid Creek, it's just a bit east of Darwin itself and a lovely beach up to it…

Can I just pause?

Yes, Darwin itself, when I first saw Darwin, and I went up on the first opportunity from 11 Singles where we were, which was a few miles south of Darwin, the residential part as

05:30 we saw wasn't too bad, there was nothing – not a very big residential area of course at that time. The post office was the centre of attraction to have a look at first of all, and it had taken the hit right in the middle, and blown the middle out, both ends were still in tact, had photos of that but…Then we went down to the docks and of course that's where they were really knocked about, and anything tied up to the docks had been sunk and was still lying

06:00 in the water in the water and ships in the harbour itself, I forget how many now, but quite a few had sunk in the harbour. Some of the oil installations and these burnt out tanks and that sort of thing, it had taken a heavy hit. And the RAAF drome itself which took a real pasting. Because naturally the escorting and light attack Japanese planes hit it

06:30 first up, they didn't know what might be there and they wanted to make sure there wasn't anything to attack them. And in the time we went of course the remnants of the planes that were there, there were some shot up on the ground and those that crashed had been cleared away. Then at the RAAF drome itself, it had taken a real heavy hit, I don't know many planes that were hit there but headquarters was riddled with canon

07:00 fire, at least 25 per cent of the buildings I'd estimate were completely demolished. No-one would say what casualties there had been, but it was obvious there had to be heavy casualties.

You were based at the Pel Airstrip?

Yes, I finished at Pel Strip, yes.

Was that attacked by the Japanese when you were there?

Yes, yes, that was their last raid even, they tried to hit it because we were important in the maintenance of the

07:30 bomber strike force that used to be going up and hitting them. But never did a lot of damage to us there, we were pretty well camouflaged, and for all you hear about the wonderful heroics of the Japanese airmen, I think when they were a long way from home and then towards the end of their range, they were no different to anybody else, they were more concerned in making sure they had enough petrol to get back

08:00 to Penfoi or wherever they came from up in Timor, and they spent time looking to find the exact target.

Tell us about how big this raid was.

From figures, I don't know, I could have had them, they're listed in the History On Darwin, which was got out. It went on I suppose for an hour, an hour and a half, we were in our slip trenches, quite good sound

08:30 effects as far as we were concerned, the odd bombs, boom, they're going off, but nothing like you see in the dramatic movies, getting showered with dirt or anything like that, they were far enough away that we just kept down and hoped none of them came close. But you could hear the drone of the planes, the bombers. The old Japs, you could always pick them, when they were coming we knew that – although the red had been given – they used to put their motors out of sync – they obviously thought we were

09:00 still – they must have known we had radar, but they used to do that to throw the acoustic detection finders out, and they'd put the motors out and there'd be woo, woo, woo, woo, so that the old fashioned things they had for detecting incoming aircraft, it used to pick them up orally, and of course the motors out of sync threw them out of sync too, and it couldn't work. But then you'd have the Spitfires howling, climbing, you

09:30 could pick the canon fire, you know, wop, wop, wop, wop, wop and a burst of .303s [.303 Vickers machine gun] and so on. You know, I suppose it went on for half an hour, three quarters of an hour, something like that. Finally things settled down and it was all quiet for breakfast.

And what were the dogfights like to watch?

Well, we couldn't see them, like it was a night-time job. But it must have been – well most of them are very high after the first

10:00 raids, once again, I'm getting this from reading the log books of – 'Killer' Caldwell was one and a few

others up there, 'Blackjack' Walker. I was surprised they were as high as they were, Spitfires, they're flying at 30,000 feet and chasing a Japanese plane that had come in, you know, it was pretty solo, those jobs were – you closed in on the Jap, closed in to 50

10:30 yards and gave them a burst of – got smothered in oil from his engine and of course the plane went down. And very few of the Japs, if any, bailed out when they were hit, they had this kamikaze idea that they'd sooner die than be taken prisoner or something. But unfortunately – I say unfortunately, to us at the time unfortunately, but looking back on it fortunately we didn't actually

11:00 have to witness any actual aerial combat except our own fellows putting on a bit of a practice run for us.

What about the ones that jumped out with parachutes? What would happen to them?

Yes, well they – the couple that got on Melville Island, they tried to make it back, and because Melville Island is on the Timor side of Darwin, they were picked up there by the patrols, and no hassles with them, they bailed out and were captured, to the

11:30 best of our knowledge. I don't think any did escape, but a lot of the Japanese influence, not so much in Darwin but down when I was in the Kimberleys, from Broome and Wyndham of course the Japanese were there in the '30s, and that, as pearlers, and there was a lot of inter-marriage with some of the natives and that sort of thing, and perhaps I should leave that for a bit later, talking about the Kimberleys if you

12:00 like? Or an incident there, and I'm talking about the Japs, which springs to mind, one Sunday we were down on the Drysdale River estuary…

In the Kimberleys?

In the Kimberley region, and about 40 or 50 mountain tribesmen came in, that was a privilege to see, because you'd never find it again. They had not one scrap of westernised clothing on them, just spears

12:30 and throwers and so on. Now we didn't have to be at the strip on the Sunday unless there was something to be done, like if a transport came in, we'd have to load the stuff for re-salvaging. And we heard a bit of a drone, got up there, you'd hear it for miles and miles, there's no noise, just silence. We listened, it faded and came up again, and one of the boys with us from Queensland said, "Lofty, that's not a Dak [DC3 Douglas Dakota bomber] is it? Like, a DC3,

13:00 a Dakota?" I was just listening and I was going to say no, and a voice came from these blacks, perfect English, he just said, "Beaufighter," and I looked round and he had straight, lank black hair, and Fred Dongies was this chap's name from Queensland, he had a drawl, he said, "My God Lofty, he looks like a damn Jap." I wish he had shut up with 50 of these blokes with

13:30 spears, and the two of us with two .303s, you know? And I had to sort of agree with Fred to shut him up. But I thought after, I should have reported that to intelligence. He knew the sound, it was a Beaufighter, I'd twigged at the same time, but he knew, positive, he said Beaufighter. Now that was a bit unusual for black fellas in the Kimberleys, and he had this perfectly straight black hair, and of course in the Kimberley area, as I said, an

14:00 ideal place for them to have somebody onshore, because the Japanese knew the natives, some of them, had intermarried with them, they used to take them out, work on the boats with them, so he could easily have been dropped off as an intelligence man for the Japanese, you know?

What was unit doing down the Kimberleys?

We were a special party salvaging – on the salvage trip for planes that had crashed at Drysdale, or which is now called Kulumbaru, it was the Drysdale Mission,

14:30 and we went down there to pick up the remains of a Mitchell, and a couple of others and while we were there a Beaufighter wiped itself out coming back from our last raid on the Japanese actually, which was another privilege to be in, it's better to be in the last raid than the first one. But it was very interesting. Our crews were so short of material, they didn't have enough cameras to put on each

15:00 plane, so they had one with a camera to assess damage, and they'd hit the Penfoi air strip at first light, to see what damage had been done with the strike, the bombers went in the night before, took off also from Drysdale, because Drysdale strip was the nearest one to Timor, like the Kimberleys is the nearest part of Australia to Timor, it's closer than Darwin. And they'd hit it just after dark, and the Beaufighters went in

15:30 in the morning to clean up eight of them, and this chap went to go in last and assess the damage, and he got a bit low, hit a pine tree on his starboard wing, just outside the motor, outside the propeller arc thankfully for him, and he knew he was damaged. Now seven came in and landed, with one missing. "Hello, we've lost one," and then he came in, did a slow victory roll over the strip and

16:00 zoomed out and went out round, dropped his legs down and this same Queenslander, for obvious reasons, if you heard him talk you'd know, we nicknamed him Rastus, or Bones out of the Minstrel Show, "Thank God," he said, "We got this one Lofty, he's ours, look at him," he said, "He's ours for

sure." He was panicking, but he had to land, he didn't know what his damage was. Well after straightening up and everything, he landed perfectly about 200

16:30 feet up, and she stalled, and the starboard wing dropped, which was the one that was damaged, not much damage, just made me realise how sensitive the plane is, the damage, and he had enough forward speed, he must he whipped her hard the other way and corrected that, she'd started to slip that way, slipped the other way, bang in the wing, she hit the deck and spun off from the engine out, cart wheeled and onto his belly and skidded along. But they're built like a

17:00 tank, those things, and by this time we're in our vehicle, because we were half way up the strip heading up towards, to see if we could help. They got out all right, but that's what had happened to him. But he wiped the plane out, so that was – we were there for another period of time to dissemble that, salvage what we could out of it, pack it up and send it back. That was interesting, interesting in one little point, we saw a pilot get out, that's good,

17:30 he's right, he wiped some muck off his brow, didn't have these big helmets we have today, they just had soft leather helmets, and we saw him walk around, and of course the plane was bellied in the strip, on the sandy part of it, and looked into the cupola in the back where the navigator, wireless operator was sitting, and he'd say something and walk away, so we thought he must be all right too. We got down and he's scratching around and shifting things,

18:00 then he stood back and said, "Righto fellas, you can kick it in now." Now what he was talking about was the normal door that they got in through was a hatch door on the bottom which folded down, had a little stepladder in it, so they could climb up in. Old Rastus again tapped on the Perspex of the cupola and the bloke looked and he pointed, and showed him the bottom of the plane's a foot into the deck, you know? Just by chance, a month

18:30 later, that same crew was stranded, the weather closed in at Darwin and they had to stay at our strip, they were coming back from a patrol, and we happened to be in the shower together, and talking to him and Fred said, "What would you have done if you'd have burnt?" He said, "I'd have most likely cooked. Must have been shock or something." He said, "I never thought of opening the cupola." All he had to do was flick two toggle – just two little levers up and the thing would fly up and jump out.

19:00 He said, "All I was thinking of getting out through the bottom." You know, the thing is sometimes when people die in a situation – I said, "So why didn't you do this?" And the emergency and a bit of shock …

Can I ask you a few more questions on your time in the Kimberleys? This would have been 1943?

Yes.

Was that the same time as this Japanese unit had landed in the Kimberleys?

Yes.

Did you know about …?

No, we didn't

19:30 know until I was reading about it in Untold Stories, a book somebody wrote, putting together scraps of evidence from the Japanese diaries and things like that. And they landed, and they went south. What we were doing, we were supplying from Drysdale, what is now called Truscott, we only knew it as Anjo Peninsula, which is the nearest peninsula to Timor, and they were building their fortresses and even super forts, I think they had a terrific runway, I never ever

20:00 got out to the strip. And the Japs had no idea that they were going to do this, and they entered, these fellows, from submarines. And they went south, if they'd have gone north they'd have found it, it's just the luck of the game.

What happened to the Japanese?

They must have been picked up by subs because they – you know, most likely they rendezvoused and landed there, for so many days to see what they could find, and the sub would come and pick them up again, because that's how they got the story, you know, it was all in the

20:30 Japanese records when they surrendered. They also landed people in Arnhem Land at different times, round there, which nobody in Australia knew about until after the war, and they got the Japanese diaries, but just as well I suppose, because they would panic if they knew. And in the Darwin situation, a couple of things that were different.

21:00 We lost one Beaufighter which was actually the cause of many losses, fellows showing off a bit, and I've forgotten the pilot's name now, but he knew one of the girls at the 4AGH [Australian General Hospital] general hospital, a nursing sister, and he was buzzing the place, doing a slow roll on one motor, and he was just coming out of the roll and he went in, and of course wiped the plane and himself

21:30 out. When our people picked up the wreckage and studied it, they found that both toggle switches controlling the feathering of the propeller, which I was talking about earlier, were both in full feather, which means neither of them was doing any pulling. Now when he was doing the slow roll, he'd have

one motor cut and on full feather, and the two toggle switches are beside one another,

22:00 and they realised he must have put his hand down, he was controlling the plane upside down, coming out of the roll, and he put his hand down to flick the one in, that was feathered, and he accidentally hit the other toggle which was just beside it, and bumped it into full feather and before he could do anything he was into the side of the hill. So from then on they modified the Beaufighters and put the toggle switches with a distinct separation between them, so you couldn't

22:30 hit one, with gloves on, accidentally pull the other one too. Unfortunately they don't realise there's a danger until something happens, and that was a bad miss. On a humorous side, we went down, I was with the crew, the 31 Squadron went from Comalie Creek in the Darwin area, straight across the Moratai in the northwest tip of New Guinea.

23:00 A long flight as you might imagine, from there across over the sea to New Guinea. We had to go up, a party of us, to service this Beaufighter, the only one left, and it was to take what they called general hands, who were left behind to clean up the camp, burn any rubbish, see the latrines and all that were left hygienically and so on, and they were going to fly, there was about five or six of them, in this

23:30 Beaufighter, across to…And we got up there and I was doing the radio, I wasn't all that happy with it, looking at it closely, and one of the problems was the insulation, it was synthetic rubber, they were experimenting with it because rubber was in short supply. And it would go on like plasticine, if you put pressure on it in places it would short-circuit, so it wasn't very reliable. The electrician wasn't happy with what he saw,

24:00 and the 2A, the air frame men, the Perspex had some cracks in it, little holes drilled to stop it going further, so I think it was going further north into combat. Well anyway, a jeep came in, the pilot who was going to fly it got out, he said, "Who's the 2E?" after saying hello and all the rest of it. The 2E identified himself, he said, "I was just wondering, what revs should I get on run up

24:30 in these? Is it 2300?" And the chap said, "Yes, 2300." He said, "I thought it was. On take off, about 27?" And you can imagine, these six blokes that are supposed to fly with this fellow for 600 miles or something across the sea, they're looking at one another like this. He caught the looks, and he says, "It's all right fellas, I have flown these, I'm authorised and my log book's endorsed for Beaufighters, but it's a while

25:00 since I've flown one. All I want to do is find out enough about it to get it up there, and while we're there I'll find out enough about it to get it down again." And they were looking very sick about this, but anyway the three of us doing the electrical on the air frame, we decided, "No, there's no go, we're not going to send this thing into operations, in the condition it was in." So we told him, we said, "No, we're not going to endorse it to go into operations, and as far as we're concerned it should go back to

25:30 Wagga, use if for training or something like that." So that's where it went, and we made I think friends for life with those general hands, who weren't flyers anyway, it might have been the first time they'd ever been in a plane, and they weren't looking too happy about this bloke asking …

Did you also come across Americans?

Oh yes.

Tell us about the Americans.

Well the most amusing Americans we came across were girls. Another humorous incident, might as well put a bit of humour in, we had sadness before.

26:00 We were up at this same Rapid Creek, just along from Fanny Bay, if you know Darwin Fanny Bay is – very good beaches, but the tide goes out from here to everywhere, it goes almost to Timor. And when it's out, you've got this great strip of beach. Well up until this time there weren't many girls anywhere around up there, so you never worried, if you had togs [swimming costumes] you had togs, if you didn't have togs you never worried. So we went down, we'd decided after we'd had a bit of a

26:30 barbecue, I suppose about a dozen of us, to go for a walk along this Fanny Bay. I had a towel on my shoulders, whilst I never did sunburn, I get brown instead of burning, but I never wanted to just roast in the sun, so I had the towel over my shoulders. We're just walking along and suddenly out of the scrub at the far end, two girls appear and started walking towards us. Well the fellows are talking, "They can get nicked [get lost], we're here first. Bugger

27:00 them, we're right." You can imagine the language and that. And they were all bravado, because they're only 18, 19-year-old kids. And finally, when they started to get close enough to be eyeball to eyeball, they lost their nerve, and they made for the water, because the water's that far out, you've got to go from here halfway to Sturt Street to get up to your knees in it. And your's truly and another bloke, who had a pair of trunks on, I just

27:30 put a lap-, put a lap-lap [wrap-around cloth] on, we were right, but it was just a little humorous. They joined us then and had lunch with us, of course they were quite happy to have a bit of male company to chat to too, 'wash that man out of your hair stuff', South Pacific, you know, they were American girls, had just come in. But most of the American air crews had gone when we were there, they was busy over

in the South Pacific. But unfortunately, I feel something

28:00 I'd like – if I had the time, I suppose I had, it's more having the willpower to go – some recognition should be given to the American airmen who were at Darwin when that raid hit, because they were the only fighters who were there. We had an old Wirraway or something and some other old Douglas thing was shot up on the ground before it even took off, you know. And I think one Wirraway got a shot in, according to records, but there were

28:30 18 Kittyhawks [Kittyhawk fighters], and they were to pick up a convoy in West Australia, and they got as far as Adelaide somewhere, and they were ordered to go to Darwin. Well they got to Darwin, I think there was 15 made it up to Darwin, you can imagine going up through the centre [centre of Australia] with no support, no engineering support, and they were supposed to pick up an American convoy and escort it somewhere towards Timor. But the weather was bad,

29:00 they took off on that morning of the 19th, and they flew out to try and find it, they couldn't, they turned and came back, because they had to come back for fuel, they were running low. And I'm not sure if it was Pel, I think it was, Major Pel, it was his flight, whoever it was, the commander, he sent – I think there was only 11 of them in the air, five were on the ground unserviceable, and he put five down to re-

29:30 fuel, they had no inkling of the attack imminent, and the other six stayed up while they were refuelling. And they were on the ground suddenly the planes hit them. Well they engaged them, and they got about five planes of the Japs in that first hit. And I think lost half of their own. But I often think, if they hadn't been there, the Japs

30:00 would realise, well there's no defence, you know, there's no need to worry, we'll just come and land. But when there wasn't a defending force they weren't to know just how many there were, or what, they'd know they were attacked and they lost planes, but that's given no record, you know, people don't know about it, they don't know that that's what happened. One American in the Kittyhawk, it was an equivalent to our Sunderland [Sunderland flying boat], long range flying boat,

30:30 was shadowing a convoy north-east of Darwin, and he went off to get it, and he knew he never had enough petrol to get back, but they didn't know what happened to him, they got a signal that he'd sighted this plane, he was going to attack it, but of course that was all they heard. Once again, from the records of the Japs, the navigator on that boat described it. He shot them down, but they didn't –

31:00 they were able to land on the sea and be rescued by their own support group, but they shot him down and of course on his own flying into – a single fighter, they say is pretty vulnerable because there's several turrets can train on him, and he's got to be lucky if one of them doesn't get him.

You said before something about the Aborigines mixing with Japanese.

Yes.

Now there's a host of towns there, Broome, Derby …

31:30 Yes, yes.

Did you go through those towns?

We flew into the Kimberleys themselves to Kulumbaru and then we were on ground in the end, we never got into Wyndham. We flew straight – that was an experience, at work and get a memo, grab your essentials, down to the strip, and go down there and these others I hadn't been with before, like the engineer, the air frame bloke,

32:00 instrument man, an armourer, and we're there with our gear, there's a Beaufort, fully armed, it was going on patrol over the Arafura Sea in Anson Bay, and because they're going down that way they were to drop into Kulumbaru and drop us off you see, and then go on with their patrol on the coast. So we had to pile into this plane, and the old pilots looking at our kit bags, and one of the boys said, "What length do you

32:30 need to take off with this?" He said, "What length's this strip?" We told him 2,000, whatever it was, feet, he said, "That's about what we'll need, looking at the stuff you blokes have got." Because he had depth charges and a fair load on, petrol and everything else. With the result that we left some stuff behind, just to lighten the load. Well I'm trying to work it out, we must have been two and a half to three hours in that, going from where we were, over to the Kimberleys. Of course down here you forget how big the top of

33:00 Australia is, and talking about DVT [Deep Vein Thrombosis] and you know, deep vein thrombosis, we were perched in there with the original crew of four, plus us, we just had to fit in where we could with our gear and sit there for two and a half hours or whatever. And anyway, he landed us out there and that was all right. That was interesting, that was hit very hard, that strip, but only through bad bomb aiming by the Japs, our

33:30 fellas, I wasn't there thank goodness, it was not that long before we went out. Quite a few bombs didn't go off, they were still lying there, but the ones that went off, the daisy-cutters as they call them, the Japanese bomb which hit, and anti-personnel, it radioed its stuff about three feet from the ground, it would just spray, called them daisy-cutters. Now whoever decided where to put our camp, the

camouflage

34:00 men, did a really good job, because there's a lot of sandstone outcrops in the Kimberleys, about 12 or 15 or 20 feet high, with gum trees, little scrubby stuff growing amongst them. From the air as we were coming in, we thought it was the camp, you know, you looked down and you'd see these blocks in amongst the gum leaves, but when we got there it wasn't, it was just this sandstone. And the camp was actually clear of that out to the end under the trees. Now

34:30 these 23 bombers hit them, came in fairly low, and the Japanese worked on the same principle of bombing as the British, they could let everything go at once, they were all on a platform underneath, and the bomb aimer can select any one or select the lot. And they worked also on the principle that the leading plane I believe gave the signal, went to let go and they all let go when he said so,

35:00 and you sort of got this tremendous impact all of a sudden. With the bombs, what I was saying, in the American planes they were stacked up on the bomb bays one above the other, so you could only let them drop out one at a time, so they always go out in a stick and they land, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, on the bottom, whereas if you've got them all, like the room here, like the carpet, and they're all size, and you hit the button and set it that they all go at once, well if you've got 12 and you let

35:30 12 go, they'll all hit the ground more or less at the same time and give you that bigger impact, if that's what they're after. And the boys who were there, they got no warning, they were on their bunks and everything, and these planes came in lower, they didn't hear it, and then suddenly there – one chap I was talking to, he was an armourer, he was setting up a .5 [.5 calibre gun] in the gun pit, and he said, "The next thing I knew I heard whack, whack, whack and I looked up and there's a tracer going

36:00 past me, and these planes are coming over the trees." He wasn't any hero. I said, "What, did you get a shot at it?" He said, "Not really, I dropped into the bottom of the pit and waited until they went the other side." Which wasn't bad thinking, I suppose, if you're not prepared, and he mightn't have even had the string of ammo in, standing up there in the firing line trying to get it loaded. As against of course

36:30 the story goes that in, I think it was – one of the American ships that was sunk in Darwin Harbour, the gunner there was on a 20 mm one, the ones they have with a harness around their middle, and firing it and he was in water up to his waist, the boat was going down, and he was still firing the gun when she took him down with it.

Why do you say that before –

37:00 **you said that the Japanese had intermarried, or intermingled…?**

Well, it was just the norm, I think, they came in along the coast, rumour had it, the pearlers were I suppose they were pretty itinerant, they were coming and going, they'd come and get Aboriginal lubras [Aboriginal women or girls], and that was

37:30 what the hearsay was, I don't disbelieve it, it went on down here with the sealers and so on, right through, (a) to buy them, they didn't, for a few plugs of nickinick, chewing tobacco, the old black fellas were quite happy to let the lubra go and do the labouring and scullery work an sometimes relationships would develop amongst them, sometimes they were good relationships, you know, mutually, and they

38:00 intermarried and stayed around. It's a fair bit of cross-breeding amongst them I suppose, if you'd like to say.

But could you see Aborigines that had sort of like, oriental features?

This boy that I mentioned, when I say boy, you could get into trouble if you say that, but this Aboriginal lad that was in this group, definitely, that's why old Fritz, "By God Lofty, he looks like a damned Jap, look at him. Look at his hair, look at his eyes," you

38:30 know? And it was true, he didn't fit in. The Aborigine as such generally has curly hair, like it's wavy and curly hair and curly beard, and this bloke just had that lank, straight black hair and certainly did look like a Jap. But as I said, I should have reported – we should have reported it to intelligence, just in case, because they were going to Anjo Peninsula, they used to come in to get some

39:00 European supplies and bits of flour and that, in return for which they might put in half a day's work or something. They were mainly picking up bits of wood and gum suckers, tree suckers and that, they'd been cut down on the ends of the strips. And they were heading over to work where the Japs wanted to know where the place was. But anyway, as far as I know it didn't

39:30 cause any harm to anybody, so good luck to them, I suppose. But I've often thought about that, you didn't think at the time. It did make me realise though we were a bit vulnerable on that salvage – we thought there were no Japs anywhere near us. To know that these people had landed from submarines, only you know, 35 miles, it's not all that far, although it's a long way in the Kimberleys.

What happened to the Japanese

40:00 **who were in the pearling industry?**

Well, I think some were interned, you know, they were interned like they were in America, or the Germans in particular in Australia, the Germans who had come from Germany, who had ties with Germany, were all sort of interrogated and a lot were interned. And Italians, in some cases if they had direct –

40:30 but they weren't interned as strictly as the Germans were, to my way of thinking. It used to be a bit rough there, digressing a little bit, we had friends, Italian friends in Footscray, and the two boys were in the army, the older boys, actually Johnny got a mention in dispatches for – he was in the medical corp, he was mentioned in dispatches

41:00 for bringing in two wounded blokes under sniper fire in New Guinea. But his Dad's at home, and there's people calling him a 'bloody dago', and all this sort of thing, you know? Abusing him in the shop, down at the fruit shop, and he had to put up with all that going on, he'd come out of the pub and a few yobbos [louts]…

We'll have to stop here unfortunately, because we've run out of tape again.

No, that was something we used to notice…

Tape 6

00:33 **Okay, I was interested to know what the living conditions were like at Kimberley?**

They were real bush camping. Essentially it was a normal tent, that's the rectangular type tent that we use, as against the bell tent the Americans use.

01:00 Because it's so hot, and I mean hot, it never got below 100 Fahrenheit there for just on a month, night or day, while we were there. So the tent was erected, a four-gallon flour tin, two of those each end, were put under the tent poles, which were in the middle at each end, to lift the tent a little bit higher, and that gave a bit more clearance. Sides were rolled up all the time, we did actually have bunks, which was

01:30 a good thing, fold-up single beds. This gave a bit more clearance under the canvas, which you can imagine under that heat it got pretty hot. Trying to sleep, sandflies were a real problem in that area, so instead of a mosquito net you have a sand fly net, and this is like a cheesecloth,

02:00 the mesh would be a quarter of the size of a normal mosquito mesh. The boys used to say every time you breathe in, the sides came in, and they went in and out as you breathe. But it was the only way to keep the sandflies off, so any air you'd get around you was so valuable, you got under this and tucked it in under the side of the blankets, and you were sort of encapsulated in there. But very austere, just the basics.

02:30 Now food likewise, it's just what they called an OBU [Operational Base Unit], operation base unit at Drysdale, and supply and provisions were flown in, and when the wet season came on, we got no provisions. If the weather closed in they didn't have all the aids you have today, so they just wouldn't risk a plane if it was all cloud-bound, you just had to wait. And at one stage we got down – used up

03:00 all our flour. The mission had flour, they said we could have some, but it was in bags. Up there the insects are pretty – you know, every insect you can imagine seems to be there. Well it's full of weevils. So the baker made the bread and we cut it off, and every time you got a slice of bread you could see, whichever side you lifted you'd see five or six weevils, heads or tails or something, looking at you.

03:30 And I still defy anybody to have a piece of white bread, supposed to be white bread, and you bite into it, and crunch, your teeth crunch up a weevil and you don't stop on it. So we overcame that by toasting it, toast it nice and crisply and put some troppo spread, which was the substitute for butter, spread that on it and hop into it and enjoy it. But …

That was a psychological thing so that you wouldn't know when it was crunchy?

That's right, but to bite into a straight piece of

04:00 white bread, and you crunch, crunch, you know, you automatically gag on it and spit it out. But we got through that. We were also down on rations, we had tinned pork, that was an American ration, tinned pork sausages, they were a small tin, held about four sausages in each tin. We became expert in that, we in the salvage group, because we looked after ourselves as much as we could, stick a bayonet in the top, make a vent in it, and sit it in the side of the

04:30 campfire, put the vent in, let the steam out, and we got quite expert at knowing how long to leave it there and judge by the smoke, tip it over and let all the juice and fat run out, and leave it for another few minutes, and then hack it open and you had a beautifully crisp, browned four sausages to eat, which was one of the little tricks of the game. But it was quite an experience out there, we were in the dry and then you came onto the

05:00 wet season. It was my first experience of this grass, we called it elephant grass for want of a better name, it grows to about six, seven feet high, I don't know whether it's kunai grass, the same thing they have in New Guinea, I've heard them talk about it, it just grew so quickly, we used to walk round to the salvage area where the plane was we were working on, and it was okay, and then suddenly we realised we were walking in single file with this grass up around our hips, and there it was up to our

05:30 shoulders, you know, and we were walking through it like cane [sugar cane]. It was just amazing, just the growth in it. But interesting, the plane that we were salvaging, the first one was a Mitchell B25 tricycle undercarriage, and on landing his front wheel had collapsed, and that thing slid along on its nose, and it stopped with the floor just roughly under his feet on the

06:00 pedals, so I often wondered, he must have had some anxious seconds as he was – dirt coming up towards him and the plane going along like this. Fortunately she stayed up there and the first thing we had to do was get it down, get the tail down. It wasn't moving, but we had a chap allocated to us who'd been a pearling master in that area, and he was used to working with the black men, the natives there, and

06:30 they always came round, always seemed to be laughing, but I think it was a nervous reaction. You'd be talking to them and they'd break out in laughter in the middle of it, or giggle. But he spoke to them and the next thing he's got about 10 or 15 of them, and a long rope, they threw it round the tail and put them all on the rope and pulled her down until she was level. I had to climb into the radio equipment and get confronted by a

07:00 wild cat, a native wild cat, flew out from over the bomb bay, he was making a home for himself in there. Taught me to be a bit careful when I poked my head in next time, you never knew what you were going to strike. Snakes, quite prevalent, naturally, most of them harmless but you didn't know that, probably not sure until they drop. We were walking along a form of carpet snake, some sort of python, dropped out of the tree and flopped on the ground, whether he was

07:30 trying to drop on one of the boys, that's the way they catch their meals usually, drop on them and wrap themselves round, so they tell us. Lightning was tremendous there. But more on a serious note, a couple of us I think were responsible for saving, I'm quite sure, responsible for saving a Beaufort bomber and its crew. That was the night before the episode

08:00 with the Beaufighter, two squadron bombers, Beauforts, went out to bomb Penfoi, just after dark, and they left us in late afternoon. I think it was about 300 miles across to Penfoi from Drysdale, they fuelled up and everything there and they took okay, there was only five in the strike, five Beauforts. Four were back all right, they had the strip laid out,

08:30 lights at the end to identify the start of the runway run from a generator, and the CO was a young sort of disrespectfully referred to as 'six feet wonders', these were young chaps who had some university professional training, they did a six week course in administration at the university, and then they came out as pilot officers to the smaller

09:00 stations as COs. And he was panicking, "Get the lights off." But there was one still to come. And the Japanese might be following them back, that's he knew about it, he'd have Japanese following them back in the dark, fighters, and the aerodrome controller, a title they gave him there was an wireless air gunner from 2 Squadron who had –

09:30 nerves had gone, and rather than send him south, you know, psychiatrically disabled as you might say, and you know, upset – a bloke loses his morale, his esteem, they did the right thing, they said, "You can be an aerodrome controller at Drysdale for a while," just to get himself together again. Well he sort of put himself in the position of the plane that was still not in. Then we heard a

10:00 bit of a murmur in the distance, at night up there you can hear miles and miles away, there's no trucks, there's no cars, there's no engines, there's only native bush noises and that. And you'd hear slight mmmr in the distance. At that stage I could identify any plane that we had, and most of the American ones around by sound as well as sight, better by sound, I think. And I said, "That's the Beaufort now," and this

10:30 Goanna Frank, as we called him, that's another story, he said, "Are you sure it's a Beaufort?" I thought it was a Beaufort. And then Bert Bryant who was the 2E who'd done a lot of work for Beauforts at Wagga, he said, "That's a Beaufort all right." He said, "Well switch the bloody lights on." And the CO said, "Don't switch those lights on, it might be Japs." I said, "No, it's not Japs, it's a Beaufort." And so old Frank, as I said he was a bit psychy, he said, "Bugger the CO, I'm switching those lights on." And then we

11:00 switched them on, then we heard the sound getting a bit louder, and sure enough she came round and they landed. And the skipper said, "We were just about to the point where we thought we'd have to bail out over the Kimberleys." Of course you've got Buckley's and none chance there, because you couldn't land anywhere, and any chance of getting found would be – you know, if you come down and you're injured at all. So I think we saved a crew that night with that action. They were just lost, you could imagine, once you'd got off your bearing,

11:30 over that country you've got no cities, no lights, no roads, only creeks, rivers and lagoons and rocks and one looks like the other, you know, you'd never have a clue of finding where you were. So that was one

good thing. But it mightn't have been according to the book, if it had gone wrong, we'd have been in strife, but it didn't go wrong. But the same night the air ambulance came in, another humorous

12:00 incident. Because the boys who were with me, I hadn't done any of this sort of work, but they'd done a lot of work at the training schools at Wagga and different places, and they were used to night flying training, and they could set out a flare path, they knew all about it. The people at the OBU who in main were general hands, it was used by people like us who'd come in and go out again, and just pass through, and they were hopeless. And Bert Bryant said, "God, we're going to have to do this for them, they'll never get that flare

12:30 path set." So we set it out and we were doing the escort duty for the planes, like your little Chev [Chevrolet] truck, and the bloke was standing on the back of the torch and when they taxied down we'd run out in front of them and lead them back with the torch as the signal. And we turned round and the bloke said, "Bloody torch won't go," and you hear this (makes spluttering motor noise), the motor and propeller spinning, coming out of the dark towards us and a bit of exhaust. So

13:00 we belted on the cabin, "The bloody torch is not on, get out of it." And do you know what he did? He turned and went down the strip, instead of getting off to the side into the scrub. Anyway, nothing happened, finally the torch came on and the thing trundled along and the boys in the plane were laughing, they said they were watching, they said, "You didn't know it, but we could see you as plainly as anything, we could see you waving your arms and didn't know whether to jump out of the back or

13:30 what to do." But there's another instance, under panic what people do. Like the driver, could you imagine, a plane's coming down the runway and you're in front of it, you say, "Get out of here," and he turns and goes the same way as the plane, you'd expect him to get to the side. But that's another one.

Tell me, just going back before, there was a bloke called Goanna Steve?

Yes, Goanna Frank.

Goanna Frank?

Yes, that's the one that had lost his nerve, been in combat over Timor.

Why was he called Goanna Frank?

14:00 He shot a goanna and got the cook to cook it for him (laughs), so there's always a reason. And he tried this goanna and passed it round, I didn't have any, but the boys said it tasted all right, it was a bit like fish.

Did the cook cook it native style, or …?

No, no, no, he skinned the tail, they're big animals, the goannas there, big boys. One cook in 4RSU had a pet one, he'd lost his

14:30 tail and he could pick it up by the butt of the tail underneath, it was about this long, and he'd sit it down in the mess and it'd walk round us. A few cats around the place, the tails would go up as they disappeared. But another interesting thing for us there was we were working away on the plane and we heard this plane coming in. What's that? None of us could recognise

15:00 it. Looking up it's high, and that the thing that I found out, the Aboriginals' eyesight was absolutely phenomenal, I know they have trouble with cataracts and various things, but when they're not ill, their eyesight is like ours with binoculars. But he could see it, I suppose he's 10,000 feet at least up, might have been a bit more, but that's all we could make out of it there,

15:30 and this Aboriginal chap that was there was having a chat to us, and he said, "Red spot on wings, red spot on wings." He could see the damned thing like we would if we had a pair of binoculars.

Is this in daylight?

This is in daylight, yes. And sure enough, he disappeared that day, he came in again the next day, and we didn't have to wonder

16:00 long, the Spitty [Spitfire] started up, I think they had three Spitfires there, as, you know, protection, they took off, spluttered down the runway, wing tips beside each other because of the dust and the gravel, they didn't take off one behind the other, they always staggered across, and the skipper that was in that leading them, he had a few kills in the western desert, he had a few swastikas,

16:30 Italian fascists symbols on the side of his truck, but he used to fly with a slouch hat on, and he's flying along to keep the sun off his face. But he came back and he was telling us, he said, "He was fast, I could just make up on him, and I was just getting up close enough about to give him a squirt and suddenly there's an unholy belch and explosion in front of me." And I'd read about this

17:00 in the Army News, the Japanese had a scare gun on their reccies [reconnoitre/reconnaissance], had one or two shots in them, the main thing was purely to scare, if something came in behind them, they let it go and it made a lot of smoke and flame, a bit of shrapnel in it, but mainly it was to make the people think, "Well, it mightn't be healthy here." That's what the boy said, he said, "I had to get to the side."

They'd draw up a bit on him, but he said, "When I turned to come in,

17:30 he'd just draw away from me, I couldn't get away all right." But that was just another interesting little sideline, I'd read about the effect of it. And the same with – I'd read about them using, putting rockets on the Beaufighters, and when they came in, that strike I was talking about, they were equipped with eight rockets on each Beaufighter, which gave them enormous hitting power, they had 420 millimetre

18:00 canons, six .303s normally, and then they put those rockets on, so it's a pretty fair punch to take in.

And did you ever see any dog fights?

No.

You didn't?

One of the fortunate ones, as we said at the time, you'd love to have, but looking back on it, one of my mates here in

18:30 Ballarat, only said the other day, heard the provos talking, he was the gunner in Lancasters towards the end of the war, he was a bit younger than me, and he was talking about the turrets and how they work and so on, and someone said to him, "Did you ever have to use them, like to take them on planes?" He said, "No, I never had to use them in combat, thank God. It was bad enough," he

19:00 said, "sitting the back with icicles hanging off your face mask a foot long, and you're trying to peer through your goggles and see if anything's coming towards you, it was a pretty hopeless sort of a situation." That was towards the end of the war and he never had to get into combat with them. But then he saw the boys come back, as I mentioned earlier, the Mitchell that had had a go and sunk the boat that one of the boys was killed in.

19:30 A couple came back with holes in them that had been – they were the bombers, the ground fire, over the water. No, it was mainly normal routine, we lost the two chappies killed in the air plane crashes, we lost two fellows killed, we had the only 4RSU, when I say we, 4RSU had the only

20:00 oxygen plant up in the Territory, it was a mobile oxygen plant they'd got off the Americans, they were on big semitrailers. And I was working in a Beaufort, a Beaufighter, being as tall as I am I could work on the radios standing on the ground, up through the hatch, other people had to climb up and sit in there to do it. I was working on it, there was a colossal explosion, I felt the pressure difference round my

20:30 legs and a bit of shrapnel, as I thought, whacked into the ground not far from where I was, and that was I suppose a good 300, 400 metres from where the explosion was. I thought, "God, they've dropped a bomb or something," you know? What it turned out to be, an oxygen bottle had blown up, the two fellows working on it were killed, blown out of there in their boots, which was interesting, you hear people say they got blown out of their boots, and we went past there, they were literally –

21:00 their boots were left behind, where the foot contracts when you're blasted, you know, just lifts out. That again was tragic, and one of them was his last week on the job, and that caused a lot of consternation amongst the – the were only in drivers, like transport drivers, drivers made to transport as they call them, and because the engines were truck engines that they were driving the plant with, and they were a bit upset

21:30 because they'd never had any training really, in the dangers of handling oxygen. And then they found out that if you've got oxygen and lubricating oil under pressure, you've got a bomb. So they were never sure of course whether it was sabotage too, that was always one thought. We used to get the bottles from the navy at Darwin, and the army, they'd bring them down. Well if somebody planted one with a bomb in it to blow the plant up, you know –

22:00 because we were a pretty vital plant, used to fill all the oxygen for the aircraft, all that sort of thing. But that was just another sad loss from the fellows there.

Now can I just clarify, sometimes you say Beauforts, and sometimes Beaufighters? Are they different planes?

Yes. Two different planes. The Beaufort is a torpedo bomber, it's classified as, made at Fishermen's Bend first, it's a

22:30 Bristol Beaufort, designed by the Bristol Company. A slight difference out here, we put – I think it was Pratt and Whitney, I'm not an engine man but I think they were Pratt and Whitney motors, American, either that or Wright Cyclones, they were the two rotors we used.

Can I just get you to pause for a moment?

Beauforts – we put the American engine, which remained here, they did a marvellous job you know, for the size of the population in Australia, what they turned out and the percentage

23:00 of servicemen in proportion to the population, was amazing. And the original plane had a Bristol motor, which was a sleeve valve motor, a bit more powerful, a smaller frontal area, a more efficient motor we'll say, and anyway, we couldn't get them, so we made the – Australia made at Fishermen's Bend

23:30 the others, and it was built expressly as a torpedo bomber, wasn't used much for that, which is another story in another theatre, because a friend of mine was flying in them with 100 squadron out of Good Enough in New Guinea, bombing Rabaul and around there, and it was suicide to try and torpedo bomb. But we'll go back to the other, that's the Beaufort. Easily

24:00 distinguished because it had a upper turret on the top, with machine guns in front as well, and the fuselage came along from the pilot to the back turret and then dropped down sharply behind the turret then to tail, the Beaufighter was developed in England as a night fighter for the German bombers, twin engines, nicknamed as the Whispering Death in the South Pacific because it had the sleeve valve motors, and these

24:30 sleeve valve motors were very quiet, very powerful motors. I was told by the fitters working on them that the diameter of the arc of the propellers was 15 feet. That's a big arc, it means that each blade, from the centre of the shaft to the tip's seven foot six, it's a big blade.

Almost as tall as you.

Yes. And the front

25:00 cell where the pilot sat, the propellers came in, say I'm sitting here, they came in there, the engines were really sort of in front of the pilot, if you can imagine that. Now they call them two engines closely followed by an aircraft. They were fast and suitable, they were built for chasing the bombers coming in that used to fly fairly low over Britain, and wasn't worrying much about high level, so they weren't much good about 10,000 feet. But at sea level we were told they were the

25:30 fastest planes in the South-West Pacific. Saw a demonstration of that one day at Drysdale. The crew I mentioned earlier, about the chap who couldn't get out, thought he had to get out the bottom, he was in this one that was – they couldn't get back into Darwin because the weather had closed down, and they had to stay at Drysdale. Well this afternoon they went up to put on a bit of a show, I suppose – bear in mind

26:00 both of them, the pilot – neither of them I'd say would be 22, they were just youngsters, one day nothing to do, we'll go up and have a bit of fun. So they went up and had a dog fight, and up around 10,000 feet the Beaufighter was not even there, he wasn't as fast, he couldn't climb it, not like the Spitfire could, but when he dived and he came down to tree level, he left the Spitfire behind him, no problem

26:30 at all, just took off. But that was the nearest thing we got in dog fights.

Why, how are they able to go so much faster at lower altitude?

I don't know, the engine design I think, larger carburetion and that sort of thing. As I said I wasn't a 2E – even though I know a fair bit about motors, but I think that's what it was. For instance, I have this video called Flash of Wings, and they were talking about the fighters in

27:00 Europe and the trouble we were in until we got the Mustangs towards the end of the war, because we had nothing to escort long distance, and the Mustang could. And up until then, the Mustang was made in America with Ellison Motors, Packard engines, and they were pretty useless, they were very good at low level, but no good at high altitude, and when the English got them they put Merlins in them, the same Rolls Royce motors they use in the Spitfires and Hurricanes, and

27:30 they became the best fighter in Europe then, up to 30,000, above 30,000 feet. So it must be to do with I think carburetion and you know, inlet valve design, exhaust, manifold, inlet manifold design, that they respond better to the turbo, but it had to be charged, supercharged up there, so better supercharging, and so on. That's the only reason I can put down to it. But the old – according to

28:00 reports we had from the Japanese intelligence, they didn't like the Beaufighter, the two engines closely followed by an aircraft, only two men in it, because it would come in so quickly and truly, you're flying just around tree level, you know, they're on you before you – they're not like the jets, they couldn't fly at the speed of sound, but they were up around the 400 mile an hour, which is not too slow. And they were a very strong,

28:30 well built machine.

Now you showed us a picture before of you standing next to a plane with the tiger on it. Was that one particular plane that you knew?

That was a Mitchell and I hadn't – no, that was here at Ballarat that was taken, and I was out just for a drive, my brother-in-law and his wife were over visiting and took him out to the drome and I saw this tail fin, it's a very

29:00 distinctive twin tail fin on the Mitchell, and I said, "That's a Mitchell." So I swung around and went back and I couldn't believe it. And this American was there, he'd flown it over from America and it was his. And I said to him, "God, it's got to be 45 years since I've been this close to one of these." He said, "Why? Did you work on them?" I said, "Yes, I did, I used to work on the radios on them." "Hop in and have a look." The first thing that struck me of course was

29:30 how ancient it was, I mean, stuff when we worked on them during the war, your pipes, your nuts were brand spanking new, no burred edges or anything like that, everything was – this was all – like an old car, it had been joined up a few times and taken off, and so on. But anyway he said, "Would you like me to take a photo of you?" I said, "Oh, that'd be great," so he took that one which was very interesting. Just as an interesting sideline to that,

30:00 they were working on an engine, a pool of oil under it, they were mopping up this oil and he said, "We blew a pop the other day, it was a bit hairy for a while. We were taking off, getting ready for this air show, and the people were watching, and they were taking off and she blew a piston, and of course smoke poured out and they all thought it was part of the act and I'm trying to nurse the thing around, get it back down on the strip. We'd just put another motor in and we were sort of getting it set up." But I wouldn't have liked to have

30:30 gone up in it with the amount of oil that was running out the bottom of it, I tell you. But that was it. They were very noisy, the Mitchell, a very good plane, I thought they were good. I didn't fly in one, unfortunately, I'd like to have but I did the radio on the ground and they were very well equipped that way. They were interesting little sidelines you hear. The Dutch used to fly them, while we were at Drysdale the same Dutch people that I knew back at 4RSU, they went through three of them on a strike.

31:00 Well, they put in to our place at Drysdale to top up with petrol, and they got off, and we saw this sort of vapour trail behind it, turned out one bloke had left his petrol cap off one of the tanks on the wing, and the petrol's streaming out over the back. And okay, so he had to abort, he couldn't go on. A bit further on another bloke radioed in, he was losing revs on one of the motors,

31:30 he said, "I'll have to abort," so he called the strike off. Interesting part is that before they took off they were saying, "Oh God, this is too far," they were going away up to Batavia or somewhere. And you know, it was really stretching the friendship with the reins of the plane. If they had jump it would go full bore for a while and they'd be lucky if they had enough petrol to get back, and I don't think they had any intention of going. He left the cap off on purpose (laughs). Little things and tricks.

32:00 And I don't blame them. It's better to be alive and live to fight another day, than be a dead hero.

So they got back and landed all right?

Yes, they landed okay, went back to their headquarters. Another sideline there, we're there and a signal came in, three B24s [Liberator B24 bomber] coming, they're big B24s, a big plane. Dropped more bombs than any other bomber in the war.

32:30 It was in more operations – a mate of mine was a gunner in the front – a nose gunner in one, and he was always crooked, the Fortresses [Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber] get all the talk from the American movies and that, in the Superfort [Superfortress bomber], he said, "The Liberator did more work than the Fortresses, but you never hear them mentioned." But anyway, they were working out at Fenton, another thing which I didn't know, they and Fortresses were working out of Western Australia and none of us knew they were there, it was never in the papers here or anything, so if you happened to be

33:00 up there, which we were, and we heard this hell of a noise, and yelling and going on. Now if you've ever been round the Yanks when there's a baseball game on, you'd know what I'm talking about. God, the noise. And they all seemed to scream out and have a talk to themselves about what's going on, "Give it to her boy," "Bat her up now." And we thought, "What the devil's that?" We were out in the bush, and we came through and here's a diamond and this Superfort, not Superfort, a Fortress bomber squadron there in Western Australia

33:30 bombing up into Malaya and that. But anyway, the Libs came in, landed, first one, second one, our strip was a hound of a strip, had a hill right at the far end of it. Of course it never intended for anything like this, it was for little Push Moths and Tiger Moths and deHavilland butterboxes [DH87] landing, and you know, there was any amount of strip for that. But this one you went right up a little creek and then this mountain in

34:00 front of you. Not a high thing, I suppose 500 feet or 600 feet, but that's a lot if you've suddenly got to abort a landing and try to get up over it. Anyway, they landed, the Yanks are getting around, looking like Tom Micks himself, with .44s [.44 calibre guns] and water bottles and everything hanging all over them, because they'd been way up over the Celebes or somewhere, they used to go out and be out for 12 hours at a stretch. And, "Who's flying this goddam kite?" as one bloke said to the other. They'd

34:30 mention his name, and using the same vernacular, "That goddam cock-sucker couldn't land in a thousand acre paddock," he said, "I'm outa here." And they did, they turned and took off and into the bush. And we were standing beside the Liberator that had landed, we said, "Bugger this." So about a dozen of us got on the big wheels on the front and with manpower we moved it back about 20 yards. They knew the bloke all right,

35:00 he came in, and the wing tip went right through where – he'd have hit – wiped us out, wiped the plane out and himself, if we hadn't pushed it back, because it's a narrow little strip in the bush. And he went over the top, used up about a quarter of the runway before he touched down, and then had to jump on the brakes, with the result he strained his front nose wheel and taxied back with the nose down, and they had to stay there then for a few days until they flew a ground crew out to examine it and see if it was safe to take off and go back. But the interesting

35:30 part was, they were short of petrol, see? Now all we had there were three Spitfires at any time, and a bit of fuel to refuel the Beauforts if they – and I don't know the Spitfire would hold, a couple of hundred gallons, something like that, 100 gallon billy tank. He said, "I reckon about 1,000 gallons of gas, perhaps 100 gallons of engine oil, each plane, we'll be right." The poor old CO, all he's got is 44-gallon drums of petrol

36:00 stuck in the bush, and a 300 gallon tanker, can you imagine the work involved to get 1,000 gallons out of 44-gallon drums into a little 300 gallon tanker, on the chev body or a GMC [General Motors Corporation] truck, drive in and put it in the plane, go back and get another load. We were there, we left a lot of petrol in the tanks, we used to all bog in and help, but fortunately they had the pumps for the little petrol motor on it, just stick

36:30 the pipe into the 44 and stick the hose up into the tanker. It started to even look like it was sucking air, switch her off and whip it out and into the next one, and it could have been 10, 15 gallons of petrol in the tank, in the 44 still. But that was a real strain on the OB [Operation Base], because the way they got their petrol, at high tide the supply ship would drop it off, in one of the little inlets. I don't know just how far, we did

37:00 go down one day to give them a hand, just to have a look, but it was I suppose a good 20 minutes, a half an hour's drive from the strip to the coast. So they'd float it in at high tide, the drums, and then push them up and bring them up in the dry season, because the wet season, they couldn't do anything there, the bush would just be boggy. That was a lot of trips by that little three-ton truck, to bring 44-gallon drums up, full

37:30 time, and they'd get it up there, these three big Yanks shoving and clean it all out in one hit. But just one of the interesting things for us, and would break the monotony.

So no more flying for the Spitfires?

No, they're grounded until they get some gas in. But another interesting one there, I told you how we were short of meat and food? And word came around, "Boy, there's steak on tonight." We get down to the cookhouse,

38:00 yes, sure enough we had steak, and this was terrific. Old Aggie, which was Avro Anson [Avro Anson fighter], one of the old original planes we had before the war and we were fighting with at the end of the war, made by Rowe and Company in England, the only plane I ever got to get hold of the controls and do a few nice little turns, I felt that was great, until the pilot said to me, "Better move the stick forward a bit," and I realised it was just about to stall, I was that excited I was pulling it back a bit each time. But

38:30 that was interesting. But anyway the Aggie had come in and dropped this meat off, see, it all ties up with that bombing raid that they went out on. We had a nice meal, this was the night before the planes came in. After we'd had the meal the signal came, the meat was for the air crew, they've got to have their red meat, you see, for altitude flying. "Stiff luck, Charlie!" We had a nice tuck in and I think everybody in the cookhouse knew what it was for, and they thought,

39:00 "They get their meat, we haven't had any for a while." So I think it was one of those cases like Nelson, they didn't read the signal until after the meat was cooked. Oh, bad luck, we didn't realise that. We had a chuckle on that. The air crew boys didn't mind. Go onto Frank again while we're on that, you don't read about it in the book. The 'control tower', in inverted commas, four saplings stuck in the ground and about

39:30 eight feet up, 10 feet up, a little platform put around and a little pole around the top, with a ladder up the side. Now the Beaufighters came out in the afternoon, they were going to go out the next morning, they had to take off just before daylight and hit them over there just after daybreak, so they came out to fuel up and be ready to go, eight of them, now it's a little strip,

40:00 eight doesn't seem many, but it's a lot to try and get on to a little strip that's designed as a private mission strip, you know, with the proper dispersal bays and all that sort of thing. They were landing into the breeze towards this hill, which meant they go down a mile, then they've got to turn round and taxi back, there was no strip and taxi-way beside it, you had to taxi back on the strip you landed

40:30 on. So one landed, the next one couldn't land until he'd taxied back, and it takes a while, they can't go very fast, especially the old planes, the tricycle undercarriage planes, they could taxi, as you've noticed, they taxi pretty fast, they bowl along, but the ones at their tail, they're bouncing along on the ground, they couldn't go very fast. There's eight of them to come down, and we weren't Rhodes Scholars to work out that, "God, it's taking them five minutes for every one to get

41:00 down, we're going to be up here for the best part of an hour, three quarters of an hour." So this bloke turns around and takes his breath, the next minute there's a plane, wheels down, flaps down, and he's coming in behind him, against the – Old Frank's out there, red eldis lamp, signalling and then firing red vary pistols, "What's wrong with the so-and-sos?" They're no more likely to hit each other than a mob of kids out on pushbikes, acting the goat on the ground, you know? They

41:30 could see could see each other and were used to handling the things, and they realised that this way

one could land and when he was halfway along the strip, the next one landed behind him, and they all just taxied up to the end where they had to all disperse. They're flying around and it gets terribly hot…

We'll just need to pause there

Tape 7

00:30 A Japanese reconnaissance plane had come in three days and got right in over the strip before he was picked up, set the warning bells out, and next thing we knew three DC3s or Dakotas landed and they had a mobile radar unit on board which they put up on the edge of the strip there, and it was quite interesting, they were flown in from over near Fenton by an American squadron.

01:00 And just another little sideline that's not recorded in the history books, when they landed – one of the chaps from one of the planes said, "Is there a radio man about here?" I said, "Yes, what's the problem?" "Oh," he said, "The skipper's having a bit of trouble with his radio compass, could you check it out?" I said, "Well not really, I'll see if it's working but to test it you'd have to have proper facilities. I'll have a look at it for you." And I hopped in and searched

01:30 around and found the markers that we knew of, "Okay," I said, "It seems to be working all right now." "Oh," he said, "The skipper was having trouble with it." So much for that. Then they're chatting amongst themselves and he said, "Where are we? Anywhere near Perth here?" They were in the Kimberleys, you know, I suppose if you came from America it's somewhere near Perth. I said, "You're quite a few hours out of Perth, you're a long way from Perth." He said, "I reckon we might get down there, the skipper was down there a few weeks back and he

02:00 had this little girl down there, I reckon if he's this close he'll get back." And one of the other Yanks said, "Oh no, you can't do that now, there's a controller who supervises all the flights in the area, you can't do that any more, just fly anywhere." "No," he said, "I reckon he'll get there." We forgot about this, went back to work, we're coming back from working on one of the salvage jobs and picked up some met boy from the meteorology office, gave him a ride in the

02:30 truck, and he said, "Oh, that Dakota turned up. One of the three that was here this morning was missing, it didn't get to Karunda Downs." I said, "Where did it turn up?" He said, "Oh, it landed down at Perth, it got off course" (laughs). Now I think his radio compass was spot on, but he sowed the seeds for his excuse for what he was going to do, you know, which was I thought a bit interesting. Another sideline to that was one of the things I often think of, you never knew who the people

03:00 were that were with you, and the chap in charge of the group, the salvage group that I was in, the chap – I only knew him as RAAF Sharp, his surname was Sharp, he was in the permanent air force and had escaped from Malaya as the Japs came down, but because he'd been in the permanent RAAF his nickname was RAAF, so we called him RAAF Sharp – wasn't a bad sort of a bloke, a Sydney chap, kept to himself a bit. In the plane there was an old Japanese trumpet,

03:30 a cornet type of thing, I'm not an instrumentalist so I don't know one from the other, but it was like a trumpet with a few valves on it, and he got – it was a bit battered, and next thing he's blowing in it and drained a bit of fluid out of it, and he started to play Blues In The Night, the best you'd ever hear anywhere, you know? It turned out that he was a top brass player in a band in Sydney, just out of the blue he'd suddenly

04:00 give us that in the middle of the Kimberleys. They're sort of nostalgic emotional things which made an impression then, we just liked – you know? Another time, the piano, they had a piano in this place at the Kimberleys, and most of the pianos up there used to get in strife because of the humidity and heat, but this was the best condition of any I'd heard, and this radar crew that came in, there was a top pianist there.

04:30 Well, he got on the piano and of course we're all round that piano until about four o'clock in the morning, because we had that music. "Anything like that? What's the latest tune? What are they playing at the dugout?" And so on and so forth. Little things like that. Another musical nostalgia was at 4RSU the chap in charge of the NEI squad, the North Netherlands East Indies, Lieutenant Commander von Lenin was his

05:00 title, a Dutchman who was in Sydney when the Japs overran the Netherlands East Indies, didn't know what had happened to his family, his wife and two daughters were taken prisoner with the Japs, interned or whatever, and he'd get in there on the piano at our unit, and he'd play this Rachmaninov [Sergei Rachmaninov – composer], bom, bom, bom, a beautiful pianist, and just the

05:30 same thing over and over, and every time I hear it now, I can see him sitting there and wondering what his family had done, and so on. You don't of it at the time, but you can get a lot of nostalgic memories when you think of them now, and little things trigger them off. But I got back from the Kimberleys and we went out with very few clothes, as I think I mentioned, we went out very light, we were out there longer than

06:00 we thought we would be because the Beaufighter pranged and we had to stay and strip it down, and so finally we get back to Bachelor, which was the main airport for shuttles flying around, my shorts – and most of us – the main part that was left was the belt section, the pockets, no backside, not much front side, but you had the piece round there and the pockets which you carried things in. It was all right

06:30 out in the bush, and of course round the camp one of the officers came out with a flight going through was most upset, he said the natives wore more clothes than his airmen did, we used to wear virtually nothing, just a pair of underpants and it was so hot and sticky. And if you wore clothes you got prickly heat or some other illness. Anyway, we walk in to the terminal heading for the canteen to get something to

07:00 drink, and, "Goddammit there's women around the place," there were none there when we went out, you know, only a few nursing sisters at the hospital. And all these – the three mates and myself working our way along the canteen with our bottoms to the wall because we had no covering, we just had the side of our trousers and the pockets, until we got back to the camp and got issued with fresh gear. That was just a little aside, you know. And we found out,

07:30 which leads me into another little incident which I think is one of the humorous things, we found that all the toilets which when we'd gone out were just sitting in the open, the four poles with corrugated iron roof over the top, and nothing around it because there were only blokes around everywhere. Well, they're all surrounded by hession walls on three sides, so keep the privacy there because now they have women coming into the

08:00 camp and so on. Why I say something amusing, these toilets, I don't know where they were designed, but they used to have two seats made out of 44-gallon drums, they'd cut the bottom to make it like a toilet seat. And they were built over a concrete pad with a flue on it, and you put – the general hands had put timber in, and you'd use one side for the

08:30 day, and there was a roster, you had to go over, whoever was on the roster his job was to throw some mixture of kerosene and sump oil into it, you know, half a gallon or so, and drop a match in, and that would burn all night and right through the next day, and you'd use the other one and ditto, and just repeat. Someone who shall remain nameless, he was about six foot four, had a little engine in his mobile workshop, he wanted some

09:00 petrol, so he's picked up this four gallon drum, the only petrol he could get was 130 octanes for the high performance stuff, and filled the engine, there's some left in it. Put it back beside the wall, that night my mate, it was his turn on the roster, and I'm down in the workshop, and I'm looking up and I see him pick up the tin, I should be up and moving for this, to

09:30 demonstrate his actions, but he picked up the tin – a story without words, I couldn't hear anything, because he's about 50 yards away beside the electricians' workshop, where the toilet was. I see him unscrew the top, had a smell of the – looked away and smelt again, went inside and put the tin down and came out with one of the electricians and I could see he asked him, "Which is the tin," you know? The chap pointed at the tin, and I could imagine him saying, "But it smells like petrol."

10:00 "No, that's just…" Anyway, picked up the tin, disappeared behind the hessian, and next thing there's an unholy bang, toilet paper and hessian and Tom flying out of it under the hessian. He'd tipped about a gallon of 130 octane down into the hot seat and dropped a match into it. And he came down and he doesn't know to this day who put it in there. He said, "The silly bugger, I told him it

10:30 smelt like petrol." He said, "No, that's it, I mixed it myself, it's in that tin there."

I've heard stories about when someone put aeroplane petrol into the septic tank, while someone was sitting there, right? Well this guy had gone off looking for a match, he didn't have any matches, and someone else came and used the toilet while he was gone, and left a match.

11:00 **His whole genital area got burnt.**

Oh, he'd be in trouble. Because petrol is deadly, people get caught, they don't realise how quick petrol ignites, like especially if it's confined, you know, and a bit of heat to gas it, it really goes off.

What was it like, dealing with aeroplane petrol in the desert, like in Darwin?

I never had any real problems with the

11:30 handling of it, to my knowledge, we never experienced any, and as I said we refuelled those Liberators and we just handled it like as it – it had to be dangerous with the little petrol motor, there'd be fumes everywhere, you know, really. But being in the open I suppose – I don't remember now, it might have been a bit of a breeze shifting it away. I never heard of anybody having any trouble that way, it was always doing something, using it as it shouldn't have been used.

12:00 Another instance we had a chap got badly burnt, he was in the motor transport section and they had a clean up and they had a lot of some stuff like Malthoid, you know, that floor covering stuff, and it was thrown in the rubbish tip and it was sort of rolled over, in a roll, and they'd thrown – it might have even been there, in the kerosene mix, which is just as bad when it gets hot, if it gets and vaporises, and it

happened, it was like a blow torch, it suddenly ignited and

12:30 he was in line with this folded roll, and it just – because he only had on shorts and he was badly burnt, up to the AGH, and another bad burn we had was due to the heat, they were putting a coalesce mixture or something like coalesce, you know, road surfacing stuff, on the truck which it had to be hot, and sprayed out the back and these fellows were standing on a platform at the back, just regulating taps and the back end of that, it built up

13:00 too much pressure, and the safety valve must have stuck or something, and it blew the back out of it, and they got sprayed with hot coalesce, they were a mess, I don't know what happened actually to them ultimately, naturally they were rushed by ambulance straight up to the AGH and in what we'd call intensive care today.

I've got some other questions to ask you before we move on to...Now when you were in Darwin you'd also come across Dutch troops and pilots etcetera. Tell us about that interaction.

13:30 Yes. Now, as I said, with the Dutch, the impression of everybody was that the Dutch were arrogant, very arrogant people, still are. Very nice too, some of them, but it was nothing to see a Dutch

14:00 airman hurry an Indonesian crewman along with his boot, you know, head away. Now I often wonder, a chappie I got to know very well, the radio chap that worked with them and in conjunction with us, they didn't let us do their radio on our own, he was Sergeant Major Toong, he was of Chinese

14:30 extraction, he was third-generation Chinese I think, somewhere in Java or Indonesia, and a very nice chap, we used to often have a yarn. But gee, he was always looking over his shoulder for Lieutenant, the commander, von Lenin, and he'd never, never walk beside him, he was always a half a pace or a pace behind him. And more than he dare do walk through an opening ahead of him, because that was

15:00 not – the boss was the – in rank and in race he had to go first, you know? And the boys that worked at the squadron said they used to get quite, well annoyed at the way in which they treated some of the Indonesian Chinese people who were airmen.

What do you mean by getting annoyed?

Oh, well our fellows in the main, you know, they didn't take too kindly to

15:30 distinction, we used to get in trouble with the Aborigine people, ministration, because we were told never give the Aborigines any food or anything, we said, "Hell with that," we'd go out and take some Mick and Vic, or cold compressed corned bully beef or whatever we had for a picnic, if we had some left over, "Here you are chaps, do you to have this?" Give it to them. If we were caught doing that, you know, we'd get a reprimand for it.

16:00 And they just didn't like – well you know, you talk about the Japs' brutality, they liked to kick the prisoners, they kicked their own men, you know, they didn't think anything of it.

What do you think would have happened if an Australian officer had assaulted you or someone...?

Well it just wasn't on, not even shouting, as far as we were concerned.

How would you have reacted to that, if you were assaulted by an Australian?

Yes well

16:30 naturally we'd have taken what they call 'redress agreements', and he would have been court martialled of us, as long as you didn't strike back. If you'd laid your complaint through the proper channels that was, an officer would be court martialled, he's not allowed to strike. And even if his abuse was too loud, you take your redress agreement. I upset one bloke on the switchboard and normally it wasn't our job to operate the switchboard, we maintained them, but the switchboard operator wanted to go to the pictures,

17:00 so I had to be there, I was rostered on for duty that night to watch the equipment, and I said, "I'll watch the switch for you and you go to the pictures." But a bit later on I'm sitting there and one of the lines came on, so I went across, and it was a new adjutant I think he was, a new acting defence officer for squad, unit. He said, "Oh look switch, I'd like you to give me a call at 2.30 in the morning."

17:30 And I said, "Certainly sir," I said, "Well we will, I'll give you a call if I'm awake." "What do you mean if you're awake, you're on duty." I said, "We don't stay on awake duty," I said, "We don't have any alarm clocks, haven't had any equipped here," I said, "We go onto alarm bell operation after 11 o'clock or midnight," which is what they did, the boys would bed down, the switchboard operator,

18:00 and you put it on loud so the alarm, if somebody rang, it would ring the bell. And he was a bit snooty about this, and anyway, the sigs [signals] officer told me after, he said, "He wanted to put you on a charge, and I pointed out to him," I didn't know this at the time, "that if you'd been on duty, that no airman can be required or charged for not staying awake after he's been on duty for 10 hours.

18:30 Ten hours is the shift lead, and after that if you fall asleep," and he said, "I also pointed out to him what

I said, the switch operator was not required to stay awake, that a certain time he went onto alarm conditions and went to sleep." So I didn't know anything about this, but he was wanting to charge me for insubordination or something, I don't know. I never got any of those, thank goodness.

19:00 **You said the Australian soldiers didn't like the Dutch officers?**

Well they regarded them as arrogant, I wouldn't say that they disliked them, they got all right with them, but they were critical of their arrogance and attitude. As I said, this Sergeant Toong, Sergeant Major Toong, I often wonder, there was a Sergeant Major Toong was shot by the Indonesians, by Suharto, in the

19:30 revolution, remember the revolution? And I wouldn't be at all surprised if it was him, it's a pretty fair rank, and he'd been in the service a long time. He said he was very dissatisfied, he was talking to me, he said, "If I was Dutch I'd be, you know, an officer two or three ranks up, for sure, the time in the service I've done," but he said, "The furthest any Indonesian or Chinese citizen of Indonesia

20:00 gets is the sergeant major, that's the highest non com [non commissioned] rank," he said, "They'll never make us an officer." And I thought, well, after the war he might have been given the rank of general by the revolutionaries and he could have been the old Toong, he was quite a nice fellow, very clever man, but you never know.

Did any Aussies take it up to the Dutch?

Not that I knew of.

Any fights?

Not,

20:30 not, not with – there may have been some on the squadron itself, but certainly not at our camp. Most of the fights were between themselves on beer night.

Well what was the difference between the Dutch and the Americans as far as your interaction with them?

Well I got on well with the Yanks, I met them down here first in Melbourne, before I was in the air force, the Guadalcanal chaps who'd had some of the worst fighting of the whole war,

21:00 Guadalcanal, if you read about it. And that was the first time the Japs were, as an army, set back on their arse there, they thought they were going to take Guadalcanal and the airstrips, and they didn't, thank God. But no, they were – the biggest trouble – two things, like the Dutch have that very confident, high ego, and not noisy about it, they're just aloof,

21:30 and whereas the Yank tends to talk a lot, a bit like – a bit of inferiority complex, he's got to let everybody know he's around and how good he is. But in the main they're all different types from different parts of America, the mid-west is different all together there.

So the Dutch were more like, they were stiff?

Yes, very formal and you know, very like the Germans as far as that goes. Well, I think if you crossed the border you wouldn't know from Holland to Germany.

22:00 I don't think the language changes a heck of a lot either. But no, that was – I've got to say, we got on all right, but it was quite obvious that the subservience was there, and the only time I saw that again to the same extent, and I was in charge of the television transmitter here in 1960 odd, and a Japanese from

22:30 Toshiba, representative, we got word that a top Toshiba man was coming up, and with the Australian manager for Toshiba, I was to give them every courtesy. I don't know, at AWA, we had AWA transmitters, we would have been as happy. They had cameras, and boy oh boy, did they use them? And we had a thing called a multiplexor, where the sound and vision is mixed from the transmitter, and it was

23:00 an AWA engineer's design and the first thing they said, "Oh, it's small," and did they photograph that from every angle, I bet they worked out how to design one themselves by the time they got back. But that's aside. But what I was going to say is, the Australian manager was just like Toong was with the Dutchmen, he walked half a pace behind his boss, he'd step back and let him go through the door with a half curtsy, and you know, it was something we're not used to, of course.

23:30 I think that's a good thing. You can respect people without kowtowing to them all the time. No, it's – it was pretty obvious to us, and no surprise that you know, once the Japanese were driven out that the Indonesians had had all they wanted of the Dutch domination.

Couldn't blame them, eh?

No, and that's caused a big problem of course, because the

24:00 worst example, I won't say the worst, one of the worst examples was New Guinea, west Irian, the Indonesians claimed it, it's not part of Indonesia, never was part of Indonesia, they're different people,

they're Melanesians, they're totally different, their custom's different, but it was under Dutch domination, and a bit like India when the British left, people who were not affiliated with one another, they were quite

24:30 separate entities, but because they were all under the one control of the British Raj, when they left they said, "Well that's India, and you've all got to conform to the biggest bloke." And it caused a lot of upset and still causes upset. And in Indonesia, just because, you know, from Batavia right down through Timor and across to Ambon and into Borneo, it was under the control of the Dutch, so the Dutch have gone, "Now this is our

25:00 Indonesia," but they're different people, there should be about three different nations there to have harmony, but it'll work itself out, I guess. It's a bit rough at times though.

Tell us about your interaction with the women from the forces, the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], and WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service].

Yes, it was always very good and interesting. I tell the people, they think you're exaggerating. It wasn't long after we'd come back from being

25:30 out in the Kimberleys, having been up there about I suppose 12 months or more, and…

You were there for 12 continuous months?

I was up for 18 months, just on 18 months continuous, and …

You wrote a book there, (laughs).

Yes, oh yes. And it was after the grave-digging party, a couple of chaps got killed and I volunteered for the grave-digging and we went down to Adelaide River, the graves are there, and – big war cemetery, and that was where we used to go to the picture nights, the seats were all bamboo

26:00 seats, we used to sit out in the open there. If a thunderstorm came, you had water up to your knees almost as you sat there. Anyway this night we were late and the bus to the pictures had gone on the tracks, so the boss said, "Take one of the utes if you want to go down to the pictures and drive down." So there was about four of us, three of us, so we jumped in, we went down to Adelaide River and parked, and by this time the show was just starting, they're playing Stars and Stripes and the boys were about to sing out, "What about Joe?" You've heard that, have you?

26:30 Oh well, Oh well, they played Stars and Stripes and the national anthem, God Save The Queen, and then the choir would go, "What about Joe?" (laughs) Joe Stalin, "What about Joe?" We've played America, we've played Pommyland, what about Joe? He's in it, too. Anyway, that was just – they were about to do that, and we're rushing across and I could see a bare seat, there were some WAAAFs or some females sitting up that end, and so I'd just

27:00 grab a seat where you'd see it, it was about to start and the seats were all pretty well occupied. So I sat down, I just sat down and about four girls came along and they sat down. And the chap that sat down a bit along from me, someone had come over and said something to him, and he got up and took off, didn't say anything to me, told me after, the bloke said, "Get out of there, the provos will grab you, that's the AWAS seat, you know, it's reserved for the girls." So

27:30 I'm sitting there – the interesting thing was, I'm sitting there like this, next thing this girl puts her hand on top of mine, well after being out there for 18 months you've got no idea, it had me on – turned me over for about three weeks I reckon, you know, the temperature went up and people were like, "Oh, come off it," you know, "you're kidding yourself." But unless you're in that situation, you've got no idea. And anyway, I stayed there through the pictures and

28:00 had a word with her and that, but never saw the girl again or anything like that. And then as I said, he told me after, he said, "It's a wonder the cops didn't get you, you were sitting in the girls' seat." But no, the interaction was good, a bit favoured in one way. There was one of the boys in our unit, he had a friend who was in the nursing service, he came up to the hospital at Adelaide River, and having charge of a mobile

28:30 truck, a workshop, old MacNamee, he was a randy old bloke, he said, "We'll take the truck out for a field trial. We've got to go out and check the radio." So we'd pick the girls up to go and have a picnic at Adelaide River, somewhere like that. But no, it made it a bit more reasonable up there. Another humorous incident, I used to lecture to technicians up here to break the monotony and toss in a few moments. I said, "Can you imagine…"

29:00 I said – we had a pool on Adelaide River that the boys from 4RSU had found, the first time we were going there, I'd just gone down to 4RSU and we were working away and we were putting in a transmitter, pretty hard yakka [hard work], and the boss said, "I think it's time to go and cool off and go for a swim," and they jumped in the truck, and going through the camp they said, "Somebody grab a rifle." And we wondered what that was for, and they get to this – we down a

29:30 few miles across the plains to the Adelaide River and pull in and there's a tree with a rope on it and a few things, and they emptied a magazine of a .303 into the pandanus palms that are hanging into the

water, along the side. They said, “They should scare any crocs away if they’re around, she’ll be right.” And your’s truly didn’t get too far from the bank, I always made sure there was someone between me and the sand at that stage, I was a rookie. And we were having a great swim, that was our swimming hole. And on this other

30:00 day we went down, there were about four of us, five of us, and old Mac was with us, and we were having a great old chase around in the water, you know, swimming, cooling off and acting the goat like young people do, swing out on the rope, no clothes on, we were naked, and I’m standing up and you know, you flick the water off your body and you haven’t got a towel in the heat, and I just looked up to the bank a bit and there’s two blokes and two girls are sitting up on the bank watching us all the

30:30 time. So old Mac had to go over, he said, “You know, it’s a bit rough, it’s upsetting the boys a bit, they haven’t got togs,” so he had to ask them to move on. Just another little incident. And the other thing was, I mentioned up on the beach, the kids were not as tough, they talked tough, we were in Adelaide River at the main swimming hole, and we’d be all there and a

31:00 lot of fellas wouldn’t have togs, about 50 per cent of them, but after the girls appeared, suddenly the cry would go up, “Sheilas,” or girls, “are coming!” You know? And all the boys who didn’t have togs, they’re making out of the water and into the scrub to get a pair of shorts or a towel or something. But they thought they’d killed me there, I don’t know whether you can see grey hairs on that eyebrow, we’re down there and we’re trying to ride a 44-gallon drum in the water, if you’ve got an empty 44-gallon drum and try and ride it like a horse in

31:30 water, it’s pretty tough, it bucks, and it threw me off and the rim came up and hit me in the eye, boing, it stunned me a little bit, but I was a very good underwater swimmer, I used to practice that a lot, for survival techniques and that sort of thing, I was always aware of that, and so I just dropped, let myself go down, away from the kicking legs and so on, and kicked myself out to one side quietly, came up to get a breath.

32:00 And when I did they were all duck-diving and they thought I was laid out and drowning underneath. Finished up with, I think, three stitches. But it opened it up, you could see the bone, it was right on the point of the bone. Ah, it was nice, I got some attention from the girls’ side. And then back to the old doc at the camp, there were no nurses there, just orderlies, and they put the stitches in, thank God old doc knew a bit more than the orderly did.

32:30 **I was told that they used to have parties in Darwin for the girls, the WAAAFs and the AWAS with soldiers, but they used to put guards, armed guards outside so no-one could leave.**

Yes, those sort of things were – we didn’t have any – unfortunately or fortunately, whichever way you’d like to put it, I think that was reserved for air crew and officer ranks and above, when we were there, there weren’t enough girls to go round, so if there were any around

33:00 they were invited to the officers’ mess or the sergeants’ mess for the evening. But the joke was, I was chuckling at – a few film stars came, Gary Cooper, some other fellow, Una Mercal and some other girls, and one of the little spiels, they had a joke, they said, you know, they put a guard on Una Mercal’s tent, and the old colonel put a guard on the sergeant, then they had to put a corporal on to guard the sergeant,

33:30 and it was someone else to guard him, and so on, so everybody’s guarding the tent. Yes, these people are human beings, doesn’t matter what they do, they’ll find a way round, that’s for sure. And just a little on that, when I was coming south from Townsville in this DC3, I always carried two blankets as I said. After about an hour or so in the air, and the poor old wing

34:00 commander sitting beside me is going blue, and I thought, “Oh God,” I’m sitting on one blanket with one wrapped round me. “Like a blanket, Sir?” “Are you sure?” I said, “Yes, she’s right.” “Oh yes, I would.” So he wrapped that round himself. There was a WAAAF on board going south on compassionate, that usually meant she was pregnant, it may not have been, it might have been her mother sick or something, but usually it was the reason. And three Yanks,

34:30 airmen coming down from the Philippines, in their Mickey Mouse flying jackets that we were all so envious of, you know, sheepskin jackets, they had the best of everything, and they were playing up to her no end and she was sitting talking to them and then some of the crew came out and asked if she’d like a hot coffee, go up to the front cabin, so she’s getting VIP [preferential] treatment all over. Then she came back, sat down between me and the old boy, and she was getting pretty

35:00 cold too. I though, “Well, I’m not giving you a blanket,” I said to her, I said, “You’re welcome to share the blanket if you like.” “I’ll be all right, thank you.” So in the middle of the old DC3 on the floor, we’re sitting along the side of mail bags and stuff, after about four hours, you get sick of sitting on this aluminium seat, so I made a little bed for myself on the mail bags you see, and I’m lying down there under the rug, and I suppose it was

35:30 an hour or so later, I feel a movement on the rug, and her ladyship had – she was prepared in the coolness of the night to realise that a bit of mock modesty wasn’t cutting any ice at all, she was prepared to snuggle up beside me for the rest of the trip down to Sydney and keep warm. I often use that as a – used to get a good laugh from the kids of course, when you tell them about it. But it was the

perfect example of, “Oh no,

36:00 I’m right thank you.” My God, another two hours and the temperature’s almost down to zero, you’re starting to go blue, you know? I think a bit of sharing body temperature doesn’t go astray.

What were the service women like, generally speaking? Were they very stiff, or where they very sociable?

Good, generally speaking they were very family like, as I said, you were in the uniform, you’re together, you had all sorts,

36:30 some were very keen for male company, others were just like if you go to a dance or somewhere. If they saw someone they liked there, they’d be friendly. If there was someone they didn’t like, well they’d be courteous, polite (laughs).

Tell you to bugger off?

Yes (laughs).

But generally speaking, the sexual relations between men in say Darwin, who were not exposed generally speaking to women, and the only type of women they’d come across would be service women or nurses?

Yes,

37:00 there was a great respect actually, I felt, and perhaps to sum this up and give you an idea, because this was a different army, it’s not like a permanent army. This was an army of fellas, family men, fathers, husbands, who were drafted, not in the air force, we were all volunteers, but who had volunteered for service, and they weren’t like a bunch

37:30 of young fellows who’d joined the service for excitement and adventure, they just wanted the thing over and get home. The Tivoli Group, now the old Tivoli, you wouldn’t remember that, it would have been gone, there used to be a vaudeville house in Bourke Street, and I think they call it Tivoli Place now, it runs through towards the Victoria Coffee Palace. Now the old Tiv was a vaudeville show, and they came up there and put a concert on, I was at the concert, they went round. And you know, they thought, “Oh, we’re up here,”

38:00 they could get away with any blue jokes, whatever they wanted. And they started getting onto those sort of jokes, and they were booed off the stage by the boys. What they wanted to hear was homespun Stella Lamonde, singing, you know, light opera, musical comedy, and the latest hits and the dance tunes. It was an entirely different group of people than you’d find in the permanent army. They were, I found no

38:30 real problems, people had no real problems at all, it was just like a normal community, and I was – and another couple of instances, one was in Sydney, now we mentioned, didn’t have much to talk about Sydney, but we used to go in from out at Darlington, we were in the university, St Paul’s College, go and have breakfast at Darlington just over the road, which is now part of the university, it used to be the Deaf and Dumb Institute, now

39:00 it’s part of Sydney Uni. Had breakfast, they’d read out, every morning for a week someone was reading out on the daily routine orders this number, they’d read out a number and a name, on parade. “Some girl’s looking for…” I don’t think he was ever on that parade, he was somewhere else, if he ever lived. He lived, but he didn’t have that number. But no, we’d march down to the old Ultimo Tech [Ultimo Technical Institute], and

39:30 one day I had to go and get some advice, and they sent me off, and it was just after they’d taken the girls in as tech trainees, and suddenly I’m the only male in a room with about 100 girls, they’re all thinking they’re liberated now, they’re in the air force, and the boot was on the other foot, instead of 100 blokes whistling and cat calling to some girl walking through the room, they were all – so you were pleased to get out the other end. That was all right.

40:00 **So they were whistling and all that?**

Yes (laughs), you know, “What are you doing after five?” sort of thing? And while we were in Sydney, in the marching down, we had a sergeant named Croker, not a bad stick, old Croker, I don’t know what he’d ever done, whether he’d been up to New Guinea or not, but God he copped it, he’d be marching along as a DI [Drill Instructor], a drill instructor, and we had to go through Redfern, and if you know Sydney at all Redfern’s one of the old

40:30 places, these old housewives are standing there, arms akimbo or folded on their breasts, and slatternly looking types, you know? The doorsteps, as I’ve said, the bluestones, they’ve been there that long a rat could go under, the door wouldn’t shut, and they opened right on the footpath, a little narrow footpath, the street, and we’re marching along and if Croke said anything to us, they’re giving him rhino [harassing him], you know, “You big fat slob,” and a few other adjectives tossed in, “Leave the

41:00 boys alone, go and do a bit yourself,” and spit on the ground just as you were in front of him, you know? Poor old Croke had to walk along with…Anyway one morning he must have been not feeling too good, the girls would be hanging out of the – if there were any factories and that – see you at so and so, you

know, whatever, five o'clock or half past five, and what are you doing, you know, various other suggestions, and the boys would answer them and…So old Croke said, "We got to cut this out," he said, "No more talking

41:30 to the girls." He said, "If you speak again, we'll do a half hour's drill here in the street." Of course, he might as well have saved his breath. The next place we come to, there's some birds hanging out the windows, and the fellows start. "Righto," he said, "Drill." Now I'm a marker, A Flight, I'm not in the front, right in the firing line. So there was a command in the

Tape 8

00:32 Yes, well Croke said, "Right, we're going to do some drill in the street, half an hour," and there's one command in that drill which is called 'two to front salute'. You come to a halt, you throw a salute, do an about turn, and march back the other way you came from. It's a favourite one with the drill instructors because they can stand and let you go past 40 yards or so,

01:00 and then they sing out, "Two to front salute," so you salute and turn round, and you come back past them, you get to the other side, "Two to front salute," so you're going backwards and forwards, which our drill instructor, old Sergeant Croke was doing. And the word comes along the line, next time he calls out, "Two to front, salute," we won't hear him. "Right, everybody on front half," I'm the bunny, I'm the bloke because I'm furthest away from him at this stage, so we're going down,

01:30 "Two to front, salute," we're still marching blindly down towards Ultimo, and all the ones at the back turned around, and they're going that way and we're going this way. And Croke doesn't know which way – do you run after them or run after us? "Halt, as you were, stop that." And in the middle of all this you've got these women calling him all the Bs and fat slobs and, "Leave the boys alone, go and do a bit yourself." But after a couple of ball-ups, "All right you

02:00 buggers," he said, "You win, come on, let's get going." We marched on down to Ultimo for the day. It's just another one of those things, you see it sometimes in a film, and you think, "Oh, they wouldn't do that," but they do all right.

Could you tell us now that story you mentioned before of hanging the guy from his ankles?

Yes, well when we went in we moved in to St Paul's College which had just been newly built and had no furnishings, no blinds or anything,

02:30 and of course the chaps moved around, and we'd go to the shower and come back naked, get dressed. And just over the way there was what was I believe the optical section at the university, and of course during the war it was pressed into making up optical equipment for the services and mainly girls working in there. And one of the boys spotted them there with binoculars, looking in the windows. And my

03:00 other mate, a chap named Eddie Slighthome, Eddie came in and his mate Lenny deForest, he said, "Come on Tiny, we'll give them something to look at," and we got of Eddie and swung him out the second floor window, stark bollack naked, and there was true consternation the other end, they dropped their binoculars and the didn't know whether to ring the police or what to do. But anyway,

03:30 that was just one little side issue of the silly things you do. But at the same place they used to have lights out at 10.30, and you were supposed to be in at 10.30. It was a ridiculous thing to do. Theoretically it's okay, you've got to have some sleep, you're studying. But young people, you'd go to the pictures even. You couldn't go to the pictures, you couldn't go to a bit of a dance. So quite often you'd be coming home later, they

04:00 always had what they called a bomb and fire picket, a rostered group of about three people, whose duty it was to go round and see that the ground floor doors and that were secured, and so on. But there was a door into the boiler room which if you knew who was on the picket you'd tell them, leave that one open, about half past eleven they'd see it was unsnibbed [unlatched], you could go inside and get into the…Bluey Campbell,

04:30 a good mate, we were in Adelaide and Sydney together, and Melbourne, he was with me and we'd been to a dance at the YW [YWCA – Young Women's Christian Association] or somewhere, and we were coming in, and I could see the orderly officer coming down, walking through. And a lot of civilians used to go through the same area, it wasn't a camp, it was part of the university. But I could recognise who it was because they had their air force cap on, but I thought, "No, he's that far and it's that dark, he can't

05:00 see who we are if we just keep walking." My old Fitzroy training, you see? Just keep walking along and bluff it out, we'd walk through. But Bluey, being a country boy, he hadn't had that training and he made straight for the door, these people of course, they shone the torch on him, "Who are you? Name and number, what room are you in?" That was all right, they came in about half an hour later, a chap shone the torch,

05:30 "Talking to you outside before?" "Yes." They didn't take any action, fortunately. We could have copped a

bit of a penalty for it. But this same Eddie Slighthome that I mentioned before that we dangled out the window, he and I were coming home one night and he said, “I don’t worry about the doors, I just go up the pipe, up to the first floor, the basement and then the first floor, it’s really got two floors, about a four

06:00 inch downpipe.” I was pretty fit, by gee I just made it up. He went up like a possum and hopped across the window and into the room, I managed to get up there and then the awkward part came, and as you can imagine, I’m trying to hang onto the pipe and feeling for the window ledge somewhere out here three feet to one side, with the foot, to get my foot on it. But anyway, we made it. Just another little episode in the things that go on with the

06:30 boys. But we were there when one of the scares went on, we were at a dance in the AMP [Australian Mutual Provident Society] building, up on the seventh floor of Hamilton Place, Sydney, and everything blacked out, power off, had to go down to the basement, there was great excitement amongst all the youngsters, as we were, the girls and the fellows there had to go down to the basement and stay there – at a

07:00 I think it might have been when the subs were in the harbour, I haven’t checked the dates on that, it was either that or…The subs shelled Rose Bay a few times I think, because that used to put a black out on. But that was just another experience. Finally we were let out and when we got back to St Paul’s at the university, they’d all been scrambled into the slit trenches. I think we were

07:30 safer in the other place, the trenches were full of funnel web spiders and things, so we weren’t too keen, my mate and I said, “I’m not getting in there,” so we just lay on the football oval until it was all clear. But Sydney was not the best place during the war, it was very mercenary. We found that if you wanted to get transport, like a taxi, you just had not hope, unless you had – as one bloke said, “You’ve got to put a Yank uniform

08:00 on lad, or you won’t get a…” And then…

Because they were better tippers?

Oh yes, and they didn’t know where they were, they’d drive round and round Hyde Park, and drop them off about 100 yards from where they picked them up, and charge them what was on the clock, and that sort of thing, you know? That was pretty notorious. But they had the money. One of the chaps said, “You need a Yank uniform and wave a five pound in your hand, you’ll get one to stop for you.” But

08:30 of course the people themselves were, I was fortunate, I made contact with ones that were pretty helpful and interesting too, very – I remember taking a lass – you found out the ignorance of many people by meeting different levels, and she was working in an estate agents, she lived out Rose Bay way somewhere, that’s a toffy, you know, wealthy area of

09:00 Sydney, and she was saying how she was amazed when she got in here that the people – there were houses in Sydney that didn’t have bathrooms. Well, a lot in Melbourne didn’t have bathrooms after the Second World War too, you’d boil the hot water in the copper and have a sponge down and different things. But no, it was – otherwise in Sydney I did a bit of boxing there as a fill in, represented the boys, not very successfully but a

09:30 bit of fun, keep you fit, and I enjoyed it.

What about Melbourne during the war?

Well that was my home town of course, so generally I thought it was better than Sydney, they had their fun there of course, they had a few brawls, and my experience there one night, the Yanks’ navy and Australian navy, three blokes sort of didn’t see

10:00 it off too well, and there used to be a shop called Henry Bucks in Swanston Street, where the City Square is now, and there was an arcade went in, I just can’t think of the name, it went in and round – can’t remember, it doesn’t matter, anyway this plate glass window, it was a men’s wear store, rather high quality menswear…

I think it’s still there, I think it’s just down from Flinders Street Station.

Yes, Henry Bucks. But this was up in Swanston, and the one that I’m talking about, they

10:30 had a few of them in Melbourne, Henry Bucks, they had one round near David Jones, and anyway, we were coming back from a dance from I think up at the uni and there was a bit of a commotion, and there’s three of them there sort of getting into it, and a sergeant airman sort of stopped the brawl that was going, he said, “Come on, wake up to yourselves, you’ll have the shore patrol here before you know where you are, and you’ll spend the rest of the weekend in the brig, you know, like wake up to yourselves.” And they

11:00 had stopped, and then this silly big tall Yank bloke, he grabbed the smallest of the Australians and said, “Come on guys, I’ve got this little guy,” and the biggest of the Australian seamen turned round and went whack, put him straight through the plate glass window, went off like a shotgun, you know, and he was flat on his back in there with ties and shirts around him, and before he got out,

11:30 as our major had said to him, shore patrol was there and they don’t muck around, the batons are about

two foot long, wooden batons, and give you a whack over the head, no trouble at all, you know, no worry about violence, that was the end of that. That was one little difference of opinion that arose. But they had a big – I didn't see it, but you've heard have the big fight outside Young and Jacksons and the whole of Princes Bridge was a mob of bodies. While

12:00 I was in Sydney, the 9th Divvy [Division] came back from the Middle East, before they went off to New Guinea, that was a tough time, they cancelled all leave for the Yanks, no Yanks were allowed in Sydney. I saw one bloke being chased down George Street, with a couple of 9th Divvy blokes after him, but I don't know what the outcome was. He was still making good headway, he went round the corner. But yes, they came back, they were pretty incensed at the things,

12:30 and the Yanks didn't help, you know? They had a bit of a brawl up on the north-south I heard about too, it was at the – they were heading up towards the north, and the Aussie blokes were coming down, and they were swapping over, and because our blokes said to the Yanks heading up to the area where there was

13:00 fighting, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry." Some of the Yanks said, "Hey, and you'll be sorry when you get down to find out what we've done to your girlfriends, too." Of course that was pretty much a tinder box, and I believe they had a bit of a scrap for a while. But I think that's just normal, people, as I said the only thing I saw was that. Talked about Bluey Campbell before, one night we'd been to a YW dance, and

13:30 there used to be a hamburger joint down in Circular Quay, and pop in there and have a coffee. And every night I was ever there, there was a brawl, you know? Anyway I was telling Bluey and he didn't believe me, and I said, "Well, we'll go down and have a coffee before we go back to the camp." And we're sitting up the front, typical style they used to have a counter with stools up the front and at the back a half a dozen or a dozen tables, and next minute there's a ruckus going

14:00 on down the back, and a brawl starts between a – I think this time it was merchant seamen and somebody, you know, the old woman running the place, up to the phone and she's ringing the police station, it was just round the corner. She said, "But they never come, you ring them and it takes 20 minutes before they get here. And we had our coffee and left, they were still getting into it. I found out why they didn't come, they weren't silly. Up in 4

14:30 RSU one of my mates, a chap named Ken Heath, he was an ex-policeman, he must have been in the CI [Criminal Investigation Branch] or something, he had a permit to carry a firearm and he had an automatic with him at all times for self protection, but he said the first call he got was at that station, he said, "And I dashed round to a young sprog, and full of business, 'Stand aside, come on, move on, let me through.'" He said, "The next thing I was confronted by a six foot plus Negro with eyes that had turned green and the biggest looking knife I'd ever

15:00 seen in my life." He said, "I thought I was going to get lynched, you know, American ideas, to be surrounded by a mob of whites, abusing him and carrying on, I never talked as fast in my life." He said, "And I learnt one lesson, you never stick your head into where there's a brawl until you find out what's going on, don't rush in, find out where it is." But anyway that was just another event in Sydney, but the people in the main were pretty good, there was any amount of entertainment,

15:30 if you were looking for trouble you could find trouble, but we weren't, we had to enjoy ourselves. And one of my mates was a good saxophonist, he used to play regularly in a dance band in Geelong and usually hunted up a good dance somewhere, that sort of thing.

There must have been a lot of rationing, it must have been hard to get some things. Did you see much of the black market?

There was a trade, and

16:00 certainly in black market, the – we found out, when I was at Laverton after I left Sydney, in the early days the air force had its own messing officer, and the airmen payed a messing fee, which gave you a very good feed, you know, the messing officer could do his job. And that was cut out the army later, we had to all go onto what we called army rations, saved

16:30 the government nothing but it just made us have army rations, which was a bit stupid, but I did hear that someone they caught down there with butter, things like that, which would come into the camp, would go onto the black market, and that was pretty – I think it was fairly rife. I know when Dad –

17:00 and we had the business and doing contracts for the army which gave us a petrol allowance, and every month we'd get our allowance, the coupons would come, and there would be a cut back, not enough in it. And we'd have to go and see this officer in the Exhibition Building. And we never had to – we always got it adjusted by just talking

17:30 to him over the counter, but there was another two brothers that had a much bigger weigh and much bigger quality of petrol, and he always said that he had to go in and give the bloke in the office his payment to get his extra issue. Never got my extra until I went and had a private consultation with him. So I think that unfortunately it went on. But

18:00 what I did come across, not so much in the black market, but I suppose in a way, when I was coming

south from Darwin I went from my unit to the RAAF Darwin in transit. Now most of the people who've gone before are only there a day and they'd be away. I'd been told by my friend in the orderly room that I was what they called priority three, which was fairly well up, for up there, and two and one were – one must be the governor-general himself, or

18:30 MacArthur [General Douglas MacArthur] or somebody. But he said three's pretty good, you know, like the key personnel. So anyway, I couldn't do anything about it, I thought, something's going on, I'm stuck in Darwin there for about a week. And then the chap who was mustering, who'd been out at a place called Milingimbi, came in, going south, and he's only been up there for 12 months, I was there – been there nearly 18, and blow me down, he was gone the next morning, he was called out to report to the transport office,

19:00 he's gone, so I thought, "I'll find out about this." So I go over to the transport office. And a little chit of a clerk there, a bloke, I asked him what was going on, and he said, "Oh, I'll get the book, here you are, 68817, Campbell. Yes." "Oh no," he said, and I can see that it had been blurred a bit, priority four was written beside my name.

19:30 I said, "You've got down the wrong priorities." "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm priority three." He said, "How do you know you're priority three?" I said, "That's not the question, I know I'm priority three, and you've got me down here as a four." "Oh no," he said, "You're a priority four." I said, "Oh well, I'll see the ATO [Air Transport Officer]," the air transport officer. "Well that won't do you any good," you know, a snotty little person, and I said, "I still want to see him." So he went in and I could hear

20:00 him, the boy says, "Come in," you know, "What's the problem?" "Oh, there's an airman out here, sir, he's wondering, he thinks he's a priority three and he's only a priority four." He said, "Well, show us the book and bring him in." So we go into the book and then to change then, he said, "Oh, here we are, sir, yes, he's down as a priority four, he should be priority three, shouldn't

20:30 he, Sir?" I found out after the blighter was getting paid, if someone came in who was a four, I'm three and all the threes are going first, but if he knocks a couple of the threes back to make some fours, he can slip the other bloke in and put a tenner or whatever it might be in his pocket. Anyway, I was away the next morning, thank goodness, everything was fixed up. That's just an example of that sort of thing that was going

21:00 on. And I was on the receiving end of the same sort of thing, flew from Darwin to Townsville, interesting trip, down to Katherine, then across to Mt Isa, or Cloncurry actually we landed at and refuelled, picked up some stuff, up to Townsville. We're checking in, because when all the people in transit have to go through and

21:30 be recorded as they came in, on the way over I was sitting beside an commando, an army commando chap who was just coming down heading across to New Guinea, was travelling on his own and we were just talking and I wondered, when we were going through, he hung back. Normally you'd get yourself registered as quick as possible, and he waited until everyone else had gone through. And he came on, name and number and the chap, the clerk's writing it down, and he said to him, "What's your number mate?"

22:00 And obviously the clerk knew what was on, because he didn't query it, he just told him. He said, "What are the chances of getting out? How long are we likely to be here?" And he said, "Well there's the list ahead of you, you can see." He said, "If we're out in 24 hours there'll be a couple of tickets in the Golden Casket for you." I was out the next afternoon, whether that had anything to do with it or not, I don't know.

22:30 **The Golden Casket?**

That was the lottery in Queensland, they call it a Golden Casket, it's like Tattersalls, there'd be a couple of tickets in Tattersalls for you. Another little wartime thing, and I don't think it was peculiar to me. As I said, after 18 months, as I was saying before, no contact with fems [females] at all, and one came and sat down beside me at the pictures, I was accidentally in the WAAAFs' seats instead of the airmens',

23:00 the psychological upset to the equilibrium was quite pronounced for a while, you know? You wouldn't understand it unless you'd been in that situation. But we got in and a couple of the chaps and myself, I'd never seen them before the air force is like that, unless you're in a squadron, if you're a technical person, you move on your own, or two of you, whereas the squadron would move as a squadron, the army would move as a battalion or a regiment

23:30 or whatever it might be, very seldom on their own. But we travelled alone and you made friends on the trip. We – oh gee, we've got to get down the street and have a steak and eggs, you know, which was the big thing, in those days it was always steak and eggs. We got down into Townsville, and then it suddenly hit me, we're sitting in there and we're talking to the waitresses, and the noise, it seemed to be so loud, and the lights, after being in a tent in which there was no noise, and half our conversation

24:00 was by signs, you didn't talk. If you were putting on a cup of tea you just pointed at the mug and the chap would nod, and you'd pour him a cup of tea. But suddenly it just felt is was closing in my, "Got to get out of here, I can't breathe." And I said, "I think I want to get back," and the chap said, "God, I feel

the same, I've been dying to get here and I want to get out, it's just oppressive." And so I would assume that would be a normal reaction

24:30 by a lot of the fellows who came back. So we went back out to Garbutt airfield at Townsville, sat in the deck chairs until morning, slept, we didn't have bunks or anything, we just had to sleep in deck chairs, and in the afternoon, I got the call to go down, this plane was there, which I just talked about, and had a good trip down to Sydney, nine and a half hours in the air, very cold, and a

25:00 few little humorous incidents on the way of human behaviour. It started before we took off and this army fellow was sitting in the plane for a paratroop dropping, the big door was open, and they taped over any projections. Now that door was big enough to drive a jeep in, it's a pretty big opening, they used to drive them up a ramp and turn them in to the DC3. The seats we were sitting on were

25:30 drop down aluminium moulded seats along the side, they came right to the opening of the door. This old army bloke didn't know, he's rushing down, patient leave from New Guinea, he told us he'd just put his washing on the line and they whizzed up in the jeep and said, "Look, if you can get down to the strip there's a DAC [DC3 Douglas Dakota] going over to Townsville." He said, "I grabbed all my wet clothes, pull the shorts on, banged the rest into the kit bag and…" Yes, that's where he was. He got in, sat down on this seat here with the

26:00 opening right beside him, you see, protects him down the runway, turned around, run the motors up and, "When are they going to shut the doors?" And three Yanks are down the opposite side, "Ain't no doors on this cart buddy." "Oh," he said, "I'm out of here." He had enough sense, he jumped up and ran straight up the front, he wasn't going to sit beside the hole in the wall. But that's just a little aside. Following up on what I said earlier on the – giving the old

26:30 wingco, the wing commander a blanket, I say he was old, I suppose he was 45, but he was over normal combat age, a chemical man, he was a chemist I believe, and I found out later he had been very, very good to people that used to go out and take things out to where they had the poison gas, I believe, that's why he was there as a chemist, and he was very good, always made sure they were looked after in the kitchen, and got something

27:00 before they left. When we landed there was no tender or anything there. Well he got on the phone, gave some real serve at air force headquarters, "There was a plane load of airmen, returned from combat duty," he said, "And there's not even a tender there, they're jumped out on the tarmac." He might have done that in any case, but I felt it was a bit of a reward also for the courtesy that I

27:30 extended. Now the girl I was telling you about, she had the blanket with me, and she got that cold she couldn't keep up her prudish ideas any longer. We ran him to his hotel and he said to the driver, and he gave us all his telephone number where he was staying at the hotel, he said to the driver, "Now take the girl," he asked her where her address was, "Take her to her

28:00 home first, then take these airmen to wherever their destination is in Sydney." And then he turned to us and he said, "If you don't get taken to where you want to go, ring me on this number," which was really good. I went to Air Force House, they had accommodation there, and I met these chaps that I mentioned, Tommy and I, the air crew, getting home for his 19th

28:30 birthday, we spent the day having a look around Sydney, had a few drinks together, didn't get sloshed or anything, but I wanted to get home at that stage, because Dad was ill, and I could have stayed in Sydney, for quite a few days there, because I had air travel endorsement on my leave pass, and priority three, whilst it was all right up in the Territory, there was a lot of shiny people with priority threes in Sydney and

29:00 Melbourne buzzing backwards and forwards on the aircraft, and I could have been there a long time. But I got onto a troop train, that was an experience. All the seats taken out and three bunks on each side, I think they were three deep, might even have been four, and you just piled in there, slept, the train travelled all night through and got to Melbourne in the morning and back home. But

29:30 then I was attached to a unit in Melbourne which was fitting out radio trucks for wireless units. I was there for about a month looking at my summary in the history, I knew it wasn't very long, and I knew it was quite cold because it had come from Darwin and it was the middle of our winter, and they posted me to Sale, West Sale.

30:00 West Sale, BAGS [Bombing Air Gunnery School], Bombing Air Gunnery School, and once again that was interesting, although I saw my first snow there, I'd never seen it in my life, it was mighty cold, the snow on the hills in the background. But once again because I liked flying, not everybody did, a lot of people I realise now, as I

30:30 liked it, I was fortunate to go to 4RSU instead of a squadron because the ground staff in the squadron very seldom flew, but being in the servicing area and the testing of the planes, I was in that position. Now at the BAGS, the CO there, anybody who put equipment in, radio equipment, he'd rule that they had to go up in the air and test it, so two jobs I did there, one was a Wirraway, and that was an

31:00 interesting experience. I went over the A Flight, the way the squadron is set up out on the edge of the tarmac where the planes are parked, there's A flight, B flight and so on. There was only A flight

working, and you know, I think really A flight would have been the single engine stuff, the Wirraways and B flight would have been the Avro Ansons and heavier. But I went in and told the chap look, I've got to go up

31:30 at – then gave him the number of the plane. He looked up at the board, it's all on the blackboard, "Oh," he said, "You'll get a run for your money." He said, "Davey Wiseman's flying that this morning, he's pretty intrepid." He said, "What I mean is, he likes to get close." Now I didn't know anything about this, he assumed I did. I'd come down from – it's a Bombing Air Gunnery School, now what it was, was what they called a 'cine run', I'd

32:00 go and wait, Wiseman came along, we walked out to the Wirra, I had to borrow a parachute, in this case a sit on the parachute, you've seen the ones that dangle behind you, and when you get in the plane it's the cushion you sit on, and I had to borrow that off a mate I played footy with because it was the only one that was six foot three or something, big enough to fit on me, his flying suit and I put the parachute on. Anyway, Dave said, "You're game, I wouldn't go up in one of

32:30 these things in the cine run in the back seat for anything." Okay, we took off, two of us, to me that was wonderful, just the two planes took off, down the runway, one staggered a little bit, took off, they were just – loved doing it themselves because he'd been a Spitfire pilot in Britain and done, you know, about three tours and they used to bring them out then keep them,

33:00 run other up instead of keeping them there till they were shot down, they'd bring them back to training schools for experience, pass it on to the other pilots and so. And we took off, the snow was over the back at Maffra, it looked lovely. And after we'd climbed away for a while, suddenly the one over here just gives a wave and banked away just nicely, floated away you know, it's hard to believe you're up floating in the air. And I'm sitting there enjoying everything, strapped in, watching, we climbed on,

33:30 I saw an old Avvie, Avro Anson, sliding across below us, I don't know just how far, I didn't take attach any significance to that at all. And we got up to a fair height, I'd be guessing if I mentioned now, I did know because I had an altimeter and an air speed indicator in the back, it was fitted, it couldn't be flown in the steel controls. Anyway then Dave said to me, "Are you right in the back, all buckled

34:00 up?" I said, "Yep, I'm right." "Righto," he said. Next thing, boing, he's got the one wing tip and over and down, and I was thrown right off the seat and all that's holding me in is the seatbelt – he just – I forget what they call it now, but it's a wing tip, sort of a stall turn, he just threw it up like that and then flipped the nose down. Me being out here behind the point of balance, I'm thrown up in the air, and the planes going down, and all that's

34:30 holding me in is the seatbelts, the harness. And I watched the old taco go up, the old Wirraway climbs up 240, a bit over 240, which is pretty good hammering for them. Okay, next thing, I couldn't lift my head, I couldn't lift my hands, and I tried to duck because the tail of the Avro Anson looked like the patch where that light used to be, and he threw her like that,

35:00 and that threw me out of the seat again. The manoeuvre he'd done was dive – he was the attacking plane, the E gunners were in the camera guns in the turret, and they had to try and get hits on him with the camera, and he was showing them it was pretty hard to get him. So he dived in from behind, underneath, pulled it up sharp, that's what set me down into the seat, I don't know how many Gs [how much power] it would have pulled, not that many by modern standards, perhaps three, three and a half, and then came up underneath

35:30 like as if he was going to fire into the bottom of it, and then he pushed the stick forward so that it went over like that, your's truly once again was hanging onto the harness. Great stuff. After 20 minutes of it though, the old breakfast started to churn around, and hit the button and slide the canopy forward because infra dig, you know, I'd heard that if you're sick in the aircraft, you've got the duty, that's your chore, you've got to clean everything up yourself, apart from being

36:00 sick, you know, you're no airman, silly things. But I got over there and managed to get everything out. Didn't care tuppence, I remember sitting there looking through the hole in the floor, they had a flap where they used to drop drogues out. I felt that crook, if he said, "Jump out, bail out," I'd have sat there and gone in with it I think, I wouldn't have made much effort, I felt that crook. And that was all right, settled down after a while and

36:30 we tested the gear, and he came back and when he came down to low altitude to come in to land I got stomach cramps again I think. So that was my bit in the Wirra. The other time I put a radio in an Avro Anson, it's hard to believe, but they were flying and they didn't have radios in them. And they lost several out in Bass Strait, and when he came out they didn't have radios to signal if they were going in or give a May Day [distress signal – m'aidez]. An

37:00 order came through that all the sups that went over Bass Strait had to have radios in them. And they sent down some stuff, old Pommy [English] stuff, early '30s, TR9s I think they were called from memory, to power them up you took a wet cell out, two cell, one wet cell, clipped it in with parachute clips to power the damn thing up and you tuned it with a torch flame, they're called a pea light,

37:30 and you tuned it for maximum brilliance, and you had currents going up the stick instead of metres, it was that antiquated. Anyway, we took off, the bloke flying that, a chap named Jorgensen, I remember him because he played footy with me and I played in their team up there in the comp at Sale. And he

knew I was interested, she was fitted with duals, after I checked the radio and proved it wasn't much good, it was in the plane, so it's much better than nothing,

38:00 it didn't have much range or much power, but they had a radio in it, that was the thing. This time the parachute they had was a snap on one, you know, you fold it up and you put snaffles on them and the harness here, and you stow it in the plane when you're getting on board. I stowed it there and after we checked the radio Jorgy said to me, "Like to have a go at it?" "Oh yes, thanks." He said, "Well now, if you're flying left wing heavy and

38:30 all the Sperry [American instrument-making company] equipment is out," they tell people that today, they'd say, you wouldn't take off. But they did. And that meant there was no artificial bank and climb indicator or artificial horizon because that all works the sperry with the gyroscope patent. So that's just sitting on its neck and the taco for the Avro Anson for the two motors the rev counter was like a thermometer, vertical thermometer, it was on the left-hand side because the

39:00 pilot normally sat on the left-hand side. Now I knew, because I used to break my neck and read all about flying and what you do and you don't do, that if you lose your artificial horizons and that, to know whether you're flying level you watch your tacos, just like a car, if your revs go up, you're going downhill, if your revs fall off you're going uphill, if the revs are steady, well you're straight and level, that's one of the things if you're in cloud or anything. The other thing is you watch the horizon over

39:30 your – and you keep it the same distance above the snout of your plane, you're flying straight and level. Your's truly, very excited with this, thinking the first time he'd ever had the controls of a plane to himself. Flying left wing heavy, it was like you were driving a truck with a flat tyre on the front, it was lifting, you had to hold it. Anyway, Okay, that was all right, it was very exciting, except that I nearly stalled it because holding that up and excitement,

40:00 I'd eased it back but Jorgy, he didn't let it stall, thank goodness, he put her forward, and that was another interesting thing, except when we were coming back, he noticed as we landed, he said, "I didn't notice that you'd left your chute back on the side rack, which was the normal place for it. The boss here would have a fit." They lost a few, and they didn't get out, so the boss said, "Righto, we're going to check this," and he went up and timed it. Even

40:30 flying straight and level, in the time it took to get out of the co-pilot's seat, go back along the side, unclip the thing out of the stowage position, slip it on and get to the door, if you're only flying 5,000 feet you had Buckley's, you'd be into the deck, and he issued an order that everybody had to have their chute beside them when they were in the air. Anyway, we didn't have any trouble there.

All right, we'll pause there, the end of the tape.

Tape 9

00:35 Just continuing, Sale, I was at Sale when the bomb was dropped and the Japanese surrendered. But Sale was very much an air force town, as you'd appreciate, you had East Sale and West Sale, there were no big army camps or anything, it was essentially airmen round about, and they obviously behaved pretty well as far as the

01:00 towns people were concerned, because I never noticed any, you know, antagonism towards them, which could occur when a town's taken over by 3,000 or 4,000 itinerant airmen going through. But when the CO had prepared for the finish, and he had booked a train, I understand, that as soon

01:30 as the war ceased the railways were to send this train down to Sale, and we all got on board and came up to the city and of course naturally there was a lot of celebrations and that going on, and I made my way home because they were excited that things were over, because they were the real sufferers during the war with the parents especially unmarried single sons away, and we had something to do, all they had

02:00 to do was be at home and wonder what was happening and where you were. And we were posted, went back after – I think they gave us a week's leave, there was quite a few days leave, and then we went back, they kept the duty crew on just to maintain the station, and I along with most of the radio section, we were sent to – up to Tocumwal, 7AD,

02:30 a good move because it had all the facilities, it had been a very big camp at Tocumwal, and a lot of quarters, and it was away from capital cities, because the worry was that the servicemen with nothing to do and time on their hands might get into strife in the cities, so we went up to Toc [Tocumwal], mainly just

03:00 stripping anything – nothing had value after the war, equipment, equipment that was worth thousands of dollars was sold and disposed of for you know, pounds in those days, for a few pounds you can – but we got the stuff out of the planes and they started chopping them up to melt them down for frying pans and saucepans. But we were doing a bit of work there in the radio section, a couple of incidents. One was

03:30 the CO, the section officer of the radio section, hadn't had much experience, he hadn't been north himself, but he had the right idea I suppose, but he used to get onto the young LACs [Leading Aircraftsmen], AC1s [Aircraftsmen 1], and ride them a little bit, and he used to get them, one would have to make him his milo of a morning. They put a full block of laxettes [laxatives] into the into

04:00 the milo and waited to see how long it took for him to be running in and out of his office. And he hadn't learnt that when you were with servicemen and that, you've got to be a little circumspect before you get them antagonistic toward you. That was a humorous incident. I guess he suspected something, but he'd never know unless someone – anyway, listening to some music there, and one day something was on, some Mozart or someone, which I

04:30 rather liked, and we had girls in this section, and I've forgotten their name, Kath was one of them, and she said, "Oh, you like music?" She said, "Oh, get Keith to bring you over to one of our musicales." A musicale, that'd be nice, yes. So I came over on a Wednesday night or something, so Keith and I,

05:00 he knew where he was going, we get in, the WAAAFs' quarters were like a compound here, not like the seat up at Darwin, it was fenced off and WAAAFs only, sort of thing. I thought, oh well, we're invited over I suppose this is right, Keith's right. And it was in reverse again, the girls were all in dormitories like we were, no curtains on the windows, they go into their showers just like we were, as you're walking through, all these girls walking around, no

05:30 clothes on, in the huts, whistling out and, "Hang on, I won't be long," sort of thing, looking ahead. We got over there, and of course Kath knew what she was doing, she said, "Oh, we're not having the musicale tonight, but you can have some supper with us now you're here," so we had a pleasant evening and then made my way back, that was another little side, lighter side. The serious side was

06:00 went to the pictures there one night in Toc, and came home and struck one of the nastiest situations I'd struck, you could tell, the air was thick and everybody was serious. In the airmen's quarters at Tocumwal they'd built the accommodation extending on from the town itself, and from the air, they were built like suburban houses, tiled houses, weatherboard, but inside there were no

06:30 partitions, just the framework holding the roof up. And the people were sitting around you see, and they're all in clusters and muttering and going on, and one of my mates who'd been with me at Sale, Ken de Wier, Torchy, red-headed naturally, he came over and he said, "Clive's dead." I said, "What?" Clive was a man – Clive Monk, he was also in our section, and

07:00 he was married, had three children, who were living in Tocumwal, he had living out, and he used to go home every night to the house in Tocumwal and meet them. And it appeared that in Tocumwal the main gate, to go out the main gate and then back on foot involved you in about a half a mile walk. There was just a plain wire fence between the houses and our houses in the street. And I suppose every night there'd be anything up to 500 or

07:30 600 airmen would just slip through the wire and they were officially off duty, but they weren't going through the guard gate. And it appears that someone put a guard at the point where the fellows went through the fence, and he was equipped initially with live ammunition. And he challenged Clive, who was a veteran, he was on the Australia when it was sunk, he was in the navy before he came into us, he was

08:00 cashiered out of the navy because of shell shock, nerves, but he recovered sufficiently to join the ground staff in the air force, and because he was in radio in the navy, he came straight into – and this young 18 year old, who'd, first time he'd ever had a rifle, and the authority, challenged him to stop, and he told him what he could do and just walked on. It appears the young fellow put two bullets through him, and his wife and children, they were just up the street, coming

08:30 down, it was a very, very nasty situation. The guard wouldn't have lasted five minutes if the gang and crew had caught him, he'd have been summarily executed. But we found out afterwards that the CO got his driver to grab the guard in the jeep, told him to get going, he said – the scuttlebutt came

09:00 back, "Don't want to know where you're going, but you've got a full tank of petrol, just keep driving away from this area, and when you run out of petrol fill it up and go again." He said, "I don't want to hear from you or anything, for days, just keep away from here." He knew what had happened and what would happen, because practically everybody there had been through hostilities and been through killing, and to have this happen to one of the fellows like that, they just couldn't believe it, you know? War over, not protecting anything.

09:30 I always reckoned that the CO, or whoever was responsible for issuing the order to giving him a rifle, with live ammunition, in that position they should have been court-marshalled, but there was nothing to protect, he was just checking leave passes. Now that's not – you don't shoot someone for that. This was a kid. Guards unfortunately were Division 5, you started at Division 1, we were Division 1, technical, senior technical people and air crew, and you came down – it was interesting,

10:00 clerks were Division 3, and I found in the Public Service afterwards, clerks were above us technicians in rank, you know? But when it was counting and the chips were down, the ones that had the skills to do that sort of thing, were rated above the clerks, we were Division 1. They were Division 3, guards were Division 5, didn't have enough intelligence or background education, in other words intelligence,

depending upon what their background was, but generally

10:30 speaking they were a little bit slow, somewhere along the track, to be in Division 5, they were general hands digging latrines or cleaning up around the place. Everybody – somebody's got to do it, so that's not knocking them, but they wouldn't have the same sense of proportion that somebody else might have. And I could understand, you've got a dangerous situation, you get a lad just turned 18, and he hasn't got the breadth of vision or understanding, and he's

11:00 suddenly got a loaded rifle and he thinks he's got the authority to shoot people with it.

Were there some people were looking for him, some of your mates? They wanted to get him?

Oh yes, they wanted him, yes, he'd have been hung, if they didn't shoot him, which happened, you know, that did happen. Not – I never saw it happen personally, but I know for sure it did.

What's that, what's that?

Our own people were executed by their own men if they did the wrong thing.

11:30 A friend I know very well, and I know this for a fact, he was in Caulfield Racecourse, and they caught a thief, they had to run army division, and they had it a bit harder in hand-to-hand combat, the last thing you wanted was a thief in amongst you, because you can't – you've got no protection, you're stuff's in your bunk, it's in your locker, beside your bed. You've got to trust everybody. And

12:00 they caught this bloke and then they told me, they chased him into the stand I believe at Caulfield and said, "Well, you please yourself, you jump or we'll throw you, you're gone." And he finished up on the ground, whether he jumped or they pushed him, I don't – Val didn't know, but he said, it was – he was sort of upset about it because he'd just joined, and he went out and that's the first thing he ran into, this great commotion. But the service was funny that way, if you – I had a

12:30 chap that complained that he had some towels, his towels stolen, you know, he had to keep it, hang onto it with your legs while you're shaving and washing, you put it down, go in to pick it up it might be gone. As we said before, the civilian people were looking for anything like that, they couldn't get them. And he complained about his towel being nicked and all he got, the provo said to him, "But you're in a camp with 1,000 other blokes and they've all got two towels, if you can't get one for yourself you're not very

13:00 suitable for the services." So that was it.

Was there a lot of corruption going on? You know, like people flogging army stock and …

Not so much, I would say. I heard of one instance where in fact a chap wanted to get me involved in it, but I was too astute for that. It was petrol, they had big petrol dumps and petrol of course was strictly rationed, and I believe –

13:30 when he found out I had a car, I'd come down from up north and I bought a car to get around in, and I had a bit of petrol to put in it because Dad was getting rations from his work, so I could get a gallon or two, didn't need much. But we were in the city, in the Port Phillip Club Motel and bumped into him, and he said, "Oh look, we can do this, that and the other," and I said, "No, I haven't got the petrol for that." He was a bit of wild lad, I knew that, so I didn't want to get involved with it.

14:00 And he said, "Oh, I can fix that, I know mates out guarding a petrol dump at Werribee," he said, "We can get all the petrol we want, we can go out there," and that was – that was first hand. The guards on the dump, if they were in it, they could whip the top off a 44-gallon drum and take a few four gallons drums out, nobody would ever know. No-one checks the drums. So I'd say that was

14:30 certainly on the go.

Do you think it happened often?

Not a lot or it would have been caught. But it would be a regular amount. There's always someone round, even after I was out, it might have been while I was home on leave without pay, a property was down a lane near Parkes St Alban's area, and

15:00 there was only one other property on that lane, we were at the end of this road down there, and regularly a semi-trailer loaded with 44-gallon drums of petrol from the depots down at Williamtown used to come down that lane about a quarter of a mile down, pull up, and this other truck would come in with drums on it, down there, and all of a sudden everybody went up to check what was going on. But it was pretty obvious, they were taking a bit of petrol out of all the

15:30 other drums, which would go on the black market, because it still coupon jobs for some time after the war. We found out, we had a service station down in the Strzeleckis, my brother had, and it was always a problem to make sure you had the right coupons for the operators, like the truckies who were using, in those days, more petrol trucks than diesel, and you had to make sure you got your coupons.

16:00 And make sure you got paid for it too. So that was in Tocumwal, it was quite a big, a very big camp, it was equipped for Super Fortresses, very big runways and that sort of thing. But there wasn't much of interest as I said, after a few weeks and these things that happened I thought, no good hanging around

here, I put in for leave without pay, which

16:30 they encouraged, if you're going to go back to work or something like that. So I did that and then got my discharge.

Were you – yes, I mean in a strange way the war is also – it's a mixed bag of things.

Oh yes.

Even though people are getting killed, it's also a learning experience…

Oh, very much…

Tragic-comedy type situation.

There's a lot of – unfortunately a lot of pluses, and as my brother and I used to say,

17:00 showed up the weakness of the whole of our education system, and when we were recruited to do this technical work, they had to train us for the best part of 12 months to a level that they should have trained us when we were at school. They teach you lots of nonsense things, but these are everyday things. Right up until fairly recently it was the same, I'd have students come in when I was lecturing at the Telecom Technicians' School, and they wouldn't know anything about,

17:30 you know, cells and batteries, basic electricity, which is what people have been living with for 100 years. It should be part of schooling, from grade three or four. They should know what the voltage ratings are, and what they do and all that. They talk about other useless things, and they could just as easily incorporate basic physics and things into it. But that was just one of the highlights, and the other thing was it was an opportunity to meet people,

18:00 which you'd never have previously, the average person wouldn't, and as I said, they were a mixed group of people, just like an ordinary community, you'd find quite different than I'd say the permanent service would be, and I have not had experience with the permanent service, but it'd be a different situation, I'm sure.

How did the war

18:30 **impact on you, in negative and positive terms?**

I would think I'd have to say it may have even been from broadening my outlook, and enhancing my life from then on, once it was over, there would have been more pluses than negatives, you made friends. Whilst I didn't get out of Australia, I saw a lot of Australia

19:00 and – which was quite good, and education-wise it stimulated me to do a bit more study and learn a bit more, which then set me up of course then for a career with Telecom, PMG, as a telephone technician originally, but qualified, passed the seniors' test in telegraph equipment, radio

19:30 and telephones. And what used they call it? Research. So that I was qualified in all those fields, most of the people working in the telephone field weren't, they'd just do telephone or radio or research, or whatever it might be. Also gave me the interest to go ahead and do a few engineering subjects, which I did with Telecom. That was interesting too, it's one of those things,

20:00 they had what they called an open engineers' exam and you could qualify by doing this, and go down and study. You didn't go to the university, you went to lectures and studied in your own time. I knocked off two subjects, you had to get five subjects, you could originally take five years, but I said, "Well, if I knock two off this year," and they told us that it was 1960 I think, they said, "If you've got subjects at the end of '60,

20:30 you'll be given," you know, able to do the others, but no-one will be allowed to start again, they were going to cut it out because they had objections from the engineers, old shop boys, they said these people are getting in through the back door, they're not all university people, and this is not right, so stop the open exam. Not that we weren't qualified or competent, but we weren't part of the old school. And they

21:00 brought down then, just the month that we were sitting for the exam in June, they said, "There's be a supplementary at the end of the year, November, and that'll be it." So we had to get five subjects in one year instead of two. One year, I knocked off with two, and nearly got my natural science, I missed by something like four marks, five marks, out of 200. But I didn't go

21:30 ahead with it, the divisional engineer in charge of personal training, he wanted me to go on down as a cadet engineer. But in those days if you went in as a cadet engineer you were paid as a cadet engineer, but due to something which happened, one of my friends was involved with who'd done the open, and they changed that later, he brought it to the attention of people, quite inadvertently, that he was getting less money as an engineer

22:00 in charge of the coax [coaxial] cable going to Sydney, than the senior technicians who were working under him, and they said, "Oh, that can't be true." He didn't know at the time that they were senior public servants in Canberra and they lived in Yass. And the wife of one of them owned the hotel they

were stopping in. And he said the next time at dinner time Bill said, “I looked that up, that’s right. You’ve got to do something about that, that’s just – that’s not right, you can’t do that.” So they altered it. Later on, if I’d have wanted to go on, I’d have gone

22:30 on to university and finished the course on the salary that I was on in the training school, instead of dropping back to a cadet salary. Sometimes I think perhaps I’d liked to have, but I don’t think I missed out on anything, I made my career with Telecom, had a short burst on my own in the timber industry which was interesting I had the training, thanks to the

23:00 air force work, and walked straight in, and I haven’t regretted that, gave a better opportunity for the family, Ballarat’s an excellent town for education, so once I came here to the training school, I never – although I went back and worked in the television field, I kept my house here in Ballarat, and the family stayed here, they were able to go on through their secondary training here and that, and now they have the university. And thanks to

23:30 all that, my daughter’s a part-time lecturer out at the university. So certainly the war helped me to adjust to that. I would have done all right out in the other, but I think it was a broader scope and enhanced lifestyle as a result.

Did you tell your children about the war?

Not a great deal. I had a funny attitude,

24:00 I never picked up my service medals until about eight years ago. All I had was my returned from active service medal, which was given to me, joined the RSL with the returned from active service, I could join the RSL. Didn’t worry about the others because I wasn’t all that enthused about, was as such,

24:30 whilst I felt it had to be, I think you’ve got to defend yourself, some people say, “What did it achieve? It was all for nothing.” Well, that all depends, what do you mean nothing? Certainly I don’t think it would have been a good thing for the human race if Nazism had taken control of the world, they’d have only lasted like all other despotic regimes, but they’d have done one heck of a lot of damage while they set the

25:00 world back generations. As it was they set the world back a long way in many respects, with their antagonism and hatred of Jewish things, and so much learning had come from Jewish backgrounds, and they’re burning all their text books and that, well imagine if they’d done that throughout the world, and Einstein and all that sort of stuff was thrown out, you’re going back to the dark ages, and start again. But fortunately it didn’t happen,

25:30 it was closer than a lot of people think.

How did you react to the wars after World War 11? Vietnam and Korea?

Well Korea we knew would be on, I think that was pretty evident. I think that was handled the right – only way it could be. Rightly or wrongly, the Communists still wanted to take over, they wanted Japan, and whilst at the

26:00 time we were very critical of the way in which the Americans didn’t enforce surrender by the Japanese, they never did actually surrender, it was an agreement, the hostilities and they left the Akihito sitting up there and Tojo [Hedeki Tojo] and his white horse, which normally they should have been tried as war criminals, they were responsible for millions of deaths.

Tojo was executed?

Yes, the old Akihito, you know, the emperor, and really that was all left

26:30 for – to stop Communism so that the Japanese weren’t left in a vacuum without a recognised, accepted figurehead, I believe. And as it’s turned out, no-one was sure, because you didn’t know what Communism was, some people thought it was wonderful, the Red Dean of Canterbury used to write books on it, but we didn’t know that 30 million Russians had been

27:00 slaughtered by Stalin because he didn’t like the look of them. We didn’t know that he had Trotsky murdered in Mexico or somewhere because he had different ideas, although he was a bad Communist and he was a rival, it wasn’t the nicest of regimes, I’d sooner have your leader lose his job by an election than have somebody shoot him, especially if I support one or the other.

So what did you think of Communism? I mean at the time in…?

Well,

27:30 the theory of course is it’s like Socialism, it’s good. The weakness is, it’s got to be put into effect by people, and people aren’t…it’s just as simple as that.

Do you like Capitalism? Over the years, I mean how do you look at it?

Yes, I think it’s the best of a bad system. How you can improve it?

28:00 I think it will only go its normal way, it’ll get bad, over-powerful in some hands, to the extent where

you've got to revert, and nothing in nature stays still, it's all oscillating, there's no doubt in my mind about that. And it can be really bad, just as bad as Communism. I don't know what the answer is to prevent

28:30 that. Any 'ism' that is fanatical is dangerous, that's a problem.

Do you think Australia's social fabric has become too utilitarian in that regard? Too capitalistic?

At this stage I wouldn't say so, but I'm concerned at the way it's moving. Some things which I can't agree with, and

29:00 I noticed this the other day when I was talking to the optometrist, he drives up from Melbourne every day on the freeway, he said, "I haven't paid a toll in Melbourne yet, I live in Buderick and I come along Bell Street and come out round the ring road that way, it might be funny, but I don't think I should pay tolls." I said, "I agree with you, I never have believed in tolls on bridges or anything else." He said, "It's the only way we can get the money."

29:30 That's rubbish, if they want to build a stadium for the Olympic Games they can find hundreds of millions of dollars just like that, so why can't they do the same if there's a bridge wanted across the Yarra? People wouldn't mind if they had to pay a tax, a levy, but only until they get to $500 million or whatever is needed. They'll pay it, as Kennett proved that when he came in to save Victoria from the mess, it was in at the end of

30:00 Kane and Kirner. We were down the tube unbelievably, I never ever believed that they could wreck the State Savings Bank of Victoria, they did it in about four years, left if $3 or $4 billion in debt, and if they hadn't had a sympathetic government in Canberra to authorise the Commonwealth Bank to buy the State Savings Bank, can you imagine what would have happened to the bank and people who had accounts at the State Savings Bank? They'd have lost it. None of the other

30:30 banks wanted it, the debt level was too high. But as it's turned out, the Commonwealth took over the State Savings Bank and moved the obligations for the depositors. So that was a mess. But what Kennett did, and I was a bit angry with it at the time, he put the levy, you mightn't have been aware of it, a levy on every ratepayer, $100. I thought, well that's very unfair, you know, it should be pro rata on value of the property or

31:00 something, but in reality I thought it's the quickest way you can have a definite pick up, every landowner pays rates every year, he's already got bills and accounts and he's listed in the state, you don't have to make up a new list, or you don't have to put a whole heap of clerks on to work out who pays what. No, $100, and he got rid of that debt. A similar type of thing – it was accepted, people, you know, I grizzled, and people grizzled,

31:30 but okay, it was doing a job. After this they did the same, if they needed a big project done, they said, "Righto, this is for this project." But the trouble is, and they all seemed to do the same thing, doesn't matter, Labor or Liberal…

Can I ask you some questions regarding Australia's involvement in Vietnam? Were you supportive of that?

Well, they had to do something but I was not supportive of the compulsory service,

32:00 that was the biggest mistake Menzies made, it was absolutely totally unnecessary. We went through two world wars, minor skirmishes, like the Boer War and Korea, and never had compulsory service, they had volunteers and more people volunteered. And if they'd have called for volunteers for Vietnam, they'd have had all they wanted. It's a little known fact that over 90 per cent of everybody that served in Vietnam did volunteer, they were

32:30 circularised at the camps up in New South Wales, the one camp, and they wanted another, say, 500 people for Vietnam, anybody wants to volunteer, they'd leave their name in the orderly room, in the adjutant's office. And overall, 90 per cent of people went as volunteers. But the thing was there that it was compulsory, if they didn't volunteer, and that was totally unnecessary, I'm not in favour of that. And I still don't say it was a waste of

33:00 time, because if the Communist regimes that were there, there's no doubt that I would say the whole of the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia would have been Communist. Now whether they'd have been as bad as Communists as they are in Russia, you don't know, but the potential was for them to be as ruthless.

What about Iraq?

That's a long story, isn't

33:30 it?

Yes.

Do you think Australia should be involved there?

I don't see any reason why not, having your troops on the ground there, you know, they gave logistic

support. I see no reason why not, as long as it's volunteers, and it's in our interests. There's a grave danger from – as I said before, we went through a period of fanatical

34:00 Christianity, which went around the world, murdering nations right, left and centre at the point of a sword if they didn't convert to Christianity, and unfortunately we've got the fanatical Muslim group now, believes it's their right to do the same thing, that they're doing a good thing for mankind, to do that. And we've gone through that, to a certain extent largely

34:30 got rid of most opposition to different religions, obviously there'll be resentment here and resentment there in small pockets, but policies and that are not – but that's not going to protect you from a fanatical group when it arises. As I said to a young lad who was in my group, lecturing, I was talking to, lecturing to, and in the break, he was a pacifist, his people were pacifists, he said, "If we didn't have arms, we'd have no worries, the armies cause wars, nobody

35:00 would attack, you know?" I said, "It would be nice to thing that, but I've seen films of thousands of people in Europe who never lifted their hand because the oppressors didn't stop them, pushing them with bulldozers into a pit that they made them dig, and they just fell into the piles of burning bodies, it doesn't work out that way, unfortunately you've got to be strong enough, I believe, to protect it." And rightly or wrongly

35:30 in Iraq, I believe that – and I think most strategist people would say the same, they're trying to put a wedge between Asian Muslims and Middle East Muslims north of Africa. As it stood before any intervention in Iraq, you had a radical dictator who wasn't a Muslim – he was Muslim but not a true Muslim

36:00 in any shape or form, he was a tribal man, and then when he wasn't in his tribe obviously he got pretty short shift, and he was – which has been the case there I suppose since the time of Moses. But the strongest tribe runs the desert. But you had from up in Asia right down to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, or Persia, forget

36:30 Iran and Iraq, it's really Arabia, Persia right through to the Mediterranean, and then across the top of North Africa with Gadaffi, and once again a very fanatical, not genuine Muslim because he persecutes anybody who doesn't see it his way or doesn't see the belief as he sees it, which is not really the right way. So that was a real problem,

37:00 I believe. But something I won't have to worry about. I'm selfish enough. I wouldn't think. But you know, the world is so small you cannot let something happen anywhere in it if you are interested, you can't say, "Oh, that's nothing to do with us." It is. So throw the people into the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, it'll ripple the top of the Atlantic by the time it finishes, and

37:30 there's a lot of trouble's got to be there, I don't know how they're going to level it out.

Now we've only got a few minutes left, so I'd like to ask you if you'd like to tell us something you haven't told anyone else, for the record, and as a last gesture of the interview?

I don't think so. There's one

38:00 with a lot of pathos in it, just quickly. I joined 12 months after my brother, he was training E crew, when I joined up he was at Nils, in the last phase of his training, I go into 1AD in – not 1AD but 1PD [Panzer Division] in Pascoe Vale, and I'm given duties, and one of the duties was to tidy up the hut with officers in it. And the second bed I go to make, I see a kit bag with 4100

38:30 36 on it, and that's my brother's number. And I'm making his flaming bed for him. Now, he spotted me marching with the group, he went to the orderly room, of course we hadn't seen each other for 12 months, and he was there to go overseas, and they said, "Oh, they're going to Adelaide that group," so he knew where the Adelaide Express left from, platform five at Spencer Street, he rushed up there, waiting, waiting,

39:00 waiting on the platform, he said to the conductor, or the ticket checker, "Are airmen going on this train to Adelaide?" "Oh," he said, "They're going on the 2 Division round at platform," whatever it was. So he raced down there to see the tail end of our train pulling out, and we never saw each other. Once again, if you sort of worked into a drama, you know, families at war or something, that's

39:30 stretching it a bit, you know, but that's just how it happened. Fortunately he got through and got back, next time we saw him was at the Melbourne Cricket Ground at the end of the war, like a mob of sheep looking for their ewes, all the parents running around trying to find their sons and daughters that had just come back from overseas, and they were all turned loose onto the centre of the Melbourne Cricket Ground, making suitable signals and signs to recognise ones they hadn't seen for perhaps four years, and so on.

It must have been an amazing

40:00 **sight.**

Oh, very much so. And as I said, the real heroes that supported the war were the parents, wives, and those that kept things going and put up with it. We were doing things, as you can gather, we were

having our fun, like people will, and young people are not frightened of danger, that's not bravado or anything, you just don't worry about it. And I think, different for the air crew people,

40:30 who were over Europe and the death rate was so high, I think that must have been a real test of their nerves when they went out and they knew every time they went out, you know, about a quarter of them wouldn't come back. It takes a lot of guts or stupidity or something to climb back into the tail plane of a damned plane and go over 30,000 feet waiting to get shot out of the sky, you know? And one of our boys was saying they were some of the worst moments, when he was at Lancasters, he said, "One of the worst moments was one of

41:00 their planes was hit and blew up, and one of the boys fell out of it and hit the front of the airplane, and his entrails and what was left of him was all over the canopy, you know? They just had to try and get that off to see through it to – those were the sort of things thank God I didn't get involved in. But you still suffered for them though. And as I got older, in my brother's case, and I've never said this, this old DC3 flying around with nostalgic

41:30 flights, and I was really pleased because he put 1,300 hours in in DC3s, thought he'd like to go up, and he said, "Not really," he said, "I made a lot of landings," and you look back on them, and you always wondered if the next one – so he said, "I don't think I'll tempt fate.

INTERVIEW ENDS