

Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Forbes (Tracker) - Transcript of interview

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**Some parts of this interview
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are
noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

- 01:17 Very briefly, I was born in the suburb of Sydney called Chatswood. I was born under less than two kilos [kilograms] in weight.
- 01:30 I was not expected to live. Fortunately my mother nursed me around. I went to Chatswood school and then I went to North Sydney Chatswood High School. I had a very good childhood, a happy childhood. In those days, where we lived, we were a mile and a half to two miles away from Chatswood station. It was all bush. We had a shack up in the bush, which I have a photo of there and I just had a very
- 02:00 good life. Plus the fact, in those days, when the Depression... I remember the Depression quite strongly, but everyone was in the same boat. My mother would never turn anyone away. If there was a knock on the door and if someone said, "Why are you giving these people threepence? They'll only go and buy wine or something." Mum said, "Well, for every ten people that I give to, one of them may be genuine." My mother had a very open heart that way.
- 02:30 But we did have the Depression the same as everyone else. The odd thing, when you consider today, we never ever locked any door in our house, either when we went out. It was always open or unlocked. So that starts the early stages. I built model aeroplanes like every other kid at that stage
- 03:00 and when the war broke out, I was very anxious to join up. By that time I had a cadetship as a mechanical draftsman with Waugh and Josephson Proprietary Limited at St Peters and it was a protected industry. Since I turned 18 I wanted to join up and they said, "Negative. You can not," because we were doing munitions work etcetera. That's the only time I had enough guts to stand up to,
- 03:30 very strongly. I said, "All right, I'm going to sit on my backside and do nothing unless you sign my certificate or release." Which they did. So at 18 I joined up and then... It sounds incredible. Under the Empire Air Training Scheme, you had to wait nearly eight months on the reserve before you were called up. In that time I went and studied Morse code and things like that. Then I joined the air force,
- 04:00 in 1942. A great day, which I'll always remember. Double-decker buses to Bradfield Park, another suburb of Sydney and we arrived there for lunch. And the lunch was a roast dinner, followed by tinned peaches and ice-cream. Tinned peaches to me, was one of the rarest delicacies because we never ever had tinned food, because during the Depression one could never afford it, so when I had it, I thought "God."
- 04:30 Then I got paid six and six [six shillings and six pence] a day for that. That was 65 cents a day. I thought, 'If this is war, it's bloody good'. After a lot of rigid training, I went to what they called the Category Selection Board and unbeknown to me, I was classified medically fit for both pilot-navigator or what they called wireless operator-air gunner. In those days, they didn't have navigators. They called them observers, which, I'll show you my log book, I had to do three separate courses.
- 05:00 And later on when I did astro [astronomy], I became an astro-navigator to go on to flying boats. When I went before the Category Selection Board, they said, "Would you like to be a navigator?" They looked at my father who was a navigator. He was an officer on the Zambezi. I foolishly said, "Yes," because I was scared stiff I may be a wireless operator. I found Morse the most terrible thing to learn. I was then

posted to Number 2

- 05:30 Embarkation Depot, which involved going to Canada to do my training. I was on leave, best man at my brother's wedding and I was on the way back to Bradfield Park. Whether I was unconscious, I didn't know anything till the next day and I'm in hospital. I had pneumonia and it those days, pneumonia was a lot more serious than today, resulting that I missed the boat and I did all my, still under the Empire Air Training Scheme, training, in Australia.
- 06:00 After training I was in three different squadrons. I did an operation tour in 71 Squadron, which was purely anti-sub [submarine] and convoy work. Later on I did a full tour on Catalina flying boats and when I finished that, I finished up on Dakotas, DC3s. I did enjoy it to a degree. I was a bit of rebel unfortunately and I did put up quite a number of,
- 06:30 can I call them, 'blacks'? I remember calling the adjutant, 'Bubbleguts' once, because he had a big gut and annoyed me over a certain matter, which I won't bore you with. But I do have a letter from my acting CO [Commanding Officer] etcetera, which I only found the other day, thanking me for all the work I did and saying that he was wishing to apologise for his hardness. He was an ex school, head master and
- 07:00 Fortunately, or unfortunately, I don't know what, when I was in 38 Squadron they made an offer that I can stay in the air force and I said, "No. Could I get my training, if I came out later, under the Rehabilitation Training Scheme," and the chappie said he didn't think so. I wanted to have some form of
- 07:30 certificate behind me so I was discharged in 1946 and I did training as a mechanical draftsman. I finished my training in that. I also did dairy technology. I also became a member of the Institute, an associate member, of the Institute of Refrigeration Engineers. Going back, bear in mind this was '46, roughly 1959,
- 08:00 I went on board the [HMAS] Melbourne, the air craft carrier, for a christening. I don't know you're aware, they engrave the baby's name on the bell of the... the chappie I knew, McFinish, was the navigator of the Melbourne. Whilst there I met up with some ex chappies that I knew during the war. They said, "Why don't you go back flying?" I said, "Too bloody old." They said, "Give it a crack." So I applied to the Department of Civil Aviation, could I get a license. They said,
- 08:30 all my post war, even though I had 1400-odd operational hours up then, were null and void because it was too long ago since I'd done any flying. So I then went to a correspondence school which I call the 'College of Knowledge', and I did all the subjects relating to navigation. I had to have them all within 12 months, which I fortunately passed. I approached Qantas [Airlines] to see if I could get a job. Under the Department of
- 09:00 Civil Aviation I still had to have these flying hours because I was starting from scratch and they said, "Yes," providing you become what they call a flight service officer, which I went to Darwin for a couple of years. I did that, I was on 24 hours duty. When I say 24 hours duty, I was at the air traffic control for 24 hours, but I got to take naps in between aircraft coming in. The next 24 hours, I'd pick up the next air craft bound for Sydney and
- 09:30 act as a navigator on it to get the training, to get my hours up. Ultimately I did get the hours up and in 1960 I became a Qantas navigator, which I enjoyed thoroughly. I met up with, a few humorous things, if you wish I could tell you all the things we got up to because in those days nearly everyone I was flying with, even though it was such a long time after the war, the senior captains were ex air force types and we were all
- 10:00 still living, I think, in that sort of era. I always remember, we called one chap who I did fly with during the war, I won't mention his name because it would be unfair, but he was very tight fisted. He would never shout anything, so we called him 'Captain Crime', because crime didn't pay. Another chappie I remember, we used to call him 'Captain Harpic', because he was nutty as a fruitcake, because he was 'clean' round the bend [Harpic is a brand of toilet disinfectant]. All these sort of things and the mischief
- 10:30 we got up to which would never be tolerated today, but again, we also had the loyalty of the company which I have various letters from, thanking me and the crew. We broke various regulations to maintain air craft on schedule. I've been up to 36 hours non-stop duty. In those days it was a form of loyalty. When I say duty, I wasn't in the air for 36 hours, but I wasn't asleep for 36 hours.
- 11:00 Then 'unfortunately', as Bev said, I was posted to Tahiti, which we enjoyed thoroughly. It was a paradise I suppose. I had one trip a week which was between Tahiti and Acapulco. I used to spend half the time on Acapulco and half the time on Tahiti. I was putting off - I was getting these violent headaches, which very few people have ever heard off. They're called 'cluster headaches'. It leaves a migraine for dead.
- 11:30 I tried putting it off. I found that if it happened in the air, I put the oxygen on full and breath it and sort of get around it, but I was Mexico City and it's six and a half thousand feet, lack of oxygen and I developed one of the headaches and I had to go to the doctor and from there on, through Qantas etc, and the Department of Civil Aviation, they did
- 12:00 innumerable tests, because I didn't want to get out of Qantas and they said, "You'll fail to renew your license because you'll fail your medical." So I then got out, but I got part of my superannuation paid, but

I didn't have a great deal by today's standards. I won't bore you, but I had lots of other complications, but Veteran Affairs [Department of Veterans' Affairs] have all my

12:30 health. I couldn't get a job anywhere. I went to the Commonwealth Employment Agency and they refused to put me on the list unless I'd go on the dole and I know this sounds stupid, but my parents had always brought me up, you never got handouts if you could help it. It sounds stupid by today's standards. I refused to go on the dole, resulting they wouldn't even put me on their employment list. So I started various things. I played the share market.

13:00 quite successfully. I still play the share market, but only as a recreation today. I only use a little bit of money that I have that I can spare to do it and it's amazing, when you don't try, you always win. We opened a book shop and arts and crafts. We finished that, I went on a trawler with my son, deep sea prawn trawler. It didn't

13:30 work out because father and son don't hit it off too well. He had his captain's certificate as well and we were arguing the toss so I gave it away. We're still the best of mates. I then started a security business. When I say that, purely wiring up various places for burglar alarms which I knew very little about, but I got away with it. We tried various things and we've lived quite comfortably ever since.

14:00 **You mentioned Chatswood when you grew up was bushland. Can you describe that community?**

We were at the very end of Chatswood which today is called Castle Cove.

14:30 One of our neighbours was a Doctor Willis, curiously enough was the chief medical officer for, it was called the Repatriation Commission in those days and they lived in a castle. There's a sandstone castle on a point called Sugarloaf Point. I don't know what's happened to it, but it was a fair dinkum [real] castle. One of his, may have been his grandfather built it. He was a member of the original Parliament and

15:00 we used to... they had a very big dam which we used to swim in. Miss Willis used to have kittens, chasing her off. They had no family because one of, his brother was a mental case and in those days they had a padded cell and they kept him always ... There was always this, it sounds stupid, this shame that you had a mental case, so they'd never marry because they felt they would pass that gene on to the...

15:30 May have been during birth that this all happened to him, I don't know. The other people, we were down near where there was a lot of tanneries which have all gone today. Oddly enough, that area, which was before I was born, I think it was called the bubonic plague that came after the First World War, which millions and millions of people died. No one in this little valley, they called it

16:00 Frog's Hollow, ever got that flu and they put it down to the tanneries. That the tanning of the bark must have had some antiseptic quality. My mother, during the Depression, if any child brought Mum a sugar bag, because all the sugar came in bags in those days, Mum would make them a cowboy outfit. I think it required two sugar bags. She used to... So we had a lot of cowboys

16:30 with sugar bags. The baggy pants and the flayed out trousers etc. My mother was very good. My father unfortunately... I've brought the papers here. This may sound incredible and I hate saying these things because it sounds like I'm the biggest bull-artist [liar] that God ever put breath into. But Dad was an officer on board the Zambezi

17:00 at Nauru Island. It was a British ship with Alaskan crews, all the deck officers were English and they were under charter to the German Phosphate Company, because Nauru was owned by Germany prior to the First World War. Dad's ship, I've got all the records there, I've got it, oddly enough, from Ballina, from the museum down here. They were told by the Germans that they had to go to

17:30 Rabaul and they offloaded all these cases. Unbeknown to the ship's crew, they didn't know war had broken out because there was no radio that came to tell them, and it was radio equipment that they were taking to Rabaul. This was one day after the war was declared. They were intercepted by one of the Australian ships, which were all under the Royal Navy in those days, and taken prize of war, because when they boarded it they found all this, the Germans who knew about the war, and they also found all this radio

18:00 equipment. The trial lasted about 12 months I believe. My father must have got drunk at one stage because he joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and it was the ruin of Dad because he was in hospital two years after the war, still in Canada, in 1920. He was badly gassed, he'd been machine gunned in the leg, so much of his leg taken off, shortened it and so forth. His nerves were bad and poor old Mum had quite a problem. I always remember

18:30 she used to smock for some company and I think she got something like twopence a dozen for the smocking. They supplied all the material. Poor old Mum worked hard, but she was very good to both me and my brother. I see people don't do it today. Mum took me to museums, the art gallery, the Mitchell Library.

19:00 All those things I used to go to and in those days they were free. I don't know if they are today. So I had

a very good childhood and a very loving mother. Unfortunately Mum died very early and my father later on.

Did your dad tell you any stories about his time in the AIF?

No, not really.

19:30 He was, in those days they called it shell-shocked. Very badly shell shocked. He ultimately did get a job for a while, but he also hit the grog very badly and he wasn't the best of drunks. I still had the greatest admiration for my father, but he was a very bad drunk. Which is I suppose the war time experiences etc.

20:00 How would he behave and what kinds of things...?

He did tell me once, one of his good friends got hit somewhere, must have been in the stomach. Anyway, he grabbed him and half his stomach fell out. He was dead. That really upset him a lot. He was a very close friend. The big effect, I suppose, he couldn't go back to sea. He was colour blind, he was stone blind for a while through the mustard gas,

20:30 and then he was colour blind. How can I put it? Anzac Day was a big thing to him and he'd go in and Mum would always take me to the march and when I said he hit the grog [alcohol], it was only a periodical and suddenly he'd get on and he'd really hit it bad, but he wasn't a constant drunk if you know what I mean. He was a very handy man and also would give his

21:00 shirt away to the last person. Mum warned Bev when she married me, be careful he doesn't give half the house away.

How was shell shock viewed in those days?

Not the best way. I'm going to quote something here which will come as a surprise to you. If people get

21:30 upset in the services today, emotionally over something, they are catered for. I don't know whether you're aware of this, but in the air force during the war, providing you weren't physically wrong, if you refused to do a trip, a mission, you were discharged under a thing called LMF, stood for Lack of Moral Fibre. I suppose you've already heard this, have you? I don't know why they don't highlight that?

22:00 I've heard of lack of moral fibre, but keep talking.

The only point I'm trying to get at here, is shell shock is regarded, not as a, you didn't give a great deal of sympathy. A great deal of sympathy wasn't given to people with shell shock. More like a person looking at a cripple saying, "You know," type of thing without the sympathy. Can I explain that better?

The attitudes were different to

22:30 how they are today?

Absolutely.

How did that impact on your mum?

It was very difficult, because my mother was a very adventurous woman. She was born in 1888, she was born in Australia, and in 1911, which is unheard of for a young girl in those days, she went around the world. Not by air.

23:00 I think the Wright brothers had just been starting up, hadn't they? She went by ship to various places and she always had this feeling of adventure. She had to come home in 1912 because her father died. I have a feeling that may be one reason why Mum married Dad, is the fact that to her, she could see the romance of travel etc. being an ex...

23:30 He had the master's certificate. By the way, he had his master's certificate for steam and sail because he went through his sailing boats first as an apprentice at 12. He was a very tough man, but life was tough in those days.

How old was your mum when she married your father?

She would have been about

24:00 28, I suppose. About 27, say.

Did your mother tell you how she and your father met?

Yes. Down at Circular Quay. Bear in mind, the trial wasn't for my father. It was the trial of the Germans on board this ship and it was history. First time it's ever occurred and never occurred again.

24:30 A British ship was taken a prize of war by a British ship, which sounds rather federal, but you see it was a British ship. It was under British regs [regulars] at the time. Dad used to go fishing to fill in time off Circular Quay, in that area. And that's where Mum met him, there. Fell in love. He was quite a handsome man. My son's got the same exploratory

25:00 'wanderlust' as my father and my mother. At the moment he's in the middle of New Guinea, some horrible place, being dropped by helicopter.

What else did your mother do? You mentioned she had to work.

No women went to work, but I'm saying worked at home to bring some money in. She was a tremendous keen gardener.

25:30 We grew all our own vegetables. She used to love reading and she liked the arts. Taking a small child constantly to museums, art galleries and all those types of things. She was very fond of history.

What other ways did the Depression impact on your family?

I was very young, bear in mind. I would only be...

26:00 I was only seven when it started. The impact wasn't on a lot of people as everyone imagines, but for the simple reason, everyone was in the same boat. If some of the interest rates go up here, you have a lot of people moaning, "I bought this house at five per cent, now it's ten per cent." But it's like everyone having that happen. Everybody was,

26:30 there may have been one per cent that wasn't, but there was a sort of comradeship between everybody and helpfulness. To help one another.

You mentioned your mum would make cowboy suits out of the sugar sacks. What other activities and games would you and your brother get up to?

Under the house, we'd get sardine tins and make tracks. That was our trains, because you couldn't afford any toys for trains.

27:00 My brother who is nearly eight years older than me, I had the greatest affection for because he took over more of a fatherly attitude to me, more than my father did.

27:30 Things today which would never be... Paper chasers, have you heard of those? Everyone goes, the kids around the neighbourhood, one lot would go out with a pack on their pack of torn up paper and as they went they'd have to throw the paper out and you'd have to find it, so that was called a paper chase. Actually cowboys and Indians was the big thing in those days.

28:00 Later on, but this is when the Depression's easing out now, Monopoly came in. I was really sold on Monopoly. By the time I was about 11, my mother was a very keen bridge player. My brother could play bridge, Dad could play bridge. To make up four, I used to have to play bridge. I was taught how to play bridge. At one

28:30 stage during the war, I was on leave and I, with Mum, we entered a competition at Chatswood and won the bridge competition. That was what was called 'auction bridge'. Not so long ago I decided to join a bridge club here. I was tossed out after the first lesson because they play bridge, today, they call it contract. You've got to write down your bid and so forth and being such a garrulous person, I couldn't keep

29:00 my mouth shut, so they said, "I don't think you're very suitable for this game." So I don't play bridge any longer.

Can you tell me about some of the friends you had in the neighbourhood?

Yes. We did lots of things which are contrary today. We went bird-nesting, which I suppose is very cruel.

29:30 We didn't rob the complete nest, we used to 'blade' them. I had a box, we used to keep a box with all the eggs in. When I say 'blading', punch a hole in and, but I don't want people to think that the kids in those days just destroyed the nest. They didn't. In fact, I always remember, there was one sparrow's nest we kept taking, it got up 13 eggs, the poor bird laid. What else did we do? We built model aeroplanes. I joined the Australian

30:00 Air League when I was about 11 or 12. Went camping with them at Narrabeen. Ten days, all food etc, one pound. And Mum made my uniform for me. She didn't buy a uniform. She made my shirt etc. That was 1936, so I would have been 13. What else did we do? Bear in mind, once you went to work, everyone went to Tech [Technical College] for at least three nights a week in those days.

30:30 I remember when I was at Warren Joey's I was wagging Tech with a group of boys and right opposite Central Railway Station. It was called the Glaciarium and that was a big ice skating rink and instead of going to Tech we went to the Glaciarium and unfortunately one of the lads fell over and split his eye open and as a result all our firms knew, because he had to go the doctor and there was a

31:00 report about it. Knew that we were wagging Tech, so we got caned across the knuckles for it for going to the Glaciarium.

Can you describe the Glaciarium?

It was a dirty big ice skating rink. It went for a long while because I even went with Bev before we were married. They supplied the ice skates and that was it. By the way, swimming was a very big thing.

31:30 I should have mentioned that. I was in the, I competed in the school activities. I also got a bronze medallion for life saving in those days, which was all done by teachers in their time. Not the school's time. The chaps at North Sydney Boys' High. I don't know if you've ever seen it. It's a big sandstone building at the top of North Sydney there.

32:00 Still standing after I left there, so I couldn't have been too bad.

What kind of experience was school?

I can remember some bad memories and good memories. When I was at infants' school in Chatswood, we all paid sixpence a week.

32:30 No, not sixpence, it must have been sixpence at the time, that North Shore Hospital would; a pupil and I got run over by a car and it put me out of school for a long while and I was in hospital at North Shore and it was an old weather board place down near the railways. I used to see the trains going by. I always remember when it came due for the sixpence to be paid, my mother

33:00 wouldn't pay it and the headmistress put me in the front of the whole school saying, "Here's a lad that's had the advantage of that free bed and his mother won't even pay the sixpence." It wasn't sixpence a week, it was sixpence maybe every three months or something. But they had charged Mum full rates. They didn't give her that bed at all. So I came home in tears and told Mum and Mum went up and saw the headmistress, Miss Thurston and she had to, the next time, have

33:30 the whole school out and make a public apology. That was a bit of a blow. The other things I remember. This is obviously before the war; we were getting migrants coming here. But when I say migrants, they were all refugees. You've heard that saying, they called them 'reffos'.

34:00 I remember when I was at primary school, we were all allocated one boy who couldn't speak English, so we could help teach him English. The lad we had couldn't speak a word of English and he had what they call, in sixth class you sat for what they called the QC, the Qualifying Certificate, which I was 10 and a half when I sat for it. You could leave school after that. A lot of people did.

34:30 But those two boys that were in our class, both passed the Qualifying Certificate which put you in whatever high school you wanted to. Three lots of high schools. I unfortunately went to what they call a 'superior' public high school, which I was taught Latin and French. Another high school was the commercial high school which was purely teaching bookkeeping and that type of thing. Then the next high school was

35:00 a trades high school, where you were taught carpentry. Then for the girls there was the domestic high school, which taught the girls, actually domestic high school.

What was the refugee boy you were allocated like,

35:30 **and where was he from?**

Italy. I don't know what part of Italy. At this stage I was about nine or ten. He was assimilated very easily with us. We took a pride in trying to poke fun at him, which he took in good turn. I suppose he poked fun at us in Italian. But he really tried very hard and within twelve months he had quite a

36:00 good vocabulary going, plus the teachers helped as well. Don't get me wrong. Teachers in those days stayed back till six o'clock at night to help people. I don't think the unions were as strong. Plenty of times I've been still at school at half past five because later on teachers ran various clubs like the photography club and after school you'd learn about photography or how I got the bronze medallion. That was before

36:30 school and the teacher himself obviously was qualified to do it. Teachers were very dedicated.

Do you know what circumstances the Italian boy came from?

No. We never even asked him. We just assumed he was Italian and that was it.

Difficult for these refugee kids to be accepted.

They were, in my case, were accepted very easily. All kids can

37:00 be a little bit cruel and at times you laughed and poked fun at him, but it was all in a good sort of frame of mind. He didn't ever get upset over it. At times he'd say some things to us too, once he could speak English a bit better and tell us what he thought of us at times, so it was quite a... I had not idea what his parents were like or... I never came in contact with them.

37:30 **At 12 you joined the Air League.**

At night time we had to go to North Sydney. I'd caught the tram. We lived a long way away. You may know where Castle Cove is today.

38:00 We'd do lessons on all various aspects of air craft, how to build them. We built model aircraft. We

pretended to be in the air force I suppose. We had flights, squadrons and so forth. At the end of the year for two dollars, one pound, we went on a ten day camping to Narrabeen.

- 38:30 We got off at Dee Why, the Swan Lagoon service station and you could walk from there to the back of Narrabeen Lake, which I don't know what it is. The people that owned it, the property was named Wheeler. I think they do have a Wheeler estate there now, I'm not sure. It was a big farm in those days and we had boats, we went boating. We had a ball.

What kinds of things did they teach you?

- 39:00 That an aircraft body's called a 'fuselage'. There's 'aerons', which cause the banking, there's 'elevators' which make you go up and down and there's the 'joy stick', which is the stick in the middle. At this stage, 1935, was the big Stinson crash, where the chappie that owns that, he's dead now, and in place to go now up the north
- 39:30 coast here. He had a boarding house up there. They'd given up all hopes of the Stinson people, they felt they were dead. O'Reilly. Have you heard of a O'Reilly's Guest House? It's still going today, but he's dead. All the searches were conducted in the wrong places. A few of them did die. And O'Reilly had this vision, as he put it, thought he knew where it would be and he found them in the bush up the north
- 40:00 of New South Wales here. We kept scrap books, I wish I still had them on all the details of the flight. At the Air League as well, we went on board...

Tape 2

- 00:44 **Just keep elaborating some of the things you learnt in the Air League.**

On the weekends we'd go to Mascot Aerodrome, which in those days was called Mascot.

- 01:00 It wasn't called Kingsford Smith. And there was no runways, it was just one big paddock. We were allowed to board all the aeroplanes including the Southern Cross. I saved my pocked money with a boy called Billy Bundock and we met up with a chappie that owned, not a Tiger Moth, but a Gypsy Moth. He had this painted red, with the skull and cross bones. His name was Goya Henry. Dad knew him as well. He was a real,
- 01:30 one of these barnstorming type characters. He put the two of us, we had to pay a couple of shillings I think, he put the two of us in the back of this aeroplane with the skull and cross bones and we did our first flight. That was about 1936 or 1937. Continuing on this vane, at Chatswood school, one of the boys there, his name was Ulm,
- 02:00 he was the son of Charles Ulm and the Southern Cross is up at Brisbane Airport. It was flown, that was the last flight of the Southern Cross was from Mascot to Brisbane and we had the whole school. They put young Ulm in the Southern Cross and we all got out on the playground and the Southern Cross flew very low over us and young Ulm waved to us, so we all said goodbye to the Southern Cross, which is
- 02:30 I thought very nice. I don't know who the pilot was. It could have been Smith. I think he would have been dead, Kingsford Smith. Ulm, I had a lot of regard for his father, Ulm. I think he was a fantastic airman, Ulm. But he's not written up very much. Smithy was more flamboyant character that took all the headlines.
- 03:00 Again, building model aeroplanes. We used to fly them in the park. They were only by elastic. We used to wind them up with elastic. My brother and his friends at that stage decided to build a glider. They launched it from the roof of the house. How stupid anyone can be. One of them ended up with a broken arm. It just didn't work. Times were good then because there was no such thing as...
- 03:30 There weren't too many regulations or political correctness, if I can use that term as well. To have a plane come over at about 50 or 60 feet at a playground, bare in mind it was very slow. But you could imagine the screams today. Getting back, you asked me about how I became a navigator, unfortunately for me I've got this psycho thing where
- 04:00 I didn't find out till well after the war, that I was medically fit to be a pilot and I always assumed I was medically fit. But because I did the diploma entrance, which is equivalent to matriculation, I topped the course in mathematics, which you didn't need to be a genius, because I knew all about triangular forces and all the physics type of thing. So the board you went before was called the Category Selection Board. They obviously said,
- 04:30 "This bloke must be a navigator." But they made them then, they weren't navigators. As I said, I've got my log book there to show you the different courses. They were an observer. It goes back to the First World War. They only had pilots and observers. I did a navigation course at Cootamundra. After completing that I did a full air gunners course at Sale. I then did a bomb astro-nav course at Sale. I then did an astro-nav course at Parkes.

05:00 They then reclassified me at that time as an astro-navigator, which... Other people were then classified as bomb aimers and so forth. Or straight navigators which didn't involve a lot of... All my work was done both in, on Catalinas and in Qantas by using astro, by the stars.

Did you always have an interest

05:30 **in wanting to be a pilot, even when you were a little boy?**

Oh, yes. All the time. But I gave it all away when I thought I wasn't medically fit. What the hell's the sense now?

What was it like up in the plane for the first time?

It was an open cockpit. We had no pilots and the noise level was absolutely fantastic. The air speed indicator, which would shock people,

06:00 wasn't what they call 'pitot tubes', it was big flat plate with a spring on it and you looked out the wing and as the wind hit the plate it pulled, like a weighing machine, 35 miles an hour or so. It was not a Tiger Moth, it was a Gypsy Moth. At the same time, later on during the war, I did do a lot of flying myself, because my first crew I was with

06:30 was only three of us. Dave Stephenson who became, we had a ball. We were best of mates, but he never lasted through the war. He went on a Beaufighters and crashed. We only had one pilot, myself, and a wireless operator. My job was to be in the right hand seat and also to be the navigator. This was purely on, it wasn't very dangerous, just anti sub work off the coast of Queensland coast picking up convoys.

07:00 I had to wind the under carriage up. In those days the under carriage, the Avro Anson was made of fabric by the way, and you had to turn this handle about 200 times. It nearly killed you. You had to pump the flaps down, but I used to hand fly that quite a bit. Then when I got on to Catalinas, the skipper I used to fly with, I used to take that sometimes, fly it for quite a while. When I got on Dakotas which was

07:30 DC3s, I flew them quite a bit but never landed any. Dave and I, Stephenson, used to play the goat on the Ansons. We'd see a cloud, if it was fairly flat he'd say, "Try and land on it." We'd fall through it. If people knew. We had a mid air collision incidentally. I'll always remember that, because about five foot of wing went off. When you approached a convoy you flashed

08:00 OE on the Aldis [signal lamp]. It was my job to flash the, to identify them. Suddenly the whole of the, it was called an Aldis lamp, my sights were just full of aircraft. Dave saw it and he dropped the wing down. What happened, we were relieving him and the sun was behind us. It was ahead of us, but behind him and he thought we could see, but we didn't. Couldn't see at all. Anyway five foot of wing went off. We managed to land.

08:30 Get down all right safely. But I'll always remember, Dave at that time he was a flight sergeant and I was a sergeant. When we did get back to base, the chappie that was flying the aeroplane was a flight lieutenant, so David tried to drop him in the operations room. I'll always remember that. So we pulled David off and there's no record of that in the...

09:00 Squashed the lot because he was an officer of the flight that was at fault. This is what gave me a bit of a complex about commissions. I was a warrant officer, but I did get a bit of a complex about both doing the same job and he could get away with it, but Dave couldn't get away with it.

09:30 **You mentioned when you first enlisted you had tinned food and that was rare. What kind of food would you eat?**

My mother... We had very wholesome food. She grew all the fruit trees and so everything was preserved. Don't get me wrong. We would have occasionally a tin of fruit, but that was a luxury. Any tinned food was luxury because it was costly. Ice cream was very pricey. But

10:00 Mum bottled peaches, nectarines, even jams, all those things. So we didn't go without. Don't get me wrong. She had a cow, Jill was its name. It was my job, because it used to go along the streets at the back of Chatswood, which were all paddocks with plenty of grass and the pound keeper used to ride a horse in those days

10:30 with these leather legging things on and he was an absolute BB so-and-so. Because you couldn't afford to have Jill put in the pound because you'd never afford to get her out. So my job was to keep poor old Jill going all the time. Not my job all the time, but one of us would make sure the pound keeper didn't get Jill. We'd put her down in the paddock next to us and so forth. It was so much milk. In fact

11:00 How many damned blancmanges I had and cream, which I used to enjoy because the cream in those days, you used to skim the top, the same as clotted cream they have in England. Devonshire tea is clotted cream, or should be clotted cream and it's the cream that's skimmed off the top. We lived very healthily.

What other foods would you eat?

11:30 Always had meat because meat wasn't that expensive. One thing I did have which a lot of people didn't

have, and I hated it. I still eat it with reluctance, was chicken. Mum had her own fowls. Being Mum she had names for them all. They were all Greek names. Always remember Aristotle. Only time we ever ate a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken], and I used to damn well nurse the blasted things,

12:00 The only time we had a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , one had gone off the lay and gone broody or the roosted had had his chips and I used to get so broken hearted. I always remember having Aristotle for dinner. I don't know whether it's age, but you know how every bit of chicken meat today is white? In those days chicken meat used to be brown. I don't know why. But it wasn't bred for the table. So we had plenty of chicken, which a lot of people didn't have. But we had it because we had so

12:30 many damned WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

Did you not like the taste or you didn't like having to eat Aristotle.

Psychologically I'm still blocked on. I still eat it. Don't get me wrong.

Where would you get red meat?

At the butcher. The ham and beef shops in those days, that's what you call delicatessens today. They consisted of a counter and the whole lot was flyscreened.

13:00 Little sliding gate where you put your money. So you saw all the ham and beef, man, there was no flies. Sounds odd, and the butchers in those days used to have water running down the windows for cooling. Inside the windows. Rabbits were very plentiful.

13:30 I used to enjoy rabbits, but I've gone off them ever since myxomatosis. Have you seen any rabbits with myxomatosis? You'll never eat rabbit again if you do. Poor animals.

Did you go rabbiting?

Oh yes.

Tell me about that.

The talk of guns today, everybody had a gun. I had a, normally kids started off with a daisy air rifle then they graduated to a 22 calibre, which is

14:00 gun powder type thing and you used it for rabbiting. We used to go to wherever the holes were and get grass and put under to try and smoke them out and shoot them because rabbits were very plentiful. There were a lot of rabbits around our way. We never had it, but one of the - I don't know who it was, used to have those hound dogs, go, "Whoo" all the way. Used to take them rabbiting. I don't know if he got any more rabbits. Another thing was black berrying,

14:30 mum used to preserve all the blackberries. Used to get oodles [lots] of blackberries, because again, blackberries weren't a plant to destroy? You must destroy it. Bear in mind I was in a semi rural area which in those days. I haven't been there but I would presume would be either industrial or residential, but it was Castle Cove for the better name.

15:00 **These days it's a very affluent area.**

Is it? Well, it wasn't in those days, because my mother bought it while Dad was at the war and she paid four hundred pounds for it which was a lot of money in those days. It was typical type of home and how you lived in those days. I slept all my life on a front veranda. We had a bedroom. Everyone had what they called, French doors, just lead out onto a big veranda

15:30 on the front. Even from the time I was in a cot I slept out the front. When I rained Mum used to bring oil skins to put over the beds so it wouldn't get wet. We had a bedroom, don't get me wrong, but we always slept outside. As I got older, it was a very good thing because I could sneak out of bed. Mum never knew what I was up to. This was when I was about 15, I'd - Dad also slept outside,

16:00 but that was on the back veranda.

What did you get up to when you snuck out at 15?

I didn't do it very often, but a terrible thing we did once. Just went to see the chappie. They live up in Townsville. We decided about nine o'clock at night; they called in at our place so off we went. We found a shed that had gelignite in it, sticks of gelignite, so we took

16:30 a fair bit of gelignite and some detonators and came home. I put some in a cupboard at home which Mum found out later on. With the 22s up in the bush we used to put them under a tree, the gelignite then fire a rifle at them and see how far we could blow a tree. Stupid things like that. Terrible things. That didn't go on regularly. We had enough gelignite to last us for a while because I always remember I had a push bike.

17:00 You know Roseville hill? I went down there with a stack of gelignite. Later on I thought if I'd fallen off there would have been a mighty explosion. Roseville Baths were very good baths in those days as well. It's gone now. I also had a kayak, a canvas kayak permanently at Roseville. There was a boatshed there and I kept the kayak there.

17:30 My mother was very lenient with me. Let me do lots of things. In fact, at one stage she called me a 'doctor's mistake.' I asked her why and she told me she was going through a change of life and she went to a doctor and the doctor said, "You're having a change of life." It was me, pregnant. But she only said it jokingly, of course, she was a lot older then. But it was a good life as a kid out in the bush, but not the bush like here.

18:00 Suburban bush.

Did you always have an interest in explosives?

I suppose I must have, in a way. When I was very young I used to make lots of things out of nothing. I remember reading about gun powder so I scraped soot from the fire place. I think I needed about 70 per cent carbon and I went to the butchers. The butchers used

18:30 to use salt peter in those days for curing corned beef and things like that. They used to pack it in, so I got some salt peter which I ground up and Mum always had sulphur. I don't know what we kept sulphur for. I mixed the two together, but I never blew anything up. It just fizzed. I never got beyond the fizzing stage. I can tell you a rather funny episode on Ansons about explosives.

19:00 This sounds incredible. In the 71 squadron, bear in mind it was only just out of Brisbane, the CO decided to do a low bombing, they had a bombing range there, that he was going to do, it was purely the pilots they were going to do the low level bombing and I was put out on the bombing range and they had things that you vector and radio to tell them how far off the target.

19:30 Frankie Carr was the radio operator I used to be with and he grabbed Frank to wind up the undercarriage because he only needed, just a little short flight and the bomb bays also were hand operated. The CO said to Frank, "Close the bomb bays," which Frank thought, okay. He's not used to this. He turned the handle, it wouldn't go one way so he turned the other way. What he did, he opened the bomb bays. This is in the

20:00 Brisbane valley which is a lot of Germans settled there after the First World War. That's why the name Laidward, Lesk, all these names. They were originally interned, but they were harmless. They were farmers. They were patriotic people. It's just their bad luck that they had German nationality. They came over the target and the CO said to Frankie, "Open the bomb bay doors,"

20:30 which Frankie wound back which closed them. So these were only practise bombs. They make a big cloud. They're only ten pounds in weight. The CO made 16 runs and each time said, "Dummy run." When he came into land he said to Frank, "Close the bomb bay doors now," so Frank wound it, but he opened them, so 16 bombs peppered a farmhouse at Lowood and the poor German thought that was done deliberately because he was a German. I'll always remember that.

21:00 In fact, I met up with him later on and he invited me for a special meal one Sunday night and what do you think it was? It was chicken.

You mentioned earlier you were run over by a car. What happened?

Yes. In those days every kid had what they called a billy cart, which you

21:30 made yourself. It was a butter box or some box and you put a couple of wheels on it. The boy next door, Frankie Wilks. I left early one morning with him and Victoria Avenue, Chatswood's a very busy, and we were coming down one of the streets, Royal Street, and he saw this car coming. I can't blame him, he was in the back, but I went straight under the car. I don't know how long I was in hospital.

22:00 Everything is a vague memory for me because I don't remember anything. I don't remember going up there. I had concussion badly, obviously. I had... Physiotherapy later on made one of my shoulders two and a half inches lower than the other because the damage I did to one shoulder, I overdid it on the other shoulder. I suppose at least six months or more I was incapacitated, because things moved slowly

22:30 in those days. If you went into hospital with an appendix, you'd be a fortnight, whereas today I think you're tossed out in a couple of days, aren't you? Little vague clips I remember. I remember seeing trains coming at North Sydney, that's all.

23:00 You mentioned your father was in the AIF and came back debilitated. What work and activity did he do after that?

My mother and father didn't know much about Veteran Affairs, because it wasn't, it was called the Repatriation Department in those days. He got a job ultimately as a nightwatchman in

23:30 Chalmers Street, that was where the Repatriation Department used to be, the 'limb factory'. Right opposite there was the War Museum. I don't know whether you realise that, right opposite Central Station was the War Museum and in there, by the way, was Ulm's original plane, which I suppose was in the... Dad took me there. I used to often go over there, but Dad only went

24:00 once with me. He got very upset by it when he saw the things of the trench warfare which was terrible thing and poor old Dad couldn't stomach it, so I used to... In those days kids could go without worry and

I used to cross the, Dad would take me in with him to work and then I'd just go and spend all my time in the war museum. That's at Central Railway.

24:30 **Can you give us an overview of the types of things you experienced at art galleries and museums?**

Some of the things I used to, said to Mum, "Look at men, they need clothes on." Because a lot of the sculptures, as you know. The Mitchell Library intrigued me tremendously. There was a tremendous stamp collection donated to the Mitchell Library which I used to peruse.

25:00 It was all on glass slides and one of the stamps there was the Mauritius Penny, which there's only four in the world, there were only four in the world in those days. I spent a lot of time in the Mitchell Library. The art gallery, I suppose as a young kid always remember, I don't know what it represented, but there's a mob of people on a raft drifting down a stream somewhere. I didn't learn about Monet or

25:30 if I had, I wouldn't have remembered it anyway. That rather intrigued me, these people. Kids' minds work entirely different to an adult's. Thinking, why the hell are they in the raft? Why don't they get in the boat? Stupidity of the... Even though we lived so far away we'd have picnics at the Botanical Gardens. That was quite a big thing.

26:00 Everyone, not just us, on a weekend would hire a rowing boat from Smiths' Boat Shed down there where I'm referring to at Roseville Baths, and they'd row up the river. That was the big thing going.

What memories do you have of the centre of the city?

Just things flash through my mind. I met up with a friend once,

26:30 in the city and the police came along and said, "You can't stop to talk. You've got to move." You weren't allowed to hold up pedestrian traffic by talking, so we had to move... I know that sounds incredible to say. My biggest treat, I think it was McDowell's was the name of the company. They had a cafeteria there and the big treat was lunch at the cafeteria.

27:00 It was fantastic. All these lovely looking things like trifles and chocolate coated this and that. You went along with a tray and picked it up. I used to enjoy McDowell's. The other thing, in fact we've still got it here. When I was five... Bev still uses it. Bushell's Tea used to give coupons and if you got enough

27:30 coupons you used to go into the city and you'd get saucepans or something. Mum got this dirty big casserole dish which is still being used today, with so many coupons. Everyone saved Bushell's Tea coupons. Same as Gibson's Tea. Did you ever come across it? Mum also believed when we were a lot better off, believed that every year she

28:00 and the children should go and stay at a boarding house. Not in a cottage because she felt that she didn't want any work to do and so on. In fact, the last place I remember was at Pinehurst at Tuggerah, and Don Bradman was there. I don't know if you're aware how good Don was with children. We all had a game of cricket with him and he brought us a big watermelon.

28:30 He wasn't staying at Pinehurst, he was staying at another boarding house but he turned on a cricket match for us all.

This is Don Bradman himself?

Yes, I bowled against him.

Tell us about that.

It was exciting. He also, I don't know why people don't push this; Don Bradman went around to all the schools. He wasn't getting the money that these blokes get today. I think his was six pound

29:00 fifty a week or something like that. He worked for a bank and he came to Chatswood school, so we all had a game of cricket with him. But he would have gone to many other schools, not just Chatswood specifically. I also, at that stage, I always remember all the famous air women. The surname was Johnson, who flew from England to Australia.

29:30 Then in 1938 I think it was, the famous McPherson air race [McPherson-Robertson air race, 1934] from Sydney [London] to Melbourne, was won by Scott and Black, two air force pilots in a plane called the Comet, which was the forerunner of the... It was a piston thing, Datsun 38. And the one that came second was a Parmontier in a Douglas, but it was a DC2 and they were KLM [Royal Dutch Airlines], and actually having paid

30:00 passengers, which I thought it was a very good effort to come second, where the air force had all the back up in creation. When I say air force, RAF [Royal Air Force] I'm referring to. That was the McPherson air race of '38. It was a very famous air race. I wish I could think of her name now, Johnson. But she was a very famous air woman.

I'm interested in asking you about girls. Did you have any... ?

Now that's

- 30:30 a funny thing to say. Boys will always talk about girls, but no one ever, ever dreamt of going out with a girl at 14. You never met up with them. I went to... My primary school had a girl's primary school as well, but the boys were separate to the girls. I went to a high school that was all boys. The girls obviously went to... Bev went to Hornsby Girl's High. Even when I went to work, I
- 31:00 don't think... I would have been at least 16 or 17 before I took a girl out. It wasn't the era. Do you follow? How do you meet a girl if you're both at different schools and so forth. Don't think that I was odd that I was... Everyone was the same boat.

Were there socials? How did you meet girls when you were 16?

The biggest social thing was the church, in

- 31:30 my case, I'm referring to. We had, the church was always very active in social things and where you could meet girls, but you still... You had girls on a very high pedestal in those days, which it's a shame today. Just recently I stood aside, in a doctor's surgery, for a woman, and the doctor came behind me and
- 32:00 he went and walked ahead of her and I chipped him. He said, "No, I'm not going to stand aside for her. I'm the doctor." I thought, what an attitude. Before you always held girls on a pedestal, which comes as a bit of a shock I suppose.
- Which church did you go to? Were your family quite religious?**
- Church of England. My mother used to be a Sunday school teacher in her youth, so she made me go to church, which unfortunately, I went too much
- 32:30 because it was the Church of England and I was in the choir and that meant quite frequently I had to do morning for the church, afternoon for the Sunday school and the evensong. I'd have to be in the choir for that. She used to send me to get a broom and chase me to church. But I did enjoy the socials. Then the church also, again, not mixed,
- 33:00 all went on camping trips. I can't think of the name of the Sunday school teacher, but he was a medical student. He was just on the finish. He was a doctor and he'd been paid by one of these religious funds to be a missionary. He turned out to be a, he had to go, he went as a missionary. But he used to
- 33:30 take us camping, Govetts Leap up in the Blue Mountains. I always remember, we had a salad and he chopped up all the tops of the carrots. I'd never eaten carrot tops. He reckoned it was good for you. Unfortunately for me, he was a bit of a, can I say bible-basher? For a better term? He went a little bit over
- 34:00 board, which I suppose he was thinking he was going to save all the missionary, he was going to save the little girlies from sin and what have you. Religion came into it a bit, but I put up with that because I had a damn good time otherwise. Sunday school picnic was a great thing out.

Did you learn anything at Sunday school that was useful for your life?

Yes, in one way. Again, I always remember

- 34:30 this famous, I'm not a Catholic. You may be but I'll say this. You know St Paul, well, his original name was Saul, I suppose you knew that. I'd heard that at Sunday school, that this blazing light and he'd had to go to a 'street called Straight', to the House of Annas, in Damascus and when I was on freighters, I used to stop in Damascus and I remembered all this. So I hunted around and I found the street called Straight and I found the House
- 35:00 of Annas and I went there, down below and saw the house was still there. That must have taught me something, mustn't it?

Was it quite common for people to go to church in those days?

Oh, yes. Except Dad never went to church. Mum did.

What kinds of religions were in your area?

The Catholics. Oddly enough, one of Mum's best friends was Jewish, who

- 35:30 used to come always down on Christmas day to have a glass of wine with us. Church of England, names like Metho, that was Methodist, Presbyterians and Congregational. It was a terrific mix up of allegiances. It was a little bit of animosity towards the Catholics, not... from the Catholic boys towards us. I don't know what it's like today, but all the Catholics went to
- 36:00 Catholic schools in those days. Whether they were a public Catholic school, I don't know, but everyone could afford to go to a Catholic school. This Keith Scully who I just went up to see in Townsville, used to like my mother very much, and I always remember him saying to Mum, "Mrs Forbes I like you very much, but I'm so upset." She'd say, "What are you upset for Keith?" He said, "You'll never go to heaven." Mum said, "Why not?" "Because you're not a Catholic."

36:30 That was the sort of... Do you follow? There was a sort of barrier at all times. He was my best friend and he was a Catholic, so I can't say we... The thing that's upset Keith, he names one of his sons after me and he became a Protestant minister. I don't know if Keith's ever forgiven him. He's exactly four days older than me, Keith.

You mentioned your mum had a Jewish friend. Was that

37:00 **unusual for Jewish people to be in Australia at that point?**

You didn't see too many. I don't know why, unless they kept it hidden. Mum had a very open mind. His name was Burgess. He had a furniture factory somewhere in Sydney, Burgess Furniture. Whether it's still going. He'd be well and truly dead now, because Mum was born in 1888, so it's a long while ago. He always used to come down... Life was so much simpler.

37:30 For instance, election of council members. Our local postman was a councillor. You didn't have to spend money going around saying, "I'm going to be elected for council." If you thought he was doing the right thing. In fact there was no such thing as a Labor or a Liberal party and there was no payment for them either. Everyone tipped in those days. The garbage man always got a couple of bottles of beer

38:00 at Christmas. Have you ever heard a term called a 'dunny Lane'? If you look at a lot of older suburbs like Willoughby for example, you'll find the house faces the street. At the back there's a lane. That lane was put there to bring the night cart up because all the toilets used to be outside and they were pans and they used to come up and... So you always left him a tip, the night cart

38:30 bloke. Who else did you__? When I say tip, it was always a drink, not a tip. I got a tip once. At Christmas I used to put my name down at the Post Office to deliver telegrams and you used to get five cents an hour, sixpence an hour, which was a damn lot of money for a kid in those days and I used to work 13 hours non stop to get plenty of money. I only got a tip once. I used to get that many

39:00 glasses of fruit juice, or cordial, that many Christmas cakes to eat. Never a tip. Once a person gave me threepence.

Tape 3

00:44 **Could you share that story about the apple core?**

I would like to first of all explain that I was very well off in the Depression. We always had plenty of food

01:00 and so compared to a lot of people, we were very comfortable. But I do remember a chap called 'Spicer'. He's brought an apple to school, he was eating the apple and he threw the core on the ground and about five kids tried to pounce on that core to eat the apple core. One other thing I do remember, I might as well say this, my greatest ambition was to own a Bonds athletic singlet, because my singlets used to consist of my mother's worn out

01:30 singlets and if you ever try to wear a women's singlet as a boy, you'll find out about the remarks of the past. But I do want to say that we were very well off during the Depression as far as living conditions were concerned. We also owned our own home, which was a big thing.

Your mum's side of the family was quite well off?

Actually, Mum was born in 1888

02:00 and my grandfather came out obviously long before then and he came out to Australia for one reason only. He failed to dip his forelock for any man, was his saying. Do you know what I mean by that? Going back to round about 1880, you always, if you were a person in the village and the

02:30 person of a higher echelon than you came by, you had to dip your forelock. In other words, like a salute. He was very strongly against that and so he came and settled in Paddington. In fact in those days he sponsored the very first Labor person for parliament. He was very anti the British system and I suppose you'd have called him a tremendous socialist.

03:00 He established himself with quite a good tailoring business in Sydney and he still preceded... I don't understand this, but prior to the First World War there was a bit tailor strike because the Jews, forgive me saying this, the Jewish people started manufacturing suits, I shouldn't say Lowe's, but you know how you can buy a suit at Lowe's ready made? Prior to that, everyone used to have to go

03:30 to a tailor to have a suit made and to have this mob starting up mass production of suits, holy sailor. It was the end of the earth, so that caused a lot of stink. But they were quite well off, definitely. Otherwise my mother couldn't have afforded to go to these, round the world like she did.

Did you know your grandfather?

No, he died in 1912.

Did you know your dad's parents?

No. Never saw them because he was an Englishman and he never went back to England.

04:00 **You said some people don't look on the Depression as being a hard time, but were they really a hard time?**

That's what I'm trying to stress. I don't think they were a hard time as far as I was concerned. Because as a kid if every other kid only has the same as you, what's the? You're not wanting to say, "That boy's got a Hornby train set.

04:30 I want a Hornby train set." No one had a Hornby train set. Everyone did the same thing. We all had sardine tins which were our trains, in the area where I lived. I don't know what it would have been like in other areas.

Did the schools supply food for the kids?

We used to get, no lunches or anything, but in kindergarten only, we had a bottle of milk every day.

05:00 It was a bottle with a cardboard top on it, but that was only kindergarten.

War was brewing in Europe from 1936. What news were you receiving about Hitler?

It was all... Bear in mind my age when I say all this, but Australia was taking all this as a dirty big joke. I always remember a joke:

05:30 under the Armistice Hitler wasn't to do any armament, Germany I should say. And one of the jokes was that this person worked for a pram factory and thought they'd take the parts home and assemble them to get a pram. When he assembled them, it was a machine gun. They all knew what was going on and made a joke of it. I find today incredible. They talk about weapons of mass destruction.

06:00 This was under Hitler, by the way. When Chamberlain came back and said, "Peace in our time," well, deary me. It was quite a blow.

Do you think people could see that war was coming?

No, I think Australia was too isolated frankly. We were very isolated, you know, Australia. I was with the American 7th Fleet for a while and that's going back to 1944, they wondered

06:30 whether I could speak English. There again, a lot of the Americans in the services in those days were very ignorant people. I was amazed at the lack of education. I'm very pro American by the way, I'm not anti. Just saying how, I caused no end of trouble there. It was an island in the Philippines and Manila hadn't been taken at this stage. It was a naval base because I was on flying boats. To have a shower,

07:00 I found the quickest way to have a shower was just across the, we're in tents, which I did. The next thing, I'm in front of their, sort of, disciplinary officer. I'd gone into the shower where all the Negroes showered. You shouldn't. The biggest sin I could have done was to get into that shower, with Negroes. But this was 1944, so... .

07:30 **A lot of racism.**

Oh, there was racism. It was very strong. I think it may still be. I don't know.

Did the white Americans mistreat the Negro Americans?

No, not. I wouldn't have known. They treated them as a complete unit separate to themselves. There was navy as well. The navy's a funny group of people. I don't know what it would have been the ships though.

08:00 This was only on the land, that I was...

Do you remember where you were when war broke out in 1939?

Yes. See that? That's what happened when war broke out. I told you I had a shack up in French's Forest. I was up a tree. One of the chappies I know, I think he's most probably ended up in an asylum,

08:30 I don't know. He decided while I was up that tree to chop the tree down, which he did and I came flying down and smashed my radius and ulnar. It was up in Little Harbour again, so we had to get back by boat. Ultimately got to a doctor. Doctor said, "I can't do anything." I had to go to the North Shore Hospital and I had my radius and ulnar smashed and I thought, again I was too young to go into the air force, but I thought it might hold against me to get in. That was my biggest worry.

09:00 But, I got over it. I'll always remember it because when I came in, to me it seemed about seven or eight o'clock at night, it came over the radio. I may as well tell you a tale about the Depression and the radio. Bear in mind my father was a very strong Pommy [Englishman]. We had the very first

09:30 radio that wasn't a Crystal set. I used to build Crystal sets as a kid and so on. And it was a big box like this and it had this speaker and oddly enough they were magnetic speakers. Later on they had, the

magnets were electro-magnets, they've oddly enough gone back to magnets. It had a long lead, the speaker used to go anywhere. There was a large paddock next to us and when the test matches were on, we would have at least 100 come. Dad would put this up on our back veranda

- 10:00 and have it on full bore so they could hear the test match. As soon as one of the Englishmen got bowled out, Dad would turn it off and they would scream blue murder. The only way they could get it on was give him a bottle of beer. So, he'd start up again. He was really anti the Australian's cricket. As long as England was winning, that was all right for him.

What did he think of Bradman then?

I don't know

- 10:30 what he thought of Bradman to be honest. I know he wasn't very upset at Larwood. You know who I mean by Larwood, with the body bowling. That didn't upset him much. I know when the English were losing, the radio would go off. When Australia was losing, it would go on full bore.

One more question

- 11:00 **re sport. The 1936 Olympics. Did you receive any news about that?**

Yes. Next door to me was a chap called Harold Wilkes. He had a gymnasium at the back of his place. And he trained a chap called Eddie Scarf. He was a wrestler. He went to the Olympics. I suppose you've never heard of Eddie Scarf. He trained him, so that's how I knew about the Olympics. Bear in mind TV wasn't going in those days.

- 11:30 Eddie, I don't think go anywhere, but he went to the Olympics.

Was the Olympics in '36 broadcast on... ?

Yes. I better be a bit careful there. I think they were, I'm not sure. In fact I may as well put it to my age. We weren't very wrapped up in the Olympics. And because, what did it mean to us? Not much? Who did we have going to the Olympics in '36?

- 12:00 Publicity today highlights things a lot more, doesn't it? Well, you didn't have the publicity. I did know I followed Eddie Scarf because I knew him personally. Not as a friend, but as an acquaintance.

Coming back to the tree being chopped down. Did you break your elbow?

I smashed the ulnar and radius.

How did you actually land and when did you realise he was chopping?

The pain was terrible, because the bone was sticking out then.

- 12:30 Quite painful.

Did the tree fall on you?

I don't know. I think I fell out of the tree, quite frankly. Let go when... Not too sure. He was mad, by the way. I'll tell you his name. He was Allan Brayn. His father was a Member of Parliament, oddly enough. But I do feel he had a screw loose somewhere.

You don't have memories being up there and watching him?

No. I'll always remember. One of the chaps

- 13:00 had their girlfriend with them and I was too young to have a girlfriend. She sat in the back of the boat and put her arm around me. I always remember that. Later on, at Rathmines, I was in a dance there and who should be there but this... Well, she was a woman about eight or 10 years older than myself. She was a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] there. I don't know her name.

Did you talk to her at all?

Oh, yes. She was married as well.

- 13:30 I may as well tell you another odd thing that happened to me there, if I'm not... Mum had lots of friends and one of them was a musician. This is getting back to the Depression years. As a young person, I may have been about seven or eight, Mum's talking to this... She played the piano and what have you, she's talking to this woman.

- 14:00 Typical of, you listen to the conversation and I gathered this woman was on an absolute utter. She was flat broke and whether her husband had left her, she was in a really bad state, so I went to my money box and found a penny and I came back and I gave her the penny. This is a true story by the way. It sounds incredible. Anyway, getting back to Rathmines, there was a concert party arrived.

- 14:30 This is, years and years later, and who should be the pianist of the concert party but this woman, so I asked could I go up and see her and I did and I saw her and she thanked me. She said I was going to commit suicide that night and she said, "Your faith of giving me a penny kept me going." I don't know

her name or anything. This isn't big-noting myself. It was a penny, nothing more. Young kids, you feel so impressive. I could hear this conversation, how she

15:00 was absolutely at rock bottom. I thought, well, a penny may help her.

Amazing how such a small thing can change the course of someone's life. When the war began, what were you and your mates thinking of doing?

By then I was working for Waugh and Josephson as a cadet. We constantly listened to the... Because the Battle for Britain was going on and Bader would shoot down ten planes that day.

15:30 How true it was, I'm blown if I know because we seemed to be shooting down half the German air force. There would be 106 shot down on one day. We all listened to the news and my brother enlisted straight away and I think in 1940 he went overseas. He went to the Middle East then came back and went to New Guinea.

Your brother was a couple of years older than you?

Nearly eight years older than me.

16:00 **He left what year?**

I know he was on the Queen Mary in 1940, so he joined up very early in the piece.

He went off to... ?

Middle East.

What news were you receiving back from him?

Basically very nice letters. Nothing to do with the war. His letters were basically what he'd seen in the Middle East. The Church of the Nativity and Jerusalem.

16:30 Getting back to Mum again, as an ex-Sunday school teacher, Tom was telling her all the religious places he'd been to and they were very descriptive letters and I then had, to join up I had to get my parent's consent because if you're under 21 you couldn't... So I plagued and plagued Mum and Mum must have written to Tom and Tom wrote back

17:00 to say, "Whatever you do, don't let him join the services." And Tom got into terrific strife over that, because he should never have said that. Anyway, I plagued Mum and Dad enough that they signed the, my agreement to join the services.

At what age?

18.

That was 19... ?

1942.

Re your brother Tom writing and saying,

17:30 **'Whatever you do, don't let him join the services', was that censored?**

No, it was censored. Tom told me later on when he got home how he got into strife. I didn't get that letter. If we got the letter it must have been cut out or something. Tom told me later on that he got into strife over that.

Do you remember the letters being censored, cut out or blacked out?

No, not very much, because they were all sent to Mum, the letters.

Did you mum send packages over to Tom?

Yes.

18:00 **What sort of things would she send?**

It sounds stupid. For some unknown reason they always thought you were running out of socks, so she did socks. I think tobacco. All my memory is of all these damned socks being knitted. Tom was quite a rebel unfortunately. He got into a lot of strife at times.

Like what?

18:30 Put it this way. I enlisted, I finished up being a warrant officer. Tom enlisted and I enlisted, I enlisted before then, but it was '42 when I went in the service because I was the reserve. Tom went in as a private and came back as a private because he was a very outspoken sort of person. Quite a brainy person, but...

Did he tell you stories of the Middle East?

He told me a few.

19:00 He was in Tobruk and those places. He didn't tell me a great deal.

War didn't affect him the same way it affected your dad?

He came back with very bad nerves, but whether that... He had a very short fuse. Whether that was the war or not, I don't know.

Were your mum and dad supportive of the war?

Yes. Very supportive of the war. Everyone was.

Even though

19:30 **your dad had suffered from World War I?**

Very supportive. I shouldn't say, but there was a good propaganda machine running as well. A very, very minority that weren't supportive of the war, thinking it was the right thing.

What did your mum and dad do to support the war effort from the home front?

Mum gave blood till they said to her, "You can't give any more blood,"

20:00 which upset her. She was giving so much all the time and she reached a certain age where they said, "We can't take any more blood from you." That upset Mum. While I say supportive, they ran, referring to bridge, all those went to the war, the money they made. This bloke Brayne ran a, this is the father this chap Brayne,

20:30 ran a special thing and raised a thousand pounds which was a lot of money. That was to buy a Spitfire. Everyone was trying to raise money. Then they had, which I also bought, I think for a better name you'd call them war bonds. You bought for five shillings, payable on such and such a date. This was to help the war effort. I bought some of those myself.

21:00 **A war bond is what? You pay money for it... .**

You got interest on it. Say, five shillings. In five years' time it could be worth seventy-five or seven and sixpence. I don't know what the interest rates were.

Was that quite a good thing to do?

Yes. A lot of people did it.

Supportive of the country.

Also supported you as well. You were getting... You weren't getting nothing. You weren't giving it away.

What about to buy general things in the shops, milk and... ?

21:30 Rationing was on in a big way. Tea affected my parents more than anything else, tea rationing, because they loved tea. Meat was rationed. Even when Bev and I were married, rationing was still on for clothing. You had these coupons, which I suppose people have explained them to you, for meat and clothing coupons and certain grocery lines like tea and what have you.

22:00 **You earn money in a job, yet you get coupons.**

You didn't pay for the coupons. The government gave you the coupons, but how you picked them up, I don't know. I know when I went on leave, they used to give me a little booklet which entitled so many coupons to come and give it to Mum and she could buy tea. To me, I wasn't interested in

22:30 what was going on.

Was money therefore irrelevant?

Irrelevant. Definitely. Fuel was rationed as well, petrol.

The coupons were only used for what was rationed?

Purely a ration, nothing else. They were free, but whatever you bought... it's like the GST [Goods and Services Tax] today. They had to hand over and I presume they had to take these, hand them back into whatever department.

23:00 **Were there items of food or clothing that weren't rationed that you could buy?**

I can't remember any that weren't rationed. But there must have been some that weren't. Milk. I don't think milk could have been rationed. You couldn't have rationed milk. And I don't know about butter.

In that first year before Japan joined the war, had Sydney, Castle Cove, changed much?

No.

23:30 I'm trying to think back. Not really. People started, when Japan came into the war, they'd started putting strips on their windows, shadow proof, then they had the black out drama. Later on the cars had to have those hoods over their headlights. I wasn't involved very much in it, so I didn't...

But from a community point of view,

24:00 **the bombing of Darwin?**

The bombing of Darwin, believe it or not, was as flat as a pancake. The news was the fact that only six people got killed in that was it. They didn't ever disclose the true story of Darwin. It was only after the war, or may have been, no, after the war I'd say, that the story of Darwin came out.

The news came through that the Japanese did bomb it but only six people... ?

24:30 It was, I think they said the Post Office was bombed, but it was very negative. I always remember only six people got killed.

What about the 8th Division in Singapore?

I was closely associated with that oddly enough because all the boys around me were a fraction older than me and they all joined the 18 Battalion and every one of them was taken POW [Prisoners of War] in Singapore.

25:00 I think that was the 8th Division. The boy that I was with in the billy cart, they called him 'Fatty' Wilkes, he came back as skinny as a rake, but he did come back.

He was the only one?

No, three I knew came back. The others didn't.

At that point of time, no one really realised... ?

The war was over now, when this happened.

But during, before the war was over, when the 8th,

25:30 **when Singapore fell, no one realised what happened to the 8th?**

No one realised, no. And they didn't realise the futility of the way it fell.

You were asking your mum to join the services. Why did you ask your mum as opposed to your dad?

I asked both, but I knew if I could get around Mum, I'd be right.

Your mum signed a release form?

Both Mum and Dad.

26:00 It's very odd. I always remember, I was a sergeant at the time. There's the Hotel Australia and opposite there's another hotel. Most probably gone by now and I went there for a beer and I was in the sergeant's mess by the way, which is, you can drink etc, but I was refused a beer because I was under age. That's fair dinkum as well. I had to show my passport.

26:30 I looked so young anyway. Twenty-one was the drinking age then.

You were how old at the time?

At the time I was 19.

You went to enlist at the age of 19?

No, at 18. I was on the reserve and I still hadn't turned 19 when I was in, because I was still only 18 when I was in the service because I was born in December.

Can you share your memories of

27:00 **going to the enlistment office?**

Yes. Believe it or not, the medical took all day. It was the corner of Palmer and Plunket Street, Woolloomooloo, which if you look there, I think there's a service station. It was upstairs above that service station. It had an array of doctors. First of all you had to do a sort of IQ [Intelligence Quotient] test, then you went for a medical, where you were stripped off completely

27:30 and you went through various things. One thing I do remember, I had to blow into a... and hold a column of mercury for so long. This is to see how your lungs were. You were stripped naked completely and you went, they went through every bit of you and they said, "Yes," you passed or not passed. This was for air crew bear in mind, not the ordinary medical.

So you wanted to go straight into the

28:00 **air force rather than... ?**

No, I wanted to go as an air crew straight away. That's why I had to wait. I couldn't have got release from the firm. Still fighting to get a release from the Waugh and Josephson.

You did all your medicals and then... ?

Then they put me on what they called the reserve. I had a little badge to say I was reserve. I went to somewhere near Wynyard Station, George Street, a woman taught Morse code

28:30 down there at night. Then I also went to, for a little while, I think it was Rosehill, they had some lessons you could learn basic things which I gave it away, because I thought it was basic mathematics, triangular forces, all this sort of drama. I found out later, though this friend of mine is now dead,

29:00 You were then put on the reserve, but living in Sydney I could have gone as a stand by. I didn't know this. This friend of mine later on I met up with. I said, "How the devil did you get in so early?" He said, "I went as stand by." Someone that didn't turn up, he was taken straight in. It was Bradfield Park.

Reserve just means you're waiting for the next group?

Yep. Till there was enough. Bear in mind, though, 1942,

29:30 the Empire Air Training Scheme was worldwide. It was Canada, New Zealand, I'm not sure about New Zealand, but South Africa, Australia and the whole syllabus was exactly the same, regardless of where you went. But that had to be set up, aerodromes, every damn thing. It all took time.

With regards you being near age for enlistment, white feathers of things like that...

I never saw that, or heard of it.

30:00 I think that was more First World War. I never held it against anyone if they had a thing to say, they called it a protected industry and I don't think... Have you come across anyone that's heard of that in the Second World War?

Only one person's mentioned the... ?

I've never. Everyone sort of respected the fact that, okay, this bloke...

30:30 To think I could get paid six and six a day, when I was earning 14 and ten pence a week as a cadet, it was a small fortune. You'd get three meals a day and all this. To me, the air force was no great strain in those days. The training was quite rigid, naturally.

Had the Americans arrived in Sydney?

31:00 Not to a big state at all when I, before I enlisted, no. There may have been some but I never... Not till a later date when I'd come down on leave. Because don't forget, Pearl Harbour was 1942, or December '41.

You were then on the reserve. What happened then? You were called up?

I just waited till a letter came to say that you

31:30 were to report at the corner of Parker and Plunkett Street, Woolloomooloo, which I did, at eight o'clock or so in the morning.

What was your big hope at that time?

To be a pilot.

To fly any particular machine?

No, I didn't give a damn. Actually, I wanted to be a fighter pilot to be honest. I thought they were the best, but that was because you were listening to all the news. You hear this bloke shot down ten planes that day, or Wing Commander Holling did this, you know.

32:00 **Did you have a particular hero growing up, the Battle of Britain?**

A chap that was rarely mentioned, Wing Commander Olive I thought was very... In my book, what made me think he was more of a hero, he intercepted them, the bombers and the fighters, over the [English] Channel. That meant that he shot at quite a number that weren't shot down but they were disabled, so by the time they got further on, the other people rather sitting ducks for them.

32:30 To me Wing Commander Olive was a, more a hero.

You were at Woolloomooloo. Where were you taken then?

Bradfield Park.

What happened there?

I'm still in civilian clothes. We were taken to lunch which, as I said, really, this magnificent lunch and

then we were issued with, we had to hand our clothes back in, and

33:00 we were all issued with clothing which, a lot of it was so stupid at a later date. I was issued with an inner flying suit, which we called the 'woolly bul'l and then the outer flying suit. Silk gloves and gloves over that, flying boots. When I was on operations I used to fly in pair of shorts and nothing else and a pair of boots, rubber boots, which I got from the Americans, because we found that these army boots

33:30 would make sparks on the, walking through the companion way, so I thought... I've got all this hot suit that I carried all over the damn place and they didn't sort of think, well, we'll issue purely with where you're going. Well, I never knew where I was going. Then I, as I told you, I got ill, and I did my training at Cootamundra and so forth.

At Bradfield Park, what were they trying to -

34:00 **you were issued with suits - but what were they trying to teach you?**

They just taught you the basics of various things. I must have a repetition memory. One of them was hygiene. And I always remember, "Shock is an involuntary lowering of the vital functions of the body, characterised by profound low blood pressure and rapid shallow pulse." That was hygiene. Law, because you were going

34:30 to be a future warrant or commissioned officer. I had to learn air force law. And mathematics basically. Air craft recognition. Morse code. A horrible thing, Aldis light, which... I used to say, "Al-dis, and heaven too." Reading the Morse with the... You may have seen them, they go clickety-click. God, I hated that damn thing. I just got through by the skin of my teeth, as well.

35:00 **You just got through all the subjects or that in particular?**

No, Aldis. The misfortune, I came top in mathematics, which wasn't because I was a genius, it was because I'd already done the equivalent to a matriculation.

Some of the blokes with you were in the future going to be pilots, some navigators.

They were characterised later on, after this course. It was a six week's training course.

35:30 Drill, PT [Physical Training]. The PT nearly killed me. God, I've never been so sore in all my life. Oh, and firing on the rifle range and learning about hand grenades, all this.

Why was the PT so difficult?

Inside a gym, you know, vaulting over a horse.

36:00 It nearly killed me and I thought I was fit. It applied to everybody.

Did you know anyone when you were going into Bradfield Park?

I didn't know I was going into Bradfield Park. All the letter stated was the fact that I was to report, this was the corner of Palmer and Plunket Street, Woolloomooloo.

Were friendships starting to be formed?

36:30 Yes. Very much so.

Were crews formed there?

No. Crews were formed at what they called OTUs, Operation Training Units.

After Bradfield Park you went to where?

I went to Cootamundra. That was a basic navs school. I then, bear in mind I'm an observer now. I went to Sale to do gunnery.

37:00 I've put them all here. After the gunnery I did bombing and then later on I was sent to do an astro thing at Parkes. That's where, but I was sent on to a general reconnaissance school.

At Bradfield Park, were you already told you were going to be an observer?

Yes.

Was there any way you thought

37:30 **you could get out of this?**

No, because I was too scared stiff I'd be a wireless operator.

Can you talk about Cootamundra?

Cootamundra was study all the time. I used to, it was only about, I've forgotten how long, wouldn't have been more than a couple of months and the weekends was either doing your washing or they had a very nice swimming pool there.

38:00 and swimming but had very little social life, as far as seeing other, there was no balls, but they did have a picture theatre. It was basically the push training into you.

Were they taking you up in the sky?

Yes. You did all your training on Avro Ansons again.

Can you describe what an Avro Anson looks like?

Avro Anson's a twin engine air craft that had Cheeter engines.

38:30 It was a fabric... Built as a medium range bomber. It had a gun turret at the back. Under normal conditions it only carried a crew of three which was the pilot, the navigator and the wireless operator who sat at the back. He had to change coils an lots of, lot of arduous work being a radio operator. It wasn't like shooting in. You had to change coils

39:00 for different frequencies. You had a big box of all different coils and things.

Tape 4

00:43 **You were talking about the Avro Anson. Was that a biplane?**

No it was a monoplane and to start it, the navigator had to go to the engine, the cell to the crank handle and crank the damn thing to get up and the pilot would

01:00 thank, it sounded like Biggles, he'd give you the thumbs up when he was going to make the contact and she'd fire if you were lucky. Everything was hand operated on it.

Do you know what years the Avro Anson were made?

I went and saw, with my brother, in 1938... I think they were going to be a front line aircraft around '36, '37, before they got... Because it was completely of fabric aircraft.

Very much on the World War I type of aircraft.

01:30 Yes, it was a Cheeter and they were all English. When I said Cheeter, they weren't Pratt and Whitneys. They were Cheeters.

Where would you sit in this?

I sat two places. There was a nav table, but in take off I'd sit on the right hand seat and it was my job to get the undercarriage up and in landing to bring the undercarriage down, actually and to pump the flaps for coming in to land. If you wanted so many flaps, I'd pump the flaps down.

02:00 **Could you explain the process of pumping the flaps. Whereabouts on the plane... ?**

They were at the back of the pilot, but I'm sitting on the right hand seat and my left hand could touch this lever that I could just push and I'd watch the gauge come to what degree of flap for landing and put the flap in.

The pilot would say what degree... ?

Fifteen degrees flap, or something like that.

And you could alter that depending on his call?

Mm.

Are you sitting next to him?

Yes.

02:30 **And the radio operator is sitting... ?**

At the back of the nav. As soon as we got airborne and everything was cleaned up I had to get out of my seat and go to the nav table and start navigating.

Was it important for you to be up front for weight distribution?

No. They couldn't have operated without someone in the right hand. They could have I suppose, but I don't know how the pilot would have ever wound the undercarriage up. Try and hold the controls at the same time. He could have, I suppose.

Someone also had to wind up

03:00 **the undercarriage.**

I wound the undercarriage up. That right hand seat was generally a duel seat. In other words, they also had the stick as well.

So if something happened to him you could... ?

Theoretically, but it wasn't meant to be that way. Something did happen once and I didn't...

What happened?

All this is not on strips, it's on grass fields.

03:30 You always do what they call a rev [revolutions] count. You have two mag-meters on motors, so before take off you rev the motors up to a certain number of revs and click one mag-meto and if you get a drop, say of 100 odd revs, that means there's something wrong somewhere. Anyway, in this case we had a rev drop. We got the ground staff bloke to come out and check some plugs, then we went for take off.

04:00 In take off, the fence... I was wondering why the hell David wasn't lifting the air craft off. He's got full bore, there's the fence coming up and I'm in the right hand seat and I look down and he had it, instead of... I'm trying to think of the mixture. A full rich mixture - for want of a better name I'll call it that. He had it in the cruising mixture, therefore we didn't have enough power and I went to put my hands to push it full. He just about broke my hand because he

04:30 thought I was trying to take over, but I managed to get the throttles forward, the rich, the mixture. I wish I could remember what the term was and we cleared the fence. So it was nice to have a second bloke there I suppose.

He didn't realise he didn't have enough... ?

Today... I'm going to get back to Qantas. When you do a take off or landing, you read the instructions. They have it all written down. In those days there was no such thing as

05:00 pre take off. You had to remember everything. When he pulled back and started again, instead of pushing it back for the, he taxied and call it the leaner mixture, then spun around and forgot to push it forward to the... I didn't notice either, it was only the fact when I saw that bloody fence coming up I thought, "Got to do something." The way he was trying to hit my hand, he thought I was trying to take over.

05:30 I was only 19 then or 18. These things don't affect one. It's just part of life, you know.

And he was how old?

My age. We were both the same age.

Why didn't you want to become a wireless operator?

Well, first, I couldn't do Morse, well I could but I wouldn't have passed. I had to get a certain... Qantas I had learn Morse, but I couldn't do it well enough. I hated it.

06:00 I loathed anything to do with Morse code. I had this complete mental block out on it. I would have accepted it if I was forced to, but I didn't. Wasn't any social plane or anything. I thought the next thing, if I can't be a pilot, observer was better.

But in respect to them, the social plane. Was there a social plane of distinction between... ?

No. our wireless operator. His name was Frankie Carr. He was a rather odd-bod.

06:30 He and I weren't great mates, whereas Dave and I were inseparable mates. After he died his mother came to see me. He crashed up here somewhere in boat.

Can you talk about the levels of pay?

Pilots and navigators were on the same pay group. This is other than a commission, which was group one. Radio operators were on group three, which was a slightly lower pay.

Is that based on the... ?

On the skill. They thought, how can I put it. The hierarchy thought it took less brains to be a radio operator than it did to be a navigator or a pilot.

What sort of accidents started to happen at Cootamundra given you were learning to fly?

Basically, younger people getting air sick.

07:30 We didn't have any major accidents there at all. There was a few forced landings, but that's nothing, especially up Cootamundra, there's plenty of grassy fields and things.

No one got in trouble with the props [propellers], starting up the Avro Ansons?

No. You mean getting hit with a prop? No. Actually the prop was there and you wound it, you were at the back of the prop when you wound it. You made bloody sure you didn't lean forward.

08:00 **How long were you at Cootamundra?**

I'm not sure. Say roughly no more than two months or so. Might have been three months even.

Do you remember the first time they took you up?

No I don't to be honest. It was purely a map reading exercise, I knew that, but I don't remember much about it.

08:30 We had to put out charts on to a pine board and then varnish it over because, to save using too many charts up, you could use the same chart over and over again.

A pine board?

Like masonite. Instead of using the paper chart. You'd have to have a chart every time you flew. Like on Catalinas I always

09:00 had my chart, but this was put on and you used the same chart for some period of time. It saved the cost of the...

What was happening discipline wise... ?

Discipline was always strong. I don't think anyone ever broke, warranted... You were too busy trying to study to think of, you know, breaking discipline in any manner.

09:30 Discipline was... You had to... I may as well say that. You had to take a photograph of your cupboard. You had to put your books in a certain order. You couldn't just put your books... You had to go in certain order. Same as when you did your bed. It had to be folded in a certain manner. All this time you on slept on palliasses, you weren't on beds. You slept on... Do you know what I mean by palliasse? It's made of hessian, like a big chaff bag and it's filled with straw and that's what you...

10:00 You slept on the floor. Both at Bradfield Park and all through the training.

After Cootamundra you went on to Sale?

Yes.

Just in respect to the timeline, you were still in the EATS [Empire Air Training Scheme] program weren't you?

The Empire Air Services... ? Yes.

You hadn't had pneumonia yet?

I had it before. I got pneumonia between...

10:30 When I finished that six weeks' course at Bradfield Park, I was then sent to Canada. I was at what they called Embarkation Depot, but I went out on leave and when I was on leave I got pneumonia. I was put in hospital and the draft that I was going on left so there am I stuck with a... So they gave me some leave and I started the next course. I missed all my friends, because I started a new lot of friends at Cootamundra.

11:00 **In a sense, you would have been heading off to Canada and then UK [United Kingdom]?**

Most probably, yes.

Were you disappointed?

Very disappointed. Terribly disappointed.

Do you know how you got the pneumonia?

Haven't got a clue. But I do know one thing. I may as well mention this. They just found a wonder drug called M&B, in other words is sulphur monamide and I had to take something like eight tablets at a time and

11:30 they were monstrous things and they had to give you bicarbonate of soda afterwards to keep it down. I'm still only 18 now, and the sister who would have been at least 28, an old woman as far as I was concerned, stayed by my bed all night and I fell violently in love with her. Not from a physical point of view. She was marvellous as far as I was concerned. I wish I knew her name.

12:00 **You were in hospital during that time?**

Yes, at Bradfield Park. At this time the air force had their own hospitals and their own catering. Later on it all became one, like Concord and so, they all became one hospital.

That hospital hadn't been affected by the doctors leaving and going overseas?

No. Well, they were specially there anyway.

From Cootamundra you went on

12:30 **to Sale and the training changed?**

It was good. The bombing was good. The air gunning was fantastic. This is again the stupidity of how administration works. I did my air gunning on what they called gas operated Vickers machine guns. If you ever look at First World War things, you'll see there's a drum that fits on top of the machine gun, not these belts and things. Anyway,

13:00 I did all my training on the Vickers and the way they used to, how can I put it, score, they painted the tips of the bullets with paint. Red paint, green paint and then they'd take a drogue behind another aircraft. This air gunnery was on a plane called Fairey Battle. It was like a fighter. There was no communication between the pilot and the two

13:30 in the back. You sit on another bloke's lap and you took it in turns to use the gun. You used to, if you had a stoppage, you used to crawl along the fuselage and you had signals. If you pulled two right legs that meant such and such is wrong. You had the code. The only way you could tell. But it was great fun because a few people shot their own tails off which was only natural, without doing any... You know, they came down. But I can tell you a humorous story, which is really true and which

14:00 sounds so incredible, it's not funny. Everyone enjoyed air gunnery. Now the pilots are young blokes as well, and they thought this is terrific and they thought themselves fighter pilots because this is... it looked like a Spitfire. You could say it was a forerunner. It looked like a Hurricane, it really looked a fighter. They used to do low level and when we finished they'd do loops and throw it all over the sky and we'd think it was a bloody ball. It was a Rolls Royce Merlin

14:30 engine, the same as the Spitfire. That's cooled with what they called glycol. One of the big troubles with those Spitfires is that the tanks used to catch on fire because it was a glycol mixture. It was very flammable. In this case, the engine was on fire. The pilot can't... He's in front, do you follow? This two seater, he can't tell the blokes at the back, so one of the things he'll do, he'll throw the aircraft all over the sky and

15:00 wake them up to what's going on. Which they just thought it's a standard sort of procedure. They're sitting there enjoying... Here's this bloody engine on fire, because he had the fire warnings coming up. So he thought, "What the hell am I going to do?" So he trimmed the aircraft, do you know what I mean by trimming the air craft? Trimming an aircraft, you can set an aircraft trimming tabs that fly exactly straight and level without the pilot and he climbed out on the wing to let them know that the plane was on fire. And he got blown off. This is true. It sounds... You won't believe this.

15:30 Sounds so incredible. These two are sitting there and one's sitting down on the other's lap and he looked out and he said, whether this is true or not, "Oh, there's someone parachuting." And he reckons the other bloke got out before him, whether... They woke up to the fact that, looked down and saw there was no pilot and they jumped out and that's a true story. I only remember the humorous things. Please, if you can put up with that. I don't believe in all this—'In operations, I've been hit...' and all this,

16:00 but I'm not going to go on about that. Everyone has those things. It's nothing new. But I think it's the humorous things that count.

Remember though that the Archive wants both the humorous and the reality. We don't want to give people the perception that war is that much fun.

Well, at this stage, it was fun.

What was the end of that particular story?

16:30 Everyone was saved.

The plane went down?

The plane went down near the 90 Mile Beach up near, off Victoria there.

The commanding officer didn't scout the... ?

I don't know what... No, because an engine fire... As a trainee anyway, you had no say. You weren't going to complain. You may get 'scrubbed'. That was the worse thing that could happen to you is scrubbed. That meant you failed your course, you were sent down as an airman, which was a, you know. You didn't want that to happen.

17:00 **Scrubbed in respect you were no longer in the air force?**

No. No longer in air crew.

Therefore ground crew?

There was nothing wrong with ground crew. Don't get me wrong, but to have that happen to you, you felt a complete failure. You didn't want that to happen.

How many guys in your particular group got put down to ground crew?

A lot failed because they failed the courses as time went by.

17:30 Ultimately about 60 per cent got through. I'm just guessing this.

You would have had a lot of bitter ground crew then?

Oh, yes, you did at times. Got very... Especially at Cootamundra because a lot were made guards there and that didn't, you know, impress them. I also went on to do a general reconnaissance school which was

18:00 a three months course. I can tell you something funny about that if I may. All of us were on a disciplinary charge over this. By this time we were all at least sergeants. We had our wings and what have you and the general reconnaissance school, the grand finale was to take a reconnaissance of Sydney Harbour, but we were at Bairnsdale. It was two reasons. One is that you land at Moruya and got oysters for the mess which was a bloody good thing so we always...

18:30 The idea was to do a reconnaissance of Sydney Harbour and you had to put a report in; how many ships, and of course, in this reconnaissance school you learn all about ships and what have you. All these Ansons and that, we decided to fly under the Harbour Bridge, which we did. I think it's called Walsh Bay on the left there. We turned to the left and forgot about it and I put my report in, passed... I had so many ships and what have you.

19:00 The next thing, we're all on a charge. We were confined to barracks for the rest of the time of the course. What transpired, the wharf labourers reckoned the Japs [Japanese] had landed and they downed tools and they didn't come back for two or three days and we were charged - nothing to do with flying under the Harbour Bridge, but for hindering the war effort. They all downed tools and flew through.

19:30 All I remember is humorous things.

What planes were you flying at Sale?

Airspeed Oxfords, which look like an Anson, but are not.

20:00 I'm thinking of another aircraft. I said it was like a Spitfire and like a Hurricane. Not a Hawker Demon. I'll come back to it.

Were they trying to get the navigators to fly with different pilots or were you... ?

You flew with different people all the time, because you weren't crewed up at all. It had no crewing

20:30 at all in the training.

Were there pilots who you thought, I don't want to be with this guy?

No, I never gave it much thought, because I may not see them again. I may have been as full as a tick the night before with them in the mess for all I knew. That's when I was a sergeant.

You mentioned the gunnery. What other things did you learn at Sale?

The bombing, that was another course, the bomb aiming. How to use the bomb site

21:00 to drop bombs. The grand finale. Bombs when they go off form a crystal. They get worried about them, so they used to send these bombs down to the bombing school so you could use them. You know, they couldn't keep them in operations. So you dropped up to 250 pound bombs.

Were these the powered ordinances or the live ordinances?

Oh live.

21:30 The training ones were the powered ones, the ten pound ones.

So Sale was the place where that fellow... ?

Yes, that was the gunnery school. By god, what's wrong with me. Avro Anson, Airspeed Oxfords were the bombing there. Sorry.

From Sale you went to...?

I went to a squadron.

22:00 I went to 71 Squadron and I did a tour there, an operational tour, but it was only anti sub work. Picking up convoys out at sea.

Sale was the place you decided where you would go?

No, I had no decision. I could not make a decision. It was the powers that be made the decisions.

22:30 Because I then went on to do a, this general reconnaissance school I was telling you about. You were given a choice of three planes you could go on to operational on there and that was Catalinas, Hudsons

or Beaufighters. Ninety-eight per cent of the people put in for Catalinas. Say, 1.9 per cent put in for Hudsons and only one

23:00 silly idiot put in for Beaufighters, and that was me and I was the only one that got Catalinas. The proved how the system works. I wanted them because I knew, my other pilot was on Beaufighters. I wanted to go with him.

In respect to those three planes, was one plane better than another?

Everyone wanted the flying boat because it was the status symbol to be on flying boats. You did terrific long range, you know, 24 hour non-stop flights.

23:30 **The Beauforts, were they much of a plane?**

They were made in Australia and they were a copy of a Blenheim. Their OTU was at Bairnsdale. They used to call it the 'graveyard', because they lost so many Beauforts down there. They lost them all in training. They lost far more in training than ever in operations.

Why?

One I have heard, whether it's true

24:00 or not. The aircraft was designed in England and they had heaters on it to, for the cold weather. When it was used in the tropics, no one ever bothered turning the heaters on. The tale I've heard is that carbon monoxide coming... Down at Sale it was quite cold in winter and they turned the heaters on and carbon monoxide would come into the cabin and they'd all fall asleep

24:30 and crash. Whether that's true or not...

Sounds very much like a design problem.

Yes. Because it was designed in Australia later.

In going through that course, were there areas that you wanted to avoid? Thought, I don't want to get a posting there.

No. Not really. I'll be honest there. in my mind I didn't care a damn. It may have been the form of discipline. I just did what I was told. That was it.

And the worst of the

25:00 **Pilots, navigators and wireless operators. Were they sent to the UK or ground crew?**

A mate of mine, I know when I did the general reconnaissance school, a lot were sent to the UK. They were the ones that failed the course, so I wouldn't know.

You didn't try to fail so... ?

I did. I tried to fail that course as well, because I thought I'd be sent to the UK But unfortunately I didn't fail it, which upset me. In fact they knew I'd had...

25:30 They knew I wasn't trying unfortunately.

Where did you start astro-navigation?

That was at Parkes. Long before... That was straight after Sale. It was purely a course using a sexton at night and you did navigation by sexton all the time at night in Avro Ansons.

26:00 **What's the process of astro-navigation and what are you trying to achieve?**

It's very complex, because it never changed. Even with Qantas I had to... Even though the sexton I used was \$80,000 worth. If you're in the air, you can't use a marine sexton because at sea, you've got a horizon which is the ocean, isn't it? They invented a sexton, it was a bubble, a bubble sexton. Now an aircraft also wanders all over the place so you wound it up. It was a clock work motor.

26:30 You wound it up and you started shooting over a period of two minutes and it automatically averaged what that site would be over the two minutes. You then went to stacks of tables and looked up whatever star and you had to get... Well, for a fix in Qantas, I always got four position lines, but you could have three. I could pick three stars. I get one line like that, another line like that and another line like that, and I've got a fix. But it's a lot of

27:00 mental calculations as well.

Why was astro-navigation so important?

How else would we know where you are? All the time that I flew in the air force, radio was a dead silence. You couldn't get bearings, you couldn't use it for any...

And the compass?

You had a magnetic compass, yes. A gyro [gyroscope].

Was that helpful at all in respect... ?

Gosh, yes, for dead reckoning.

27:30 If I could just say, basically, if there was no forces acting whatsoever, from A to B you draw a straight line. Measure it on a protractor and say that's "100, 0, 1, 0 and so, 010, I'll get there." But unfortunately there is forces involved and it's basically wind as far as aircraft's concerned. If you flew that straight line, the wind could be blowing you there. You'll never get to that point, so you had to work out what the wind was, then lay off the course

28:00 to get to that point. So you had to get a fix somewhere to know what the wind was. I'm sure I'm right here. England's entirely different. They had the G-box, a lot of electronic equipment they could use and bear in mind there trips wouldn't be more than three or four hours there and back. I'd say the only ones that were really genuine astro-navigators were flying boats because you had such a long period.

28:30 See, I was based in Australia, I was mine laying Hong Kong, Swatow, Amoy, Hainan, in China and places like that because you could operate from a ship or aircraft tender. But you still took 24 hours and I only carried one navigator. I used to fall asleep, hope for the best.

What about the fact, from an astro-navigation point of view

29:00 **Northern and Southern hemispheres?**

Well, only for the stars. That's the only things that happened and the longitude because you get longitude east and longitude west and all these things. Plus also, the variation of the magnetic field. Different compass readings and so forth.

In the Northern Hemisphere you were looking for the Northern Star.

They all did that, so I believe, but I never... Even though I went as far as I ...

29:30 The Northern Star had an organ of up to 50 seconds of arc out. It was very good I presume. But I went to ordinary stars. I used the Rigil Kent, Bellatrix, Betelgeuse, all these different stars. Canopus, Sirius and so forth.

Given that the world rotates and stars move across the sky, how does that affect your... ?

30:00 You had an air almanac that gave the position of what they called the Greenwich Hour angle, the position of Greenwich and all those times so you could then work from that for that day, at that time, but based on Greenwich meantime. Everything was based on Greenwich. Then you had the stacks of tables you would go to, to find the rest out and you found then that you could get a bearing and you put,

30:30 plotted that bearing and that was the position line.

This process would take considerable time.

You had to do it very fast, especially on Boeings. God I had to work. Now I'm getting back to civil flying now. That was far, far harder.

Given that the plane was in motion...

I could do it in about 20 minutes I suppose all up.

31:00 **Would you then have to compensate from where... ?**

I'd then have to compensate from where we were and lay off... If you couldn't see the stars, you did what they called dead reckoning. I also on flying boats, I used to look over the side and look at the sea and I could judge what the wind was from that and the drift. If you're ever low level flying you'll see what they call sea lanes, straight lines.

31:30 That's the direction of the wind, so you know wind direction. It always breaks into wind. Those little waves always break into wind, so I got to the stage I could estimate what force that wind would be. I had flame floats at night. I could throw a float out that had a flame on it and I could take a drift on it and work backwards from that. In daylight, say the sea was completely still, I had sea markers which

32:00 were aluminium, you threw out and a big sheet of aluminium powder, you can imagine that would show up and I'd take a drift from that.

In the war years, how accurate was this astro-navigation?

It's never... How can I put it to you? I'll explain a trip first of all. I'm...

32:30 Say I'm going to mine lay Hong Kong. We've laid our mines at 300 and 600 feet. So, my idea is, first we have what they call a 'datum', which from memory was Wanshan Island, doesn't matter. I have this datum. I try and get there as accurate as I can, but it's not accurate enough. I doubt whether... astro, in those days, if you were within about ten miles it was good.

- 33:00 A good area. But then, I'd be up the front of the flying boat, remove the hatch and I had my helmet on, and I used to then guide the aircraft and I'd map read till I could see from memory, what I'd memorised what the place looked like to bring us on to that island and then I'd tell them, "Left, left, steady. Right." Then once I got over... I'll always remember once, I was quoted...
- 33:30 One of the COs, my immaturity, which I suppose was. I had a crew that were all at least ten years older than myself. Ex-headmaster and what have you and I made three runs at Hong Kong one night and each time, this was at 300 feet with all those hills around and I'd say, "Dummy run," and I'd give them courses to fly to come back again. On the fourth one, it came over the intercom,
- 34:00 because I did have phones, "If you don't drop that bloody mine this time, we're going to drop you." They were going to drop me overboard. So they put that down as immaturity. It wasn't immaturity. It was, but unfortunately my mind... I worry about lots of things, don't get me wrong, but my mind was, I've got to do a job, that's it. I never... Nothing came on either side of it. Can you follow what I'm trying to get at? Today I think I most probably would
- 34:30 be bloody different. And I never thought, ever, that I'd ever be shot down.

You were just trying to get that accurate?

Yes, precisely, because if you dropped the mines incorrectly, two things could happen. You could drop them over a sandbank, they'd explode, you'd go up with it. Then if you dropped them in the wrong place, they didn't go off, when the invasion comes,

- 35:00 our ships come in, you could blow up one of your own ships, couldn't you? You had to drop exactly where the navy... It was the United States Navy all the time that... They got Australians because they were the only ones that could low level mining. Americans did mining, but it was high level. It was too inaccurate.

The Americans weren't game to come down lower?

No, they were just inaccurate. I wouldn't know why.

- 35:30 It may have been a political thing to get Australia in the war. In fact, I've got a thing over there which will come as a surprise to you. Headlines from the papers on a trip I was on, that Australia bottled the whole of the Japanese navy up in Manila Harbour. Not many people know that, do they? But they did in England because it was an English paper. That was written during the war. But the Americans used all Australians on that. We only lost one aircraft.

- 36:00 **In respect to guiding the plane in, you got within the ten mile. You're just looking off your map to landscape and once you get close enough to the mark, is it the pilot that takes over and guides it in or do you actually... ?**

No, all the time I keep the...I've given him a list of courses to fly because there could be four mines and so many seconds between. Now he's got that up front and I just bring him right to that datum and then get him

- 36:30 to swing on that heading and then from there on, the radio operator used to tick off with a stopwatch. It's either we press the bomb release or just the jettison. If there was only two mines I used to prefer the jettison than use the proper bomb release because it was always safer I felt to...

Why was it safer?

The jettison lever was a mechanical thing. It was cut and dried.

- 37:00 What happens if you've got a hang up on an electrical device that you press? To me... This is only in my thinking. I don't know what other blokes did.

This is coming back to your preciseness.

That could be. I think it's the draftsmanship as well, brought that about.

In that Hong Kong run where they threatened to drop you, what wasn't quite precise on your run in for the first three?

A bit of cloud came over and I felt I

- 37:30 missed the datum. It was raining and so on. It was obscured so I gave him a course to get out again and then come back in again.

Coming into any target, you give the pilot the height you want, the speed?

He knows that to begin with before I go down inside the... Three or six hundred feet and it was very easy. They had a special radar altimeter for this mine laying. You set, say, 300. if you were too high it was...

- 38:00 **No, wait a sec. If you were right I think it was green, from memory. A light came on. If it was**

red you were too low and amber meant that you were a bit too high, I can't remember the exact... So he had to just forget the altimetry and all that because it would be wrong anyway. If they were barometric altimeters. He just kept that aircraft at that three or six hundred feet and flew those headings that I've given him on a piece of paper to get out of the place.

Coming in again to

38:30 **your drop zone, how far out does he have to get out on the right line?**

I'd try and see, hit the coast first and then try and work out, try and get an idea from the coast first before I do a full run. Once I got an idea of the coast, which is pretty quick, you've memorised all that you're looking for. You did the obvious because if it was a big gap

39:00 like this, there's a bay here and the bay's on your left, obviously you're bloody north. So it wasn't very difficult.

Tape 5

00:43 **You left Sale, that was your last training. Had you been grouped up with a pilot at this time?**

We'd already been grouped from the time we left Bradfield Park. That we were going to be either...

01:00 **Sorry, in an air crew?**

No, no. You were only grouped... In fact I'll explain an OTU. That was at Rathmines. You did a three months training course there and you were grouped as a crew there and you stayed as that crew for the whole... The tour was nine months, till the completion of that nine months tour. You had your own aircraft. You may have occasionally fly in someone else's, but it was a rarity. All the training was done at Rathmines with the same crew,

01:30 The crew that you're going to... They used to call it the Country Club too, that place because it was a lovely spot Rathmines. The unfortunate thing for me, is that I got crewed up with... The skipper that took me, I said, "Why the hell don't you take me Arthur?" Because he was the flight lieutenant and he was acting CO at times, so he was quite well up in the squadron, because you can have group captains as second pilots in those days. Don't know whether you realised that. Rank didn't...we had warrant officer, captains

02:00 with squadron leaders second pilots. I'm digressing. I said, "What the hell did you ever pick me for Arthur?" I was the only person that had any operational experience, that's why he took me. He'd already done a tour as a second pilot. I'll show you the letter; I feel so ashamed at myself at times, what I felt about him till I read that letter, because he treated me as one of his pupils. All the time.

02:30 That's very hard. I tried... He gave a good report about me saying that I was very successful as a navigator, and whether it was he or the CO, and was popular as a crew member, but again this immaturity came in because it stuck in my craw a bit, but after reading that letter I felt very ashamed at myself that I, so much agint him at times. Can you understand,

03:00 a pre-war... He may have been even a headmaster, looking at a 19 year old and he's around about 30, a married man. The things I'd get up to. I remember he was acting CO at one stage. Oh, my god, did all hell break loose over this? A new form of Catalina came through and they landed at Melville Bay where I was at up Arnhem Land and he wanted to have one of these, you know, like the Americans, these big zip bags they carry around.

03:30 I said, "I can get you some zips, Arthur, don't worry." So I paddled out to these new aircraft. They had sleeping bags, I cut all their zips out and took them in. He had his... The parachute section made up the bags for him. Nothing happened till a few days later. A signal came through that someone ought to be shot. 'Where's the zips? They've stolen all the zips'. I said, "Where the hell did you think you got yours?" He was acting CO at the time; there he is with a zip fastener. Went over like a lead balloon, but these

04:00 things didn't impress him, put it that way.

What other things did you get up to like that?

We had an air gunner. There was a big crew on Catalinas. The captain, one pilot, another pilot, one navigator, two radio operators, two flight engineers, a fitter 2A air gunner and a fitter armourer air gunner,

04:30 so you had a permanent crew of nine, so it was a big crew. Our air gunner who we nicknamed, his name was Smith, we named him 'Jerko', he was from the Mallee. I don't think he'd ever gone beyond school at about ten years of age because we all helped him through. He was a terrific fitter and gunner, don't get me wrong, but... His intelligence was there, but his education was very lacking and

05:00 Somewhere or other he bought a ... I was issued with a .38 pistol which I carried. They worked and he

managed to borrow a .22, a long barrelled thing and he went shooting everything up. We went to do a 'toughening up' course in Adelaide. In the heart of Adelaide, with... I said to Jerko, "Put the light out Jerko" so, "Arrgg." Bang! Shoots the bloody light out. I'm, by this time I was the senior member of the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers]. I had to try and discipline these blokes.

05:30 When I was nearly as bad myself.

That was a house light?

Instead of going to the switch he just shot it.

Did he get in trouble for that?

No, the only time he... He and the engineer got into trouble, it was in the Philippines. They went ashore at Tacloban

06:00 which is the provincial capital of Leyte and missed the boat back. We had to go on a trip that night to Hong Kong or Hainan or somewhere and they weren't on board so we had to do it with a short crew. We still had 240 hours up the aircraft before the aircraft went down for a major overhaul and our major overhaul was at, of all places, which I wasn't impressed with, Bowen, because it was the nearest to us. But it was a good holiday, you were going to see girls

06:30 which we never saw, but that's what you thought you were going to see. But 'Quickie', that was the name of the engineer, and Jerko had to stay behind. We wouldn't take them. They had to finish the whole tour without seeing anything there. But that was Arthur Riding again, the school teacher. Do you follow? The discipline.

You've left Sale and you've joined 71 Squadron.

07:00 **Can you share to the point of being transport there?**

This is the Anson Squadron now, in the Brisbane Valley you're referring to. Got the train, that was to Roma Street Station. I had to come up from Victoria first, then it was a motor train you caught from...

07:30 Whatever the other station is at Brisbane. One's in South Brisbane. Anyway, had to... Then when I got to Lowood I was picked up by the company transport and taken to Lowood and that is one place I had an absolute ball. I did in 38 Squadron as well.

You went from Sale and 71 was the first, wasn't it?

Yes.

So you had a great time. Why?

08:00 With a person my own age. We both loved doing things. He let me fly the plane half the time and we just got on well together. That was it. Even Christmas, we went down to Bilinga, it's just a little bit north of Coolangatta. In those days it was a train and all the weekenders were dirt floors. It was just... You went through the bush and I spent the Christmas with his parents.

08:30 Any leave I had I always went to see his parents. We were just very good mates. Inseparable.

Who was that?

Dave Stephenson.

What were you flying?

Ansons. Still at 71 Squadron. We were crewed up there.

What was the purpose of 71 Squadron?

Purely anti sub. Picking up convoys and... I wasn't there at the time, but you've heard the sinking of the Centaur haven't you?

09:00 **Off Brisbane? The hospital ship that was sunk?**

Did you realise over 43 ships were sunk along the Queensland-New South Wales coast by the Japanese? For the convoys coming from overseas, we'd pick them up and, way out at sea and just patrol around them till they came into the port.

What was the approach? A ship would be coming in. You'd... ?

We had depth charges only

09:30 because it was for anti sub and oddly enough, I did find a sub once. And I feel very sorry during the war for submariners. These were the instructions. If you saw a submarine, the onus of recognition lay with the submarine. You didn't have to recognise that that was an enemy or... Every submarine you saw was an enemy. The onus of recognition lay

10:00 with the submarine and they had candles that they'd send off at certain colours, which we'd know then

if they set them off. Whether this was a Jap submarine or Australian or English I don't know. We saw this submarine and so we thought, we've got it this time so... By the time we'd turned, I always remember it. It wasn't submerged it, you couldn't believe it could disappear so fast. By the time we'd turned around it was just bubbles and things on the ocean.

10:30 **Did you still drop the... ?**

We dropped one, but it was hopeless. I knew that. It wouldn't have done any bloody good. But fancy being in a submarine in those days. You had to recognise... . You had to let people know who you were or otherwise you were...

How would you drop depth charges?

They were just like a big drum. They were strapped to the wing.

11:00 One on each wing with a release.

Did you have to release both of them?

No, one at a time you could do.

Would that at all... ?

Yes, it threw the aircraft.

In what respect?

Mining did that, by the way, because your mines weighed a ton, sometimes two tonnes.

Would you have to prep the depth charges?

All that was done. In all cases

11:30 the armings were done on the ground and just an interesting thing to note about mines. They had the most simple arming device. From the firing pin, if we call it that, they put a salt washer so it held everything back. But when it hit the ocean, the salt would dissolve and it was armed. What a simple... But then they became very cunning. Do you mind me telling you about these mines? They had two

12:00 types of mines. They were all aerial mines and bear in mind they were not like what you think of out at sea. These are only effective around about... Not like Sydney Harbour which is deep, around six fathoms or something of that nature. The normal harbours are not like Sydney, very deep. They had acoustic, which is obvious and they had magnetic mines which could go off either magnetically or acoustically. But they had a little dial on them that you could set 1-7 ships. So you could set three ships full, say

12:30 and especially in Indonesian waters, they'd get out and send the patrol out to get rid of the mines, what do they call these, mine detectors, whatever they are, and they'd do it three times, so there's no mines. The fourth ship it would blow up on. It would just be a cunning idea to confuse the enemy. You with that?

You couldn't actually find them for the first two or three passes.

13:00 Even when they found them they only exploded themselves.

Can you talk about finding that sub?

We were just over the ocean and suddenly I saw this conning tower. That's all. I said, "Look, Dave," and so we spun around like mad. Put it in a steep bank and turned around and all I could see was a few bubbles, nothing else. It wasn't very...

13:30 I was just so impressed at what speed.

What height would you fly?

We were only at about, I don't suppose we would have been more than 1000 feet.

How long were you at 71?

I suppose about six months roughly.

Can you share any other missions you went on there?

71? Not really. Nothing ever exciting happened. We

14:00 once did a, for the army, search light co-op so we flew and they were going to pick us up with the search lights. We had to turn all our lights on for the army to find us. Always remember that I thought how stupid this is. Anyway.

They couldn't find you?

This was over Brisbane. We were flying over Brisbane and the search lights were going to pick us up and what have you. It was practice, you know, for the army. Had to turn our lights on to let them know

where we were.

14:30 Another thing I may as well tell you. It had nothing... This is Coolangatta. We were coming back, it must have been near Christmas '43 I suppose. We both saw all these sharks. When you've got shallow water you can see sharks like mad. So whether anything ever came of it or not, we wrote a message down because Ansons didn't fly that fast. You realise that. You could slow it down and we dropped on the sand a message to say that

15:00 all the sharks out there. I didn't see a mass exodus of people or anything.

71 Squadron was basically bringing in the ships?

Yeah. That's all basically.

What were your commanding officers like?

Excellent. Terrific. We had a mess, that if you can imagine. I'll say enamel. Here's the sergeant's mess.

15:30 In the middle was the kitchen, or the cookhouse and next to that was the officers' mess. We both had the same meals. This is what I used to get cranky on Catalinas and their snob appeal I suppose. I can't remember his name. Once a month we used to have a ding, either in the sergeants' mess where all the officers and that would come in. we'd have a real... All get as full as ticks, or the next month we'd go to the officers' mess and have a ding. Sing all dirty songs.

16:00 It was really terrific. I don't remember his name unfortunately.

So it was great camaraderie?

Really great. Yes, terrific camaraderie, because there it didn't matter what rank you were, you were air crew. You had a common, how can I put it? When you were on duty it was a common room you all went to and stayed in so you all were together all the time whether you were squadron

16:30 leaders or sergeants, all together.

I'm just interested on the side issue of coming in for take offs and landings, was there a tower which... ?

There was. But we had no radio contact, so what they used to do is fire a vary light. If it was red, don't land, if it was green, come in to land. And I may as well tell you, they made me duty pilot once. I see an Anson coming in

17:00 so I go to get the vary cartridge. Look up, see another one. That's right. I fired the green for this one and then I suddenly see... "Oh, God. What' happening here. There's bloody aircraft everywhere." So I just fired red cartridges all over the place and start again. There was no accident, so...

Was that at 71 Squadron?

Yeah, but everyone took that as a big joke. You know.

17:30 **Outside your experience of being duty officer, were there close calls or accidents?**

No, not really. One bloke tried to land one night. The wind sock was a steel pole up with a... But it was night time and flare parts used to be kerosene flares. You lit them and... But unfortunately this bloke lit the line too close to this wind sock and he hit the wind sock but he

18:00 didn't do any harm. Just made a bit of a hole in himself. There was nothing really startling there.

You said 71 Squadron was some of the best times of your life? Why?

The comradeship. Where we were, Brisbane virtually. Incidentally, I enjoyed 38 Squadron as well. I did enjoy 42 Squadron. But 38 Squadron - I'm jumping

18:30 here. When I was posted out, because I'd had my experience on Catalinas, I was more senior as a navigator than anyone and I was respected to a hell of a degree, and I did some shocking things, not navigational wise, but on the ground, getting as full as a tick and what have you and the CO from everyone down. I stole his jeep one night. They forgave me all the time. I was really pampered there, so I'll wipe that. I wanted the hamburger one night and someone took his jeep, I remember.

19:00 I thought, "He'll never know." You know how the houses were on stilts. The bugger wanted something himself but there was no bloody jeep! But I'm getting back to it. They accepted that from me. But they'd never accept that on Catalinas.

Sounds like there's a bit of your brother in you.

I suppose there was. I think it's immaturity again. I was too young.

An important part of the archive is songs from the times.

Yes, but I can't repeat those.

19:30 **But the reason I ask, is so we can understand the social context.**

Very, very dirty songs.

But it's important they're not lost for the times.

I'll tell a couple of clean ones first. Have you ever heard of a Walrus aircraft? It had two wings and an engine behind.

20:00 "Once a made designer, had a bloody nightmare. Said he, "I'll design a monstrosity." And whoever flies it is a bloody lunatic. You'll come a juggling with gremlins with me."

Then it goes on, "Juggling with gremlins." And then,

"If you want to evade your income tax, come flying with Walruses with me."

The other one, the famous Wirraway. Did you hear of the Wirraway? The fighter? They had a...

20:30 \n[Verse follows]\n "Wirraways don't worry me. Wirraways don't worry me.\n

Oil spitting fighters with flaps on their wings, jig enough distance and jig enough rings.\n So if a Zero should get on your tail, be cool and don't hesitate.\n Push it right through the gate and blind the poor bastard in oil." \n

That was the Wirraway song. There was another one. "They fly through the sky." This is Catalinas I think.

21:00 \n[Verse follows]\n "They fly through the sky with a nonchalant air.\n

The Zeroes they play with like the tortoise and hare\n And word gets around for the Japs to beware,\n Cat boats are flying tonight.\n Oh, the skipper looks round at his trustworthy crew,\n The observer's asleep and the engineer too," \n

And so on. The man that composed that song, is dead in... He crashed in... What's the bay just out of Sydney? Port Stephens. What's that bay there?

21:30 'Tubby' Higgins. He composed that, but he... He was put on the training course to train other pilots and we used to do our rough water landings in that bay near Port Stephens and he did it too bloody rough. Lost himself and the crew. But he composed that song. The others are too...

How does the rest of that song go?

22:00 I've forgot now.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

25:30 All this, I was introduced to by the CO of 71 Squadron, so I'll put them down to my misspent youth.

So he enjoyed his... ?

Did he ever. In fact we all used to have to stand up and sing a song. We'd all get fairly tanked. By the way, I never drank or smoked till I joined up. In fact the only reason I started smoking, which I don't now.

26:00 On Catalinas, to keep awake, I was issued with tablets. I can't remember what they were. To keep you awake and what I found, I couldn't go to sleep later, you know? Someone suggested I smoke, so I took up smoking.

That helped?

I think it did, so I kept awake. I used to fall asleep, don't get me wrong. Aircraft used to plough on. I'd pick a spot where I think was fairly safe and just hope to hell... Bear in mind the long distances we were travelling.

26:30 **After 71 squadron... ?**

I went to 42, OTU. Operation Training Unit first then to 42 squadron.

So you went from 71 Squadron back to... ?

An operational training unit.

Why did you have to do more training?

Because it's a different... for all of us it was a half a boat and half a plane. It's not a seaplane, it's a

27:00 flying boat. I had to learn all the rules of the water and the sea. If ahead red to sea and port your helm must turn to green and all these dramas. One very important thing I remember was that at midday the bars opened on Her Majesty's ships, so that was a good thing.

In respect to being retrained, were you part of the air force or navy?

I was air force all the time.

27:30 RAAF. Citizen's air force I joined actually.

It was called the OTC, wasn't it?

OTU. Operational Training Unit.

The OTU was where?

Rathmines, just out of Newcastle.

They were teaching you just the marine side?

No. Advanced navigation etc. because they knew you'd have to... I did nothing but astro when I was there for night flights.

28:00 Rarely do any daylight flights because the training was basically to bring you up to a very high standard of navigation. A Catalina had the highest standard of navigation in the whole lot because of the endurance on them, where they had to go.

Then you were transferred to 42 Squadron.

I had the most horrible trip.

28:30 We went to South Australia first and caught a train at Terowie and the Terowie was a train that took us to Alice Springs, then from Alice Springs we got on a truck. It took us then to a place called Birdum. You know they're talking about this railway now, this railway used to run from Birdum to Darwin then. We got another train... I've got photos of the cattle truck. It was all, that we were in and took us then to Darwin.

29:00 Then by DC3 to Gove, where Gough Whitlam was at the time. He was a navigator. I don't know whether you knew that did you? He was a nav on Venturas and Hudsons. That was my introduction to 42 Squadron. Now it's a terrific place. I'll show you photos of the crocodiles and fish, 15 foot nine swordfish we caught. It was

29:30 like the biblical, a land flowing with milk and honey. We were right in this... It was an island, it was a causeway across. Large trees, beautiful sandy beaches. We built a swimming pool which we had to make it sort of shark proof, not shark proof, crocodile proof. Every morning we'd had to work out who would go in first to see... See crocodile marks across the sand.

30:00 It was very enjoyable. The natives, the ones we saw, not the mission... , had never seen Europeans before. They were, how can I put it? They were of fine figure. You know, referring to pure Aboriginal. When you see them in Alice Springs and those places in those days, they were all skinny, spindly legs, very malnutrition look. These natives were very fine figures of men and women, but very primitive.

30:30 The babies' eyes were always fly-blown which is... Their diet of crabs, everything that was available there. They were really a... They weren't at all helpful because... This is what you got to be very careful, because I'm not trying to be racist in any manner here. We had to unload our own, for the fuel it was 44 gallon drums. All the crews had to help unload the ships.

31:00 We built a big fish trap which we'd have to go and empty, but the natives used to beat us to it and take the fish. They weren't... The only people they ever knew were Japanese, pearl divers, so... God I wish I could put this in the right words. But they were very primitive. We lived in tents all the time there, so we were under tent. The orderly room sergeant, his name was

31:30 Bates, had to sleep in the orderly room because it was some big safes there, with I don't know what, codes, what have you. A couple of times they attacked him at night, which a couple of vary cartridges would scare them away. Now, Bates may have annoyed them or something, I don't know what happened. But, there was no problems at all, but there was no mixing, except the mission was different. That was somewhere you could go. They were mission natives.

32:00 Entirely different. They wouldn't help us because they were too far away.

What was the name of the base?

Melville Bay, but don't get mixed up with Melville Island which is hundreds of miles away. Melville Bay.

How far was that from Broome and Darwin?

Miles away. It's in the Gulf, top of Gulf of Carpentaria. But we never actually did any operations from there.

- 32:30 We'd mine up sometimes from there, but there'd never be a direct flight. We'd either work from Darwin or Ginamoc Island or... That's with the Americans. I'll show you the area we covered. I've got a map there of it.

Your base was Melville Bay but you'd refuel at Darwin... ?

All over the place. Ginamoc or Woendi, all over, wherever.

Where would your briefing be? Would that be Melville... ?

No, Darwin always.

- 33:00 Except when we were with the Americans or we'd been briefed by them.

Could you say why you weren't in Darwin? Because of the bombing?

No. I still wonder why. There was already two flying boat bases there, 43 and 20 Squadron were there. I think they wanted a third... It was a new squadron. I came in when it was just started and I was out of it, but after

- 33:30 the war finished it was closed down. It was just to get more Catalinas in different areas I suppose.

You were basically in the middle of nowhere.

Absolutely. That's true. But I used to enjoy... As I said, I was issued with a 38, so I was issued with a Thompson submachine gun, which I used to kill spiders with. You see those dirty big spiders.

- 34:00 The other thing I used to enjoy, which isn't at all cruel, when you came into land, they always had a crash boat that went ahead of you so cleared the water, because there were a lot of crocs there, a hell of a lot of crocs. If you hit a crocodile it would be the finish of the aircraft and you. So you used to have to go out and sweep the bay for them and you carried this machinegun with you and if you saw one you used to fire. You'd never kill a crocodile I'm sure. You'd see a bit of meat sometimes fly off because they're such

- 34:30 Armour-plated things. But it got rid of them. No one ever hit a crocodile.

So there were no accidents of... ?

No. Not hitting crocodiles, no. It was very high discipline as well, there. Strong discipline.

You didn't get in trouble for... ?

I knocked off those zips off the sleeping bags. That didn't go over very big.

What about shooting guns at spiders?

- 35:00 No one worried about that. That was way up in the bush. The only trouble I did get into at one stage. It sounds incredible this. This is getting back to this radar jamming. When I did the radar jamming it was with the Americans. We beat them by an hour. It's written in the squadron's records. I was briefed by the Americans and they brought a little booklet on the success of radar jamming which takes time to get through the system and it ultimately came to our squadron. The adjutant had it. It was

- 35:30 marked 'Top Secret'. I'm the one that gave the what's-his-names to the Americans to do this and they had nothing to do with the Americans. I said, "Can I look at it?" He said, "No, it's only for commissioned officers." That's when I did my temper. He had a big pot belly. He became a famous lawyer I think in Melbourne. I don't know his other name. I called him Bubbleguts. And that name stuck forever more for him as well. They weren't impressed. They said I had a chip on my shoulder about

- 36:00 senior officers, but as I tried to explain to them, Arthur... See, this was the trouble with Arthur. He followed the book exactly. He could be sympathetic, but the law states that it's only Top Secret, it's only to be read by commissioned officers. Therefore you're only a warrant officer, you can't read it. You follow his logic? Whereas today they'd use a bit of bloody common sense wouldn't they? So that went against me a bit, that I got a chip on my shoulder.

Did you have any encounters with the crocs?

- 36:30 No. We caught a couple. I'd love to show you the fish we caught, the 15 foot 9 swordfish. I got a photo in there.

Tell me that story?

I didn't catch it. No one actually caught it. We used telephone wire and put a dirty big hook and a small kangaroo we'd killed as bait and put it out in the bay. The fish by the way was so plentiful there. You've no idea.

- 37:00 It would have been a fisherman's dream, that Melville Bay. We lived on very nice fish. I don't know the names of half of them. This swordfish grabbed the bait, but we couldn't bring him ashore because he was on to telephone wire and he was too strong. Bloody thing going up and down there. Had to go out with a .303 and shoot him. Kill him before we could land him. No one actually could take credit for it, but it was caught at Melville Bay.
- 37:30 **The crocs didn't attack anyone?**
- We never worried about it because... We always worried every morning to who would go for a swim first. We always looked to see if there was a crocodile tracks on the sand. There always were, but if they didn't go into the pool, it was fairly safe to... I've got a photo of the pool as well.
- They never went into the pool?**
- They could have for all I know, at times, but no one ever got caught.
- 38:00 We had to do all our own work there as well. Even to cutting the fire wood for the stove, you know for the kitchen, thing like that. No help whatsoever. I'm not trying to be anti the Aboriginal people, please don't get me wrong. They were a group to themselves and they had their... That was their thing. But again, if you were at Go, it would have been a different story because you've got a missionary Aboriginal which is entirely different.

Tape 6

- 00:42 **What were the main missions you did with the 42 Squadron?**
- Basically, it was purely mining harbours, such as Surabaya in Java, and Hong Kong, Leyte Straits even down as far as Singapore
- 01:00 to the Banda Straits. I did have a couple that did stick in my mind, one was Surabaya. Coming in at night there, because it was always night you laid the mines. The search lights, I imagine this man must be standing on the... this little grid thing because they'd hit and then they'd bounce up again. He couldn't just get them down low enough to get us. I mentioned about Hong Kong, laying their, and being told
- 01:30 I'd be thrown overboard if I didn't do the run. I did a, one lot of trips which was a terrible waste of time. Putting 25 pound bombs in the aircraft in the blisters and stacks of beer bottles. You ever heard of this before? We used to get over a Japanese aerodrome and spend all night dropping beer bottles. They'd think they, you know, they'd whistle a bit and they'd think they were bombs and then they'd
- 02:00 wake up to the fact they weren't bombs. Then we'd throw a few 25 pounders over to make sure they'd wake up that they were. I don't know who thought of this brilliant idea, but it was a harassment. One thing that stuck into my memory very strongly. We were called... It's in the log book there, to do a, act as a go between sort of for the army on the landing of Labuan in Borneo. And they hadn't, when we took off
- 02:30 Labuan hadn't been taken, but when we arrived, they hadn't taken the aerodrome and they'd taken part of the air strip and we were going to be their communications, if you follow. We tried to row ashore in a round dinghy. We went in circles and an army captain came out in a boat and took us ashore and four hours later he was dead. He got shot because there was a bit of sniping going on. Anyway, the next day, still got the... We're in a tent then.
- 03:00 These army blokes were saying, "God, I wouldn't fly in an airplane. Holy Sally. You must risk your lives flying in an airplane." Bear in mind flying wasn't thought of much in those days as... I thought, my God. Fancy being on the ground with these blokes taking pot shots at you all the time and what have you. And I saw a little bit of a creek, which I thought I'd have a wash in which I did, and the leeches got on to me and I pulled them off. But I don't know whether you know about leeches. The blood just streams. You can't...
- 03:30 They must do something to make the blood thin. So I thought... So I went into the salt water. As I did, Japanese bodies started coming up around me and I thought, my God, these blokes get five and six a day, or whatever it was, six and six a day, for being in the army. Give me the flying boat any day. I thought those poor blokes, to put up with that all the time. It was a landing.
- There were bodies lying in the water?**
- 04:00 They were sort of semi... It wasn't a very deep water, and they must have stirred up the gas in there must have made them rise up, you know? They sort of semi floated. Very bloated. They were fairly fresh. They wouldn't have been...
- Was it a mass grave?**
- No, no, they were just killed in the landing. I suppose later on they went and buried them all.

That would have been quite horrific.

It wasn't very pleasant at the time. But, I don't

04:30 like talking about things like that, because later on... I may as well tell the full story here. When I was on Dakotas, I came into Labuan. This is after the war had finished, just after the war, to pick up POWs and also to... The Dutch were being tossed out of Indonesia by the... And we were picking up all the, a lot of Dutch refugees. I was staying in a tent one night in Labuan. I had a mosquito net and everything around me and I could feel something with my feet.

05:00 My mind, from boyhood stories I was thinking, this must be an immense python coming up to swallow me or something. I leapt out of bed. What it was, it was rats. Eating the soles of my feet. There were that many rats there and the pilot I was with, he... I woke him up and his hand was just one mass of blood. The rats had started to try and eat while we were asleep. That's true. You ever heard of rats doing that? They must be bloody hungry rats.

05:30 **Where was that?**

Labuan. Borneo.

This was where the bodies were rising in the water?

They'd gone by then. This is well after that.

Where was the tent?

Just an ordinary area where we'd pitched it. I can't remember now. Near the aerodrome I think. Because the Indonesians hated the Dutch and they were doing everything possible to try and harass them as well.

What did you do to get rid of the rats?

06:00 **Well, we hardly slept all night. We just kept awake.**

Did they gnaw through the tent to get into the tent?

No, the tent was wide open. I'm trying to think who I was flying with. But enough of these tales.

You came to Labuan... ?

Purely as a communication and to set up a base for mining once the island had been taken. We did some runs as well to mine Banda Straits,

06:30 which is the entrance to Singapore harbour. The Straits of Malacca, coming up Banda Straits there. We set it up as a base, then we refuelled and took off from there. I only did a couple of trips there.

You had all these missions you went on. You landed at certain places then have to... ?

Stay there.

How did the sequence of events work? What was

07:00 **the timeline of places that you went to for these missions?**

If you went to one of... A very important one was Tacloban, which was the Gulf of Leyte. Just bear in mind this is before Manila was taken. That's the capital of the... We'd spend a, most probably a night and a day there, the ship refuelled, boat refuelled and we'd take off. Well, for instance that one, the mining at Manila harbour,

07:30 I spent, we spent ten hours over the target dropping silver paper. That caused a... the Japanese radar couldn't pick an aircraft up. See, we had all these other aircraft flying under us. Can you follow what I get at? These strands of silver paper dropping from the sky. Their radar was picking that up.

How did you know where their radar was?

We didn't know where it was. We just flew, from Bataan along to Corregidor, right out over Manila. Kept on dropping...

08:00 We had stacks and stacks of this paper. It was only strips of little silver paper. I sent some of them to the war museum. They sent me a very nice letter back thanking me for it.

Who was the evil genius that thought of that?

I don't know. But you could follow what I'm getting at can't you. Radar picks up metal, doesn't it, so if you have the whole sky full of metal, how will you know which is an aircraft and which is metal. That was the whole thing.

Was this a common practice?

We were the very first to use it

08:30 in the Pacific. But I presume in Europe they would have used it, because many of the great ideas came from Europe didn't they?

You'd be above... ?

We'd be well above all the... The others came in at around 300 to 600 feet. We'd be up about 5000 I suppose.

How did you know there wouldn't be flak from underneath or... ?

Well, you don't know till you get it. You don't look for those things either. I didn't.

09:00 **Would you actually keep moving or would you stay in one spot?**

I kept moving, oh, gosh yes. We kept on flying all the time.

It's quite extraordinary.

Bombing, I was never very successful at it. The few bombing raids I did were not very successful. I know that. I saw a big grass fire once. That was all I ever did.

You were doing bomb aiming as well?

I was a bomb aimer as well.

09:30 **Were you bomb aiming on those missions as well?**

Mm

How different are navigating and bomb aiming?

Entirely different.

Can you give us an overview of bomb aiming?

Bomb aiming was like a chap sitting a gun. He's got the bomb site, but it's just accidental, not accidental, but I was a navigator, bomb aimer, so instead of carrying a bomb aimer, they'd carry

10:00 a navigator who could do the bomb aiming. Why carry a bomb aimer all that distance just to aim a few bombs? Do you follow? So you've got the one man who will... And that's why I did so many courses.

What kind of bombs were you aiming?

Mine weren't much at all, round about 50 pounds, something like that, weren't anything startling. The mines were the startling things because they weighed up to a tonne each. They were just like a big

10:30 drum, that was all. A long cylinder. They had a parachute on them, which acted, acted as a drogue, so they wouldn't hit the water too hard, because as I explained, if they hit the water too hard they'd blow up.

What are the logistics of bomb aiming? Do you need to work out navigational points like you would... ?

No. The logistics of the bomb aiming.... You had to know where you were, to bring over, bring

11:00 yourself over that target. If it was a ship you'd have to... for instance, I always said... I did very little bomb aiming. It was so minor; it was near the end of the war. To me it was just a waste of time. It was a Japanese camp, so I was the navigator. I brought us to that island where the Japanese camp were, then I, by map reading brought us to the camp and dropped the bombs. I doubt they did much harm.

11:30 **Were you mine laying as well?**

Yes. All the time.

Would you navigate to the point?

I had to navigate to the... I had to act as the navigator on the aircraft. I had to then take over the aircraft and bring it to the, what we called the datum point. You had to pick a point that you were going to start your mine laying from cos it was essential that they knew where the mines were.

12:00 If not, their own ships would blow up wouldn't it? When the war was finished. I presume at this time they were thinking of either invading Hong Kong and later on Singapore and that's why they, you know, prior to the, Hiroshima. I'd finished my tour before the war finished incidentally, so I know nothing about what happened up there. it's hard to explain. You navigated as a navigator, and once you got near where you were, you map read.

12:30 And brought the plane over with a, "Left, left, steady. Right, steady." And so on. When you, "Left, left," you turned to the left. "Right." You turned to the right.

Can you give an overview of how mines are laid?

Yes. It was all done with admiralty charts and they gave

13:00 distances and a bearing from a certain point. That certain point is my datum point. So they say, "Five hundred yards. Another one five hundred yards," and so forth. So I had to get to that datum point. Get the pilots to steer that heading. Prior to all this, I worked out what I expect the winds to be, because the winds had a big bearing on it. I then handed up to the pilots, this is prior to getting down the front and taking the nose off.

13:30 See that front there? I stuck my head out the very front there. On this piece of paper I'd have 45 seconds, 90 seconds and so forth. The radio operator would have that. When I said, "Go, we're over the datum," he'd start counting the seconds. We'd press a, the mine release button or bomb release button, or pull the jettison toggle.

14:00 And if it was two mines I only pulled the jettison toggle. Then I also gave him on that piece of paper, that when I finished, to fly, say, 270 to ten minutes, 360 for five, so we'd get out of the harbour and then I'd come back and start work again.

What are the differences between the bomb release and the jettison toggle?

I only did that. Look, I had lots of odd ideas I did which other people may not have done. I felt that

14:30 with a mine on each side, if you got a hang up, you would never get it with a jettison because a jettison was a positive action that released it. That was it, whatever was held on that wing with a jettison toggle, would jettison and I preferred to use it. Just a matter of... It's like, I used to do this as well. On take off, before we'd set heading, I'd get them to... It would be daylight and I'd get them to fly four different courses. Due north,

15:00 due east, due south and due west. And while they were flying those courses, I'd take a bearing on the sun and I'd find out what the true heading we should be. You with it? And they'd read their heading so I'd then, because the mines were going to affect the compasses, all that metal. So I'd then work out a sort of chart that I could... It was called deviation. The difference between the magnetic heading, which was a magnetic...

15:30 And caused by the mines. You with that, what I'm trying...and that made it a lot more accurate that way. I don't know whether other navigators did that. I always used to do it.

Could you explain the jettison toggle more?

I'll put it this way. If you're on a bomb raid, you could have had four different bombs and things on it, couldn't you?

16:00 They could be timed to drop at certain intervals and so on. If you used a jettison, the whole of that lot would go in one go. You with me? We've only got one on, so I'd rather have the jettison and know it's going to go without any danger of a mishap because it was electrical circuit going through to the, where... The jettison was a toggle. You pulled it. I didn't pull it, by the way. Sorry, I should have said. I got the pilots to pull it.

It's actually a release system that the bombs were attached to, with this pulley... ?

16:30 Not bomb. The mine.

The mine, and then you'd pull the, and release... ? Were they releasing them from the air or were you on the water?

Oh, no, we wouldn't be on the water. From the air. I wouldn't like to land in the middle of Hong Kong harbour during the war. You flew at about 300 feet and dropped them and they had this drogue, it slowed them down, so it wouldn't explode.

They had a strogue?

A drogue. A parachute for a better name.

17:00 **They would fall to the earth, then wouldn't explode until... ?**

They had to be armed. The salt water held the firing pin back. A salt washer, I beg you pardon. When the salt washer dissolved it may take, I don't know. I've no idea. It may have taken six hours. It may have only taken two hours. It dissolved the...? Can you follow? If I have something holding a pin back and you release it, it will go forward won't it. So the

17:30 salt washer held... It was a very cunning, simple move, wasn't it?

Did you ever have to dismantle a bomb?

We were not allowed to, under any circumstances, to know anything about those mines. We had, wherever we went, they kept the explosive systems etc in cold rooms and wherever we went, it was always an American did all the arming. All we had to do was drop them. They wouldn't ever

- 18:00 let us know anything about those mines. Except the fact that as I was saying, they were magnetic, acoustic, and you could set up to seven ships passing before they'd explode. How many they set, I've no idea. It was up to the navy if they set five, or three or how many ships they wanted to... Incidentally, it is amazing the amount of shipping that those aerial mines sunk during the war.
- 18:30 **The Americans were privy to information about the mines.**
- They were American mines as well.
- This must have been after 42?**
- This was during 42 Squadron.
- This is after Pearl Harbour?**
- Oh, yes. Well and truly. It was 1944, the mining of Manila harbour.
- What did you think of the Americans?**
- Their food was fantastic. We had on board
- 19:00 Catalinas, our own galley, you know, that you did your own cooking because it was such long trips. We didn't do it, the air gunner, the air gunner did the cooking. The 2A, I think. The Americans supplied us with steak and everything you could think of. It was fantastic food. And then when I went to their messes, ice-cream. After all, I'm living in an era where we had bully beef, what they used to call tinned goldfish, which were herrings in tomato sauce. Dehydrated cabbage
- 19:30 and dehydrated grated potato. And mentioning that, getting back to Labuan, we asked the army to victualise us, they gave us a kerosene tin full of dehydrated potato and dehydrated cabbage, so we didn't have too much to eat on that trip. The Americans were fantastic. Rather naïve in lots of ways. I don't know
- 20:00 whether you noticed, the American navy is dry. Did you know that? You're not allowed drink on board an American ship. So what they used to have, I'll call for a better name, I think they called them rest centres. They'd pick somewhere on the land, where everyone could go to the bar. They'd have a bar there and have a drink. They used to issue a ration out to everybody, which was very limited, I suppose, and if they could buy more beer off you or something,
- 20:30 they'd only be too happy. We used to just keep on staying on the same queue going around and around all the time. We'd get a stack of ration tickets, buy all this beer. Get a fair bit of beer ourselves and flog the rest to the Americans and they never woke up to that. Sounds... To me, I thought that was very naïve of them. One chappie there, this wasn't our crew, used to make spears and they were genuine Aboriginal spears he used to flog off. Spent all his time making these spears
- 21:00 back in Melville Bay and selling them as genuine Aboriginal spears. They were very naïve. As is said, their ignorance was, general ignorance was very appalling because the little I learnt at school, I learnt about American. "1492," you know, "Columbus sailed the ocean blue" and all this sort of thing. They knew so little about Australia. They knew naught.
- You mentioned also there**
- 21:30 **were racial divisions in their corps.**
- Well, they had, in those days, where I was anyway, Negroes were absolutely separated from the Caucasians, is that what you...?
- Was there any rivalry between Australians and Americans?**
- No. No, in fact they used to, when we were taking off they all got on the side of their ships and cheer us. All the time. They feted us very well.
- With the American**
- 22:00 **rule of having no alcohol on their ships, was it just on ships?**
- Only on ships. On the land was all right.
- How were the Americans in response to things like brothels... ?**
- I never... I'm not trying to be a, what's the... ? I never saw brothels or anything like that at all. When I was with them it was all on active duties place, there was no civilians left so I wouldn't know how they... I do know
- 22:30 that during the war, and I'm not... This isn't a personal little experience. Albert Street in Brisbane was the street of brothels. I suppose you've heard that haven't you before? The Americans used to line up there and the Australians used to queue up and they'd sell their position to the Americans and so on, but I was never involved in that. At one stage, this is at Brisbane, there was quite a, how can I put it? Quite a big shindig in one of the main streets.

- 23:00 The Australians stole a keg of beer and rolled it down the streets of Brisbane. They sold it from the American mess and there was a terrific... Nothing to do with air force. I think it was the night division, when they'd come back to... I'm not sure, but... But I got on particularly well with the Americans, put it that way. And they looked after... That's why I say I'm rather pro-American. I'm also pro-American when you consider how many Americans died during the Second World War.
- 23:30 It's just incredible. With Bev I went to Normandy, to see the beach of Omaha. Have you ever heard of Omaha Beach? And I looked at that, and I said to Bev, "How?" I didn't realise this? I said, "How could anyone land there? Who would...?" It was just straight cliffs. You're thinking of Gallipoli. And I spoke to one of the locals and they said, "It was a terrible error. They were never meant to land there. Someone made a..." and I think it was something like 50,000 got killed. There was a big grass... I wouldn't... They said, "Do you want to go to the graveyard?" and I said, "No."
- 24:00 They had a big graveyard there for the Americans and the Americans, God, they lost life. Even today, 501 at... Whether you believe in Iraq or not, I'm not here to delve into that, but it's... 501 Americans have lost their lives there already haven't they? They're always... I just find it incredible how many Americans lose... And how many have lost their lives in the defence of Australia.

What about things like talks about

- 24:30 **VD [Venereal Disease] or, discussions and lectures... ?**

No. Never had any. Used to have a short arm. You've heard of a short arm for avons? Had those occasionally but that was all.

Can you describe one of them?

Oh, well, it's just a cough. You've heard of that haven't you? "Cough." Bear in mind, I was never associated... I'm not... Nearly all of my war time I never saw women and so I was never involved in...

- 25:00 You mentioned brothels. I don't know whether I would have ever gone to a brothel or not. I don't know because I was never in that position. And you wouldn't find... It's a... This island which we were at was called Genamock [?] and you'd never find women there because all the civilians would have fled by then.

Did the Americans have different attitudes to women than the Australians?

I wouldn't know. Their discipline was a lot higher than ours, believe it or not. cos

- 25:30 while we were there we used to listen... They had a PA [Public Address] system and you'd hear on it, "Private Such-and-Such," they weren't privates, whatever, "Seaman, able seaman," whatever it is, had been given six months jail for refusing to do some very minor task. You know, this is... they were very strict on their, I felt they were, on their discipline, compared to ours.

What are some examples of Australian hi-jinks

- 26:00 **and larrikin behaviour?**

They're always up to mischief, Australians. They couldn't help themselves. We always carried a billy can with us wherever we went. When you had your cup of tea we always boiled the billy, which I think amused the Americans a lot. It helped a lot because Americans had iced water and they... A lot of them had tummy trouble through that, getting cramps through the iced water, but we were drinking, like Michael [interviewer] here, hot water. I don't know about... We didn't do any great hi-jinks,

- 26:30 I don't suppose, that I can think of. Not against the Americans.

What about just generally?

Well, if we could take the starch out of someone we would if we could.

You mentioned some of the politics of the air crews. Was that most apparent in the Catalinas?

Yes, because I don't know why, but it was more apparent, a little bit of discrimination and rank.

- 27:00 I'll show you my log book there. We were warrant officer captains, and we had a group of captains second officer because they were all... This is very hard to understand. Automatically, if you got a commission in 18 months you went up to flight lieutenant and you may go further. But it didn't matter what your rank was. When you were flying it didn't make you the CO of that squadron. Now, my skipper was CO for a while and he was only a flight lieutenant and we had a group captain there, Group Captain Campbell,

- 27:30 but my skipper was more... Of the knowledge of how to handle that squadron than that group captain. He had just been posted there. Are you with me? It's hard, because if it's army, you think a colonel is such and such, it goes down to a major. Well, that didn't work in the Air force. Not in air crew, I should say.

Can you remember any situation where that distinction between air crew became apparent?

I don't believe this, but Quickie, he's dead now, our

28:00 engineer, flight engineer, Haughton was a warrant officer skipper and he used to reckon that they always dished out the worst aircraft to him, but whether that's true or not is another matter. But can you tell me how you can have a captain doing same duty, one's a warrant officer and one's a squadron leader. They're both doing the same duty. It's... And even... I told you

28:30 we chopped fire wood etc, we used a saw. Well, all the air crew did it. Didn't matter, I'd do it with my skipper. He was a flight lieutenant. We'd both help to, and loading fuel. I told you we had to load the 44 gallon drums off the barge. We call got stuck into those sort of things.

Was there any resentment from the lesser ranks?

No. Don't think so. We never got any resentment. In fact... I just recently had an 80th birthday and

29:00 one of the chappies that was on Catalinas on the ground, gave a little speech. And embarrassing me tremendously. Telling me what a job I did. You know, all this sort of... Most embarrassing. But we were all in together. That was the way... Well, that was the way I looked at things. I never found any other way.

Did people in higher ranks pull rank over others or try and flaunt their position?

I suppose they would, but they'd get away with everything because...

29:30 I'll tell you a story. If a lower rank had done this, he'd be on a charge. I mentioned this Group Captain Campbell. He ultimately became a captain and he was a very, a fairly old man, to my way of thinking. He may have been about 30, but he was a... He decided, we were at West Bay, that's at the very western point of Australia, doing runs of Surabaya at the time, so he thought he'd do a practice mine running.

30:00 This is in Australia at West Bay. So he got the navigator the datum point and everything. They got so carried away they dropped the mine and mined the harbour in West Bay. Only with one mine but if that had been a low rank he would have been in a lot of trouble. But a group captain could get away with those things. That's part of life isn't it? These CO's, like at the National Bank at the moment.

30:30 They're Scot free, aren't they? How many millions gone west?

Any other stories you can remember with... ?

Not with 42 squadron so much. I told you about knocking the zip fasteners off. The zips out of the sleeping bags. I went looking for gold. We got a brilliant idea. We got a boat and thought we'd go looking for... We never found it.

Where did you go looking for gold?

In Arnhem Land.

31:00 We didn't find any, so don't worry. I got the brilliant idea. I said, "Look, there must be gold here. There's always gold in these places." We panned but didn't get anything. I'll tell you now, there's no gold.

How long did you spend panning?

We spent a whole day.

You mentioned

31:30 **St Elmo's fire.**

St Elmo's fire. That's a rather startling thing. The goggles were brass around here and St Elmo's fire. It starts off, the tips of the air screws go blue and there's flames. It's like lightening, but it's got no... It can't earth so it can't hurt you and then it ran across, right across my goggles, these blue flames.

32:00 Won't start a fire or anything and they call it St Elmo's fire. Haven't you ever heard of it? The old sailing boats used to get them in certain areas. It was in the, round Surabaya this happened.

So it would run... ?

Yeah, like lightening that's, just flickers, flickers across like that.

And it would actually charge around your goggles?

Yeah, the goggles then off again. But I'm not earthed, so what could happen?

32:30 Do you follow? It's like electricity. If you hold one end and you're not earthed and you're not holding the negatives line, it won't hurt you will it?

What was the feeling of that sensation?

Rather uncanny. Very uncanny.

And it didn't have any negative implications?

No, not really. These things happen don't they?

This was quite common?

I don't think it is common. But if you like to check up somewhere,

33:00 it was around the Java area and I have a feeling that that could be an area that has this... I read up later about it. The old sailing boats used to get it on the rigging and so on.

During this time with 42 squadron, you must have heard stories about the Japanese.

Oh, everything you heard was terrible. Actually, they told you the most terrible

33:30 stories of the Japanese. Supposed to make you... Well, for instance, I mentioned rank. No one would fly if they were a group captain with their rank on. They'd drop themselves down to a flight lieutenant or a flying officer, because they... We were told, I really believe this. If you were shot down, the Japs would only behead you. There was no taking of POWs. Whether that was true or not, I don't know, but I have a feeling it was true. I do know one

34:00 chap that was beheaded so... So you were given that, you know, as a... Early in the piece you were given such stupid tales that you wouldn't believe.

Like what?

Well, they always depicted Japanese with big horn rimmed glasses and they reckoned they couldn't fly well at night because of bad eye sight and all this. This is utter rot. Could you imagine all that? Which I took for a grain of salt as well. I'm not that stupid.

34:30 **Did you have any personal contact with any Japanese people?**

No. never.

What about any POWs?

I had contact with a lot of POWs, yes. I went to Singapore to pick up the, in the Dakotas to pick up the POWs. By then, still, I didn't have any contact with the Japanese, but they were in a shocking state. The only ones we picked up were stretcher cases, you know? We had a nurse on board and we used to leave... I was based then at Morotai

35:00 I don't know whether you know where Morotai is, it's an island. Half way, I'll say between here. It's up north, but... There was a hospital there. We only got as far as Morotai, I don't know what happened after that, but the ones we had were shocking. It really was frightening.

Can you give an overview of that and what contact you had with these POWs?

Well, they were always so grateful to us and I always

35:30 chatted, you know, to them and that. But they didn't tell me anything greatly about their stories. They were more gratitude of being picked up and going home. Some spoke about their wives, but I can't remember very much. We just chatted in a general way.

Who were they?

Australians.

What kind of state were they in?

A very bad state.

36:00 Through malnutrition they were as thin as rakes and I don't know what was wrong with them, but we had stretchers on the, that they used to fit. Some of them were walking cases and they weren't at death's door, but to me they looked damned close to it.

Do you know how long, and where they were POWs?

They would have, the ones I picked up, they would have been in Changi most probably, because it was Singapore I picked them up from.

When you were given

36:30 **instructions for a mission like that, what would they tell you?**

They didn't tell us anything. They just said you're going to Singapore to pick up a load of POWs. That's it. And drop them off at Morotai. We were doing a shuttle all the time, Morotai to Singapore. Sometimes Borneo.

Imagine I'm in the plane with you and you're landing at Changi for the first time, what could you see, and what happened?

You didn't land at Changi. We only landed at a place called

- 37:00 Selita, I think it was called. They'd already been picked up there. They were all waiting just to be put on the aircraft. I remember once, we spent the night there at times and we had newspaper reporters with us and one of them got a sword, one of those samurai swords and he was tearing around the place, threatening to cut everyone's, this is the newspaper reporter, he got too much grog in him. We had to... Yes, he went berserk with this sword. But he didn't hurt anyone.
- How many POWs were gathered there at that**
- 37:30 **first point?**
- Gosh, a lot. I just wouldn't know, because we'd go off then we'd come back to the aircraft and they'd have loaded them on and they'd have a nursing sister with them, so I didn't really have great personal contact with them at all.
- How many POWs would fit on one flight?**
- I've forgotten now. Say, about 20 or something like that. We didn't have that many because they were stretcher cases and...
- 38:00 **Did they reveal anything about the situations they came from?**
- They didn't talk about the war at all, to my knowledge. I can't... Well, neither of us wanted to anyway. I didn't want to talk to them about and we just chatted about just every day things, just having a chat to somebody.
- Is that a sort of Australian thing, do you think?**
- I think it's an Australian thing.
- 38:30 **Not going into the nitty gritty of what had been. So you didn't find out much information at all from them?**
- No.
- Just going back to 1942 when you were mine laying...**
- That was 1944.
- That was '44, '42, sorry? So it was '44 that you were mine laying?**
- And '45.
- In terms of those missions...**

Tape 7

- 00:49 **We're just going to start with this letter.**
- This was written to me on 5th September 1945 by the skipper of my plane. He was also the flight commander
- 01:00 and at times the acting CO of the squadron. "Dear Bob. And how's the...?" It's very hard to read this. "And how's the leave going? Sorry to have missed you on the turn around that last afternoon at Rathmines. You probably thought I was in a great hurry and very unappreciative of your effort. However old boy, in spite of being the most
- 01:30 "Harassed navigator in the RAF," I used to tell him that. I told him I was the most harassed in the RAF, "What little successes we had was due to your good work. You probably thought at times I was a bit of slave driver and didn't give you credit for your work. That was not the case, for I, and the rest of the crew, very quickly realised we were very fortunate having such a conscientious navigator as you are. So old fellow,
- 02:00 "I won't labour the point, but I want you to accept my very personal thanks for your cooperation and keenness. Well, to discuss lighter matters..." I won't go on further it's about to me and his wife. I was very touched because I used to tell him I was the most harassed. I used to go to town on him and here he is, the CO writing to tell me that the successes he had was due to my effort and why the hell he couldn't ever have told me at the time, I don't know.
- 02:30 **That wasn't 'Bubbleguts' was it?**
- No, he was the adjutant.
- What do you mean about being the most harassed navigator? Can you give examples?**
- No, I made that up. I can't recall half of it now. I really don't know. It's just a term I used.

- 03:00 When he'd get a bit cranky at me at times, I'd say, "Well, I'm the most harassed navigator in the RAF." To quieten him, sort of thing, we had a rather odd crew. The chief flight engineer, who's just recently died, he was at least ten years older than me. He was a peculiar sort of person, because he went to Geelong Grammar.
- 03:30 Don't know whether you know Geelong Grammar at all? Ever heard of it? And if anything ever went wrong, Quickie would say, "I can understand that going wrong. You weren't a Geelong Grammarian." But he used to do that to let everyone know he went to Geelong Grammar. But no, we got on fairly well altogether.

Can you give an overview of the kinds of personalities that were in your air crew?

Yes. I've got Arthur Riding, who was very conscientious

- 04:00 headmaster, ex-headmaster school teacher and everything had to go, it was funny. There was no straight line, it was either right or wrong with Arthur. I think it was fair enough because I feel as though we survived the tour because of Arthur because he used his own logic which is a good thing. The second pilot, we only had the two, he was a nice enough bloke but he never did anything much. I never saw him take off once.
- 04:30 Always Arthur took off and take offs at times, with mines on board, they'd be stripped to the waist, both hands... The stick was between the two, they'd be hauling back with all their strength to try and get the aircraft off the water cos with all that weight and full tanks, sometimes it would take nearly six miles to take off, to get off the water. Because you haven't got brakes or anything. It was very hard work. You had to have that second pilot,
- 05:00 help pull that stick back. Do you realise what I'm getting at? cos you've got the drag of the water on the flying boat. You've got to get that. You go on a speed boat till you get up on the step. You with me?

It's a unique machine the Catalina, in that you've got water and air.

- 05:30 The air gunners, which is, the only thing that ever occurred in the RAAF. All other air gunners, in RAAF came through the Empire Air Training scheme. They were either failed as bomb aimers, because air gunners. They were wireless operators that could have failed as wireless operators, became air gunners and so on. So they were all under the Empire Air Training scheme. It was automatic promotion. They could get commissions and so forth. The air gunners on the Catalinas
- 06:00 were all recruited from ground personnel. They had to be qualified other than being an air gunner. So they had to be, for instance, the fitter 2A was an air gunner because he knew air frames. Could repair the air frames. You're in the air for sometimes, for over 24 hours, so who's going to fix things? The fitters 2Es were engineers. They were air gunners and they were fitters from the engines. The fitter-armourer was an armourer who
- 06:30 knew how to fix all the guns. You with me? But they were all recruited from the ground. Some of them, they were given a sergeant's stripes and when the tour was finished, they were put back to LACs [Leading Aircraftsmen], some of them. I thought it was very hard. That was only on Catalinas, because they had to have these technical, had to have technical air gunners, put it that way, instead of straight air gunners. Your crew knew their, knew the aircraft backwards.

07:00 How many on the crew all up?

Nine, permanent crew.

Were there any other guys in the crew that stood out at personalities?

Jerko, as I tell you, the chappie that we... who's the fitter armourer because... You've never seen 'dad and Dave' have you? Remember Dave? He was just a typical Dave. You couldn't help but like Jerko and he had that slow drawl and when I...

- 07:30 They nicknamed me Tracker and when I'd discipline him on something or when I'd go off because I was, they were all in my tent and I was responsible for them, he was the sergeant and I was the warrant officer and I'd say, "Jerko, you shouldn't do those sort of..." "Tracker," he'd say, "Oh, Tracker." He was a character. Fell in love with a girl at Rathmines called Emily. I'll always remember this. He married Emily incidentally.
- 08:00 He also had another friend at Rathmines, they used to call him, I don't know why, 'the Skull'. The Skull was still at Rathmines when Jerko and our crew were in Melville Bay and someone or other out of teasing, told Jerko that the Skull was going out with his girlfriend. He was determined to marry Emily. It was his first love and he was going to marry her.
- 08:30 So we got information that a Cat was coming in, that the Skull was on board. So what do you think Jerko wanted to do? He grabbed a Thompson submachine gun and he wanted to have a duel with Thompson submachine guns, against this Skull. Can you imagine such a ridiculous... ? And I'm in the middle of all this. I'm only 19 or 20 at the time, trying to stop all this. But that was his outlook, you know? It was his girlfriend and don't want you mucking around with... It turned out that he wasn't... It was just people
- 09:00 pulling his leg apparently. Anyway I won't... But that was Jerko. The fitter 2A was quite a... They were

nearly all married. The captain was married, the second pilot was married, two wireless air gunners were married. The fitter 2A was married and the fitter... The only one that wasn't married was Jerko and myself that weren't married. So you can imagine that crew...

09:30 When I mention Hong Kong, they're all married. They're wanting to see their wives again, aren't they? When I wanted to go... Make sure I laid the mines properly they were would have been quite happy to have dropped them and gone. But only as a married man, I realise now... Are you married at all? Michael looks married. He looks it. You know, your first responsibility is your wife.

10:00 **What was the age range of the nine people in the crew?**

All except Jerko and myself were at least ten years older than us, which is... Doesn't sound much, ten years, at your age, but when you... I had my 21st birthday in 42 squadron and when you're having people there that are 32 or 33, it's a big difference in age and outlook and thought etc.

10:30 **How easy was it to correspond back home?**

I'm a terrible letter writer and I let my mother down very badly. I didn't correspond very well. In fact, that Billy Barber that I showed you the photo, was in Darwin. His Liberator crashed, but they never found the body and his... Adelaide River, there's a cemetery there but they've got a obelisk with the names inscribed reported missing, he

11:00 wrote to my mother because I was too lazy to write a letter. He knew I was being lazy, so he wrote to Mum instead, which was very nice of him. I didn't write very often. I would have wrote in about once every couple of, once a month or so, but some people, you know, write constantly. My brother did.

What about the married guys on the crew?

They wrote constantly, yes.

Must have been hard for them. Did they tell you... ?

No, I was too young

11:30 for them to express any of their opinions to me. They may have amongst themselves, but it's like... Fancy talking to someone about marriage when they are just our of puberty virtually themselves. No, they never discussed it.

Did age become a point of dispute?

Not a point of dispute, no. But I never could get over that barrier

12:00 of friendship, which I had in both 71 and the other squadron, 38 Squadron because I was dealing with people in my own age group. And I got on very well with them. As Arthur said, I was very popular crew member, but I never had that... I couldn't discuss all my thoughts etc with them because they were too old. Hope that sums up.

You mentioned the Catalina

12:30 **takes a long time to lift off. Can you describe that take off process?**

Yes. It's very noisy. To begin with there's no insulation at all and you're on a hull. We carried plasticine with us, believe it or not, and I'll explain that in the landing. Forgive my crudeness here. If it was a rough landing, you'd blow a rivet. Have you been in Europe? What's that little boy that's

13:00 There's a famous... what's that statue? I've been there, somewhere in Europe. A statue of a little boy. He's peeing on a fountain. Obviously you've never heard of it. I'm sorry. I thought you may have been aware of it, but if you weren't, reminded me, if you changed a child's napkin, boy's napkin and he pees and it goes straight up. Well, that's what is used to be like in landing. We'd have all this, so we'd run around with plasticine plugging the holes. cos they were only rivet holes.

13:30 Anyway, I digressed.

Would that be a regular thing that would happen?

Oh, yes. Regularly. You carried the plasticine. Later on the fitters came and re-riveted the holes, sheer a rivet off and...

Was it a risk?

Not really. It's a boat hitting the water very hard, something's got to give sometimes. But in take off, as I said, very noisy.

14:00 I used to count the seconds for them, just out of curiosity, to see how long it would be to take off. Sometimes it would take... You imagine you've been in a Boeing. Sometimes we'd take a minute and three quarters. You sit on the ground in a Boeing for a minute and three quarters. Do you think you'd ever get off the ground? In that noise, there's a terrific noise level. If it's a still sea, like a mirror, it's all drag, cos there's no waves to break under the

14:30 hull. You follow? You've got to get that hull up out of the water and the first thing you've got to get up is like a speed boat when you give it full bore, it comes up, and they call that on the step. So you've got to bring that plane right up on that rear step, then you've got to get it airborne. You've got to break that from the water. If it's a bit of a rough water, it's excellent, because the turbulence of the... But when it's absolutely still it's very hard and with a lot of weight on board. cos the Catalina was the very first aircraft

15:00 that was ever built that could carry more than it's own weight. It could carry, full tanks... I've forgotten, more than its own weight with full tanks and everything. It was a very slow thing. I used to never fly more than about 90 knots and that's not fast.

Was this a huge tank-like structure coming out of the water?

See it there? The boat,

15:30 and it had to come out of the water. Once it got airborne. You used to get forced airborne at times. Hit again and hit again, bounce a few times. The landing... Bear in mind, in control it's very difficult because you can't... You've got no brakes. You have got drogues, which slow you down. You could throw a parachute thing out the back like a sea anchor. Incidentally they carried anchors and winches and everything in the bow section and...

16:00 Landing was, again... It's a terrible noisy aircraft. All the time, motors gunning and all you heard was noise, terrific noise. There were bunks on board for the crew, which I never got to because I was the only... And there was a complete galley, electric stove. It had its own power unit, auxiliary power unit which wasn't the motors. You started a motor inside the aircraft itself, it started the electric stove and all those things going.

16:30 Some of the Americans actually lived on board their flying boats. And every hull was water tight. You had doors that specially closed, so that if you did have, say you did have a hole in one part, you could secure the rest off. Follow what I mean? Like all the way along.

How big was it?

In those it was big. Today it's only small. I forgot the size now, but to me it was immense. But it had an immense nav station,

17:00 navigation station. It was really big. Not knowing where we were ever going to fly, I had to carry maps throughout all of the Pacific with me at all times, because we never knew where we were going, till we got there. We'd get to Darwin and they'd say, "You're going off to Surabaya," so I'd have to look through my maps and get a map of Surabaya. The charts of the coastline where we were, were charted by Matthew Flinders, that was the last map... Now the place has been...

17:30 Wasn't till 1990 something that they recharted that area; Matthew Flinders was the original chart maker.

Why didn't you use any of the bunks?

Because I never had the time to. I used to just doze when I felt like it. just doze off and sleep with me head on my table.

You were more responsible than anyone else on board?

Well, pilots would fall asleep. I used to even adjust the automatic pilot. If

18:00 I wanted to change heading, I wouldn't wake them up. I used to just turn the little nob which I turn slowly and the aircraft would go around or what have you. They'd have the automatic pilot set.

How high would you be?

Round 3000 to 5000 feet, not much more. That's why we had to go, when you say did I fall asleep, I'd never fall asleep when there was land around because I was frightened we'd hit a mountain. It was only when we hit a bit of open sea, I'd doze off.

18:30 **Everyone else would be asleep?**

They shouldn't have been, but they were.

Did you ever get concerned?

No, not really.

Were there times when you really wanted to sleep but had to stay awake?

Yes, plenty of them. But you've just got to. Sleep's a funny thing. You can get a second stage, provided you... I mean, if you went out

19:00 partying all the time, you'd have a hangover wouldn't you? Just try and do something without sleep, you get tired. Then you can sort of get another stage and you can go above it again. As I said, I was issued with these pills. Can't think of the names of them now. They use them in sniffers for cough people and

they've taken them off because it's a dangerous drug. Gives you a high apparently.

Amphetamines?

No, it wouldn't have been

19:30 amphetamines in those days. Whatever it was, it's... I wouldn't take them anyway. Same as I couldn't take malarial pills. Everyone was on Atebrin. Did you realise that when you were talking to people, a lot of them went yellow? Have you heard of that? What sent them yellow was the Atebrin tablets, anti-malarial. Fortunately for me, I don't know what it was, I was allergic to it and

20:00 I took quinine tablets so I didn't go yellow.

What happened when you took these sleeping pills?

I only took them the once. It was Ginamoc Island. I'd flown all night to get to Ginamoc. I'd had a day there, then I did a long trip, I can't remember where, whether it was to Hainan. To keep awake I thought, I better take them because I was going to land in another place in Luzon and

20:30 I thought it had been a long day, so I took them. We got back the whole crew just crashed, went to sleep. I couldn't go to sleep. Damn pills kept me awake, so fortunately, I had a couple of days to get over it and I got over it and I said... I was talking to Arthur, cos they all smoked except me. He said, "Why don't you smoke? It will help you." Whether it did or not.

Did you pick up smoking?

I took up smoking, yeah.

21:00 I gave up smoking by the way, well over 30-odd years ago and everyone says, "How did you give up smoking?" And everyone thinks it's health. I was flat broke. I'm married, but we were flat broke and I thought, I couldn't afford... If I could afford cigarettes, there's something wrong with me, so I gave it up for that reason. Bev and I have been flat broke twice.

21:30 Fortunately we've been together and times were different. But that's why I gave up smoking. You hear people say, "I gave up smoking because it's bad for you," and all this. And I could have a cigarette tomorrow and start all over again and I miss it frightfully, though it's well over 30 years ago.

Probably smarter though to give it up. These long voyages you'd do in the air with everyone sleeping,

22:00 **you described the navigational table.**

Very large.

Can you talk me through it?

I had a seat that moved along the whole table. I was issued, like army and navy and air force etc, with a wind sheet? What are they called? That you could sleep on?

22:30 You know what I mean, don't you? Just a sheet of, today it would be plastic, but it was a rubberised thing and you could wear it as a cape when it was raining. But the aircraft leaked that much I used to have to put it above the chart table when it rained, to stop the rain coming in on the chart.

Because it would leak?

Yes, there was a hatch straight above the nav section that never, well, quite frequently never sealed properly and so water used to come in there and so I used-

23:00 always took that with me to put up above the table. I had the mark, it was marked nine sexton, bubble sexton and all the air navigational tables and naturally I had a granometer, which was most essential because time, if that's longitude, time was a very... You must know the right time or you're history.

23:30 **Is this what you were describing before about the Greenwich meantime?**

It was all worked on Greenwich meantime. I don't think they called it that today. Do they call it standard time through political correctness?

What would you do at this table?

Say, first of all, we're going to Surabaya, so I'd look at the chart and I'd say to myself, I think we'll go around that mountain. I'd draw what they call a track, where we'd fly.

24:00 So I'd set off on those headings and find out where we err, which would show me the right, where I should have been and then lay off for that to just bring us back and just follow this all round and I always tried also, if it was possible, put that track over some good land like a small island so I'd be 100 per cent sure I'm right. If you could look down and saw that island there, you'd know you were right wouldn't you? All the time you're using the stars and

24:30 you think, well, you could make a booboo [mistake]. It's quite easy. All you're doing with a star... Do you

understand locus? Of mathematics? If that was a star and I took an angle on it, I must be on a point here somewhere here right around the whole world, wouldn't I, all the way around? I know I'm not going to be in Europe so I know I'm going to be somewhere in the Pacific

25:00 so I calculate where that angle is going to strike. From that, I get a line and that's the position line we're on at that time. Getting back to PNR [Point of No Return], I did, what's the other lady's name at Orange? Doesn't matter. She would have written it down. This West Bay was the shortest distance to get to a certain point in Java.

25:30 We went out one night with four other aircraft. We used to take off at 15 minute intervals between. We never flew in formation. And this may sound very odd. We had a 15 minute lag between everyone and one night we hit another chap's slipstream over the target. We'd caught up and were so close behind him that the slipstream caught us. When you think with 15 minute intervals between you'd never have that happen do you?

You got caught in the velocity of the

26:00 **aircraft in front? What happened?**

We got a bit of a shake. We knew what it was. Suddenly the aircraft like mad. Getting back to PNR, this night, again this is my immaturity, and also Arthur Ridings being a school teacher. Point of no return is a point where you've got to make up your mind. Do you proceed on, or do you go back? Do you follow? If you've gone beyond the point of no

26:30 return, you've got to proceed on. PNR, you've got to go back. We had terrific head winds and so did everyone else in the squadron. That's right, we took off from Darwin, I beg your pardon. I worked out that we'd get over the target and could get back home in time through mathematics, which, Arthur being also a stickler for the right thing, could see my point. We used 1000 gallons to get to the target and we had only 400 gallons

27:00 to get back, but I'd calculated with that wind, we'd have a tail wind and the mines off we'd be a lot lighter and so forth. So, we went on. I also worked out we'd come back, to be on the safe side, we'd land at Western Australia instead of Darwin, which we did. Arthur and myself were up before the CO of the, I don't know whether it was 20 or whatever it was, squadron, in Darwin. All the others turned back and because we didn't, we... They thought it was irresponsible to push on.

27:30 But according to my mathematics, which I produced, it wasn't. You with me? I'm a great believer in maths, and still are. They don't lie. At the point of no return, you had formulas to work out and that formula told me, with that tail wind home we were going to go home a hell of a lot faster. For instance, if we were flying at 90 knots and we had a 30 knots tail wind, head wind, that would be 60 knots. To come home, we'd come home double that speed, at 120. All this I calculated and I was right.

28:00 I got no thanks for it either. We were both... We weren't charged or anything, but we were chastised, put it that way. So that's the point of no return. PNR.

They chastised you for it?

They thought we'd run too big a risk, we should have come back. Again, when you consider every other aircraft came back, I suppose that was the only answer to it, wasn't it?

You said all the other aircraft turned back?

Turned back. Well, we didn't.

28:30 If another one had gone on and come back the same way as we had I don't think anything would have been said. Are you with what I'm saying? But you've got squadron leaders, everything in these other aircraft, who have gone back because they don't think they could make it.

When you talk about the wind speeds coming back, would that halve the journey?

Oh, yes, it doubles... Just using this hypothetically. Ninety knots with a 30 knot headwind,

29:00 you're doing 60 knots to go out, aren't you? Ninety knots coming back with a 30 knot tailwind, you're doing 120 knots. You double the speed in half the time. You with...? Wind is the thing of flying, aeroplanes, navigation. Where the wind is. The wind takes you... In fact, I got such a shock. When I got on the Boeings and hit the jet stream. Find winds of 200 knots up there. That's a strong wind, isn't it? about 250 miles an hour.

29:30 That's the jet stream. You've heard of the jet stream, haven't you?

Tell me about that?

That's Boeings. This is civil flying. The jet stream consists of around about... In mid winter over Australia I used to hit it halfway between Darwin and Sydney. I used to hit it just coming near Cairo. It's a thermal wind of the earth's spinning. The geostrophic forces and all that. But it doesn't occur... It occurs around about 37,000 feet. You got to be damned high to experience it.

30:00 No one knew about it till they got the Boeings.

Can you always assume going one way, that if the knots are a certain... ?

No. You've got to... A navigator always had to estimate what he thought would happen. In other words, it's not, if we find your wind here at this point, to say that same wind's going to occur further on. But did a course in meteorology, I had to learn

- 30:30 certain meteorological things at that, air temperatures etc, and I had to try and make a judgement of what I thought the winds would be. Today it doesn't matter. You've got GPS [Global Positioning System], you know the ground position system. No one worries about anything, do they? Just...

You mentioned the turbulence helps you get up in the air. What were the conditions like inside the Catalina?

- 31:00 **Was it really uncomfortable?**

Yes, sweat was pouring out of us. You imagine the Tropics, standing out in the sun for 12 hours, we didn't take off till the afternoon. Ten hours of the sun beating down there. No insulation. All of us flew in just a pair of shorts. Every crew member managed to find from the Americans, a pair of rubber boots, rubber soled boots, I'm sorry. We used to wear those, because boots we were issued with were hopeless.

- 31:30 I did fly with a shirt. I started off with a shirt on. But it got very warm.

What was it like having that responsibility for everybody else?

Well, at my age I accepted these things. It sounds stupid. I did the training, whether the training indoctrinated me in that groove, I don't know. Just... I accepted it and that was it. It was part of the job. I didn't lose any sleep over it. I would have lost sleep if I'd done

- 32:00 a bad job, put it that way.

You received quite a lot of awards for your work.

Only for places for where I was at. That doesn't mean much. You were in the right place at the right time, that's all that means.

Can you tell us about those awards?

- 32:30 The first one, first of all, how all this came about, when I was discharged, I didn't bother about it very much. And when I lived at Ballina, I went to the RSL there, and they said, "Why don't you
- 33:00 send off for your certificates and things?" Which I did and this is how I... That's why the dates are so odd. This one's, "Robert Noel Forbes, Warrant Officer. Decorations, medals and commendations. '39-'45 Star. The Pacific Star with the Burma clasp." I was also in the Burma area and you can't wear, you can't have the two medals. You get a clasp for them instead to say you were in the Pacific and you were in Burma.
- 33:30 Not like Air Q Europe. You could be in Italy and wear the two. So I got the Pacific Star, I forgot, to tell you I was in Burma as well. "The Burma Clasp. The war medal '39-'45 Star. '49. The Australia Service Medal '39-'45. The Australia Service Medal, '39-'45 with Clasp for South-West Pacific. Returned from Active Service badge." Then, "I'd like to confirm that the Governor-General approved your Vietnam Logistic Support medal on 24 December,
- 34:00 1993." That was for Vietnam. That was from Government House. Then, "Congratulations." Another one, "The Philippines Government and the Australian Government have identified you as one of those eligible for the Philippine Liberation Medal. On behalf of the Philippine Government, we'd like to thank you for the participation in gaining freedom for Philippines." There's another one somewhere.
- 34:30 Got one just recently. Oh, no, here it is. This is 19... "I have much pleasure in informing you you've been awarded the Australia Active Service Medal ASM, in recognition of your Qantas air crew service in Vietnam has been approved. On behalf of the Department of Defence, may I congratulate you on this award." So I got eight. And there's seven actually I think. Then the last one, the Dutch Government...
- 35:00 I don't know much about it. It was the Catalina Association said you're due for it for flying in Darwin. That was Dutch East Indies in those days and I didn't bother about it. I went to the local RSL [Returned and Services League] here and they put your medals on the, together for you. You pay for it and he put that on because he said, you were eligible for it and you haven't declared it, so that's why that one's on there. All these are letters confirming from the government. You wonder why I got two Vietnam medals, I suppose?
- 35:30 **Tell me about it.**

Well, would you like the humorous side?

I'd like both.

Vietnam wasn't what you call a very popular war, was it? My daughter was going to university at the time and I remember her sitting down at Town Hall railway station. She told me she could feel the

trains running underneath

- 36:00 at one of these university demonstrations against the Vietnam War. I felt rather sorry for these blokes that were going to Vietnam and Qantas flew troops up there so they called for volunteers and I volunteered. They wouldn't have any navigator unless he was a volunteer, so I volunteered. That's how it came about. But the humorous thing is,
- 36:30 I think it's call Ho Chi Minh City. I was in Saigon. I didn't carry much around with me. My suitcase when I got back was missing, so I assumed it had been stolen. All I had in it was a razor and a change of underwear and a shirt or something. So I was given a, what you call it? An insurance form to fill in. So I tried to look up the best Saville Row
- 37:00 tailor in London. Put, "I had one Saville Row suit." I was going to make a real packet out of this, this insurance. And thank God I hadn't handed the thing in, because about two days later there was a knock on the front door and there was an American air force sergeant. In those days they had a group called MAT, Military Air Transport. And it was one of them. They'd found my suitcases in Saigon and no one had even bothered to steal my underwear.
- 37:30 I never locked the suitcase either. I didn't make anything of it. But for that, they gave two 'dolackies'. One was the Logistic Support Medal and one was the Australia Active Service Medal. I didn't know that they gave these things until I sent all my papers into the RSL. So that's how I came... But it was only being in the right place at the right time, so please don't
- 38:00 think there was any bravery or anything attached to it. There wasn't whatsoever.

When you say, "Being in the right place at the right time," there was more to it than that.

No, not really. How many people joined the air force and stayed in Sydney all the time. It wasn't their doing, for that was it? They could have spent four years and get nothing. You were sent where you were told in the air force. Know what I'm trying to... ? Don't you think it's the right

- 38:30 place at the right time?

It's also what happens in the place at the time. Were there many fatalities and risks associated with the kinds of missions you were on?

Well, they lost aircraft, put it that way. We got hit once.

- 39:00 Only once and I don't know if it was machine gun or rifle fire because we were so low and we used to fly so slowly. Someone could have been taking pots with an ordinary rifle. That Manila one, for instance, I saw the aircraft below me was, I saw it destroyed. I don't think it got hit by enemy fire. This is my feeling. I think he was too low and hit a hill. I don't know. Suddenly to see an aircraft blow up in front of you, it's a bit... Our squadron lost a few aircraft.
- 39:30 There was always a danger, put it that way.

What kind of contact did you have with enemy fire?

A bit of machine gun and stuff like that. That was all. And as I said, we were hit... Our flight engineer... See that web in the middle of that plane, up between the wings that hold the wings

- 40:00 together? The flight engineer sat there and our flight engineer used to sit on a tin hat cos if anything ever came up from underneath it was going to protect him, his privy parts. When we were over the target he always had a hat there. As it turns out, we were hit, I think it was on the starboard wing. There was no damage done. No great thing. Just repaired.

What was that like?

- 40:30 Well you don't know till you land that you've been hit, really. Because it didn't come through the hull. If it came through the hull you'd be aware of it, but...

Is it too loud in the plane to hear?

You wouldn't hear. No, the noise level on the planes was terrifically high.

That would also attract enemy attention, wouldn't it?

Yes. Not so much the noise as the... We used to put in auto-rich. The exhaust would light up and that would attract more than anything, so by putting in auto-rich, you stop the flames coming out of the...

- 41:00 Have you ever noticed a piston aeroplane at night? There's always flames coming out of the back.

Tape 8

- 00:48 **You've told some interesting stories, but surely war is devastating too?**

It never was to me.

01:00 I'm sorry. I'm a complete let-down to pacifists and everyone. I'm not for war. Today I think it's terrible, but I never even gave it a thought. That's the honest gospel truth. Certain things that happened to me, I can't remember, by the way. Whether the mind blanks you out. But I never felt that way. I feel sorry for the poor soldier that had to get a rifle and point at a person or get a bayonet

01:30 and stab him. What a terrible thing to have to do. Mine was all... I never saw a soul. You dropped the bomb or you laid mines. You may have killed thousands of people for all you know, you don't know. But it's not... Can you see what I'm trying to get at? It's not personal.

I was reading some of your log. One particular day you had ground fire, ack-ack [anti-aircraft] firing over the target?

02:00 That happened quite frequently, yes.

Can you tell me about some of those experiences?

I never took much notice of it. Again I'm being absolutely honest here. It never worried me one iota. In fact, I remember saying to my mother how pretty it looked over Macau with the searchlights trying to hit me. They were hitting the sky. I thought how beautiful it was. Put it down to stupidity or something on my part. I may have something that turns me off worrying. I don't know.

02:30 **Were the enemy search lights any better than the Brisbane search lights?**

A bloody sight better. Except as I said, I could just... I'm only imagining this. I imagined I could bring it so down, you couldn't go any further down, you just touch it, so you'd jump on, because it's going... I made all that up. That's how I felt. But it didn't upset us.

To drop mines you were at 300 feet...

Or 600, depending.

Or 600, to drop bombs, what...?

03:00 I was never a great in the bombing side. About 3000 feet or something like that. Depending on the terrain. I didn't drop many bombs. I wasn't a... I was no great roaring success.

With the ack-ack ground fire and searchlights, those targets would have been bombing targets, would they?

Oh, yes. The Liberators... In fact, I also did certain other flights,

03:30 air-sea rescue flights. I suppose you've heard of an air-sea rescue, haven't you? We used to, for instance, I can't think of where it was, Lombok I think, the Liberators used to go out and do a strike there and we'd follow them. We'd have to take off long before them, because they'd overtake us, but we'd hang around the target if they got shot down. In fact, a chap... This is an interesting tale and I wasn't involved. His name was Shilling, Bob Shilling. I met up with him a few years ago. Could you imagine anyone being

04:00 shot down twice in five minutes? He was on a Liberator and there was a Jap cruiser and a few other boats, anyway, he was shot down. And a Catalina came, the one I'm referring to, came and picked him up. It just got airborne, and it got shot down. Another Cat came and picked him up. He got shot down twice. That's remarkable isn't it? They called him 'Two Bob', because his name was Bob Shilling.

04:30 I don't suppose that goes down on the history books, does it? It's remarkable. I thought it was. I wasn't involved, so don't get me. Our squadron was, but I wasn't involved. When our squadron did a trip, it didn't mean you were always going out on that trip. There's 13 aircraft and they only send four out. Do you follow?

Were you involved in air-sea rescues?

Yes.

Can you tell me about... ?

05:00 I shouldn't say this, but the majority of people I was only on land to air-sea rescue. We just did a couple. All you did was hang around the target. Wait to see if anybody got shot down, if they did you went and picked them up. And you carried, how the hell we'd ever use them, carried a bamboo stretcher you could wind around the person and lift them completely into the aircraft. But no one ever got shot down with us. The only other time when the Spitfires first came out, we

05:30 were supposed to follow them, but they were so bloody fast, they landed before we were half way there. That was a bit of a failure. All the Spitfires were accounted for, so...

Coming back to the ack-ack you did actually fly over targets with all that firing at you?

Yes. I didn't take much notice of it, put it that way. It's the honest truth, I can't remember.

06:00 Even the time we got hit, which as I'm saying was only rifle fire, I reckon, it was just a hole in the wing. I wasn't even aware of it. I wasn't even aware of it till Quickie inspected the aircraft after landing and saw the hole.

The only times you were actually shot at were... ?

Over the target, yeah.

And bombing raids?

Yes.

No mine laying?

They were all in mine laying because it was over a principal target. These are all mine laying. The mine layings were in major harbours like

06:30 Hong Kong, Surabaya, Leyte Straits, all those that were main shipping harbours. It had to be a harbour. You couldn't go out to deep sea because the mines would never work. A sea mine's got a buoy and it's held to a certain, by an anchor, certain height. Aerial mines, you depended on a shallow... When I say shallow water, harbour water.

As someone who's never flown

07:00 **in a Catalina, that sounds extraordinarily dangerous in respect to flying 300 to 600 feet.**

Hong Kong was dangerous because I landed there in daylight with Qantas and I nearly had kittens after I realised. cos we only virtually had road maps, cos there were no great maps of the area and when I saw those hills at Hong Kong, to think we came out of that all right, I was very surprised? You've been to Hong Kong, haven't you?

07:30 Have you been to Hong Kong, Claire [interviewer]? Have you seen the, what they call the 'checkerboard'. You came in from the sea to land then. You didn't come in over the washing.

I take it there are high hills?

There's a high hill painted like a checkerboard and the idea was... This is in Qantas's day. You kept on flying till you saw that checkerboard and then you turned sharp right and it brought you into Kaitak.

08:00 **On the mission you described earlier where you had to do four runs and the crew would chuck you out if did another, were you under fire then?**

We could have been. I never... I concentrated... It sounds so... All I concentrated on was bringing that aircraft into that datum and steering it in. I didn't care. Bev accuses me of this. I can turn myself off completely. Do another job, you could be talking here, do whatever you like, and I can still... And I think

08:30 My training as a navigator's done that. In Qantas pilots sit up front on automatic pilot, tell dirty jokes and what have you. I'm sitting back having to navigate. I'm turned off. I never hear a thing and I have a feeling that's what... I can turn myself off. And purely on to what the job I'm doing.

Coming back to the base at 42, did you lose other planes?

09:00 Did we lose planes? Yes. I don't know how many we lost, a couple I know. I could look up the squadron records.

What was the effect on morale?

Well, one crew, they think got beheaded. They're not sure of it. Everyone's upset, naturally. But it's wartime. What can you do about these things? I was very upset at Dave Stevenson dying. And Billy Barber and so on, but you had to accept those things.

09:30 It's hard to believe isn't it?

How did Dave Stevenson and... ?

He crashed flying a Beaufighter, crashed the Beaufighter. Poor old Bill was on a Liberator that got shot down from Darwin again.

You only heard about those?

Yes. Letters written to the... Another couple of other blokes. But it was nowhere near as bad as Europe or anything like that.

10:00 Don't get me wrong. People in Europe, I don't know what their casualty rate was. It was very high, wasn't it?

The Catalina wasn't the only flying boat?

They had Sunderlands, but the only ones that actually operated in the Pacific were Martin Mariners. They didn't operate; they were not fully operational aircraft. They could be transports. Could they call it that way? Sunderlands. You heard of a Martin Mariner? There was a sea plane, a Sikorsky and there

was the Pusher Duck,

- 10:30 the Walrus, but they weren't operational air... Well, they were operational but they'd fly VIPs [Very Important Persons] from A to B. They weren't going on bombing raids or anything like that.

How did the Catalina compare to those?

Entirely different. Gosh, yes. It was a, a case on its own, the Catalina. I don't think they'll ever build another aircraft like it. It was... They were designed in 1935 believe it or not.

- 11:00 The two Pratt and Whitneys. Those Pratt and Whitneys with those fantastic engines. They just go and go and go. Can you see the tremendous lift area they've got? And the tips are floats. At the very end of those are floats and the floats come down for landing like an undercarriage, but it's operated by an electric motor. In fact I may as well tell you one little tale about that. We were on the water and the pilots had this thing across the control

- 11:30 stick, start motors and all of this and you pressed a button and it went back to the engineer, who did all the necessities. And these press start motors, and Quickie pressed the wrong button and he pressed the floats up and there was hatch straight above the navigator and I went straight up the hatch, around the other side of the wing trying to balance the aircraft. That was a bit exciting for everyone.

- 12:00 **The Catalinas were a general transport, all-round... ?**

Well, Catalinas were used in strafing, we used them in strafing, believe it or not. Strafe barges and things like that with it. It was used for bombing. It was used for air-sea rescue. It was used for these mining operations. It was used for everything you could possibly think of.

In respect to strafing, there were no front guns were there?

No. They had the chappie

- 12:30 in the bow that had a twin machine gun. This was barges. The Japs used to have a lot of barges. They strafed the barges and things like that.

What guns?

There were twin .303s in the front and the blisters had two .5s, but one in each blister and in the tail was a .303 as well, right down under the tail section.

Given you were landing the Catalinas with the crocodiles and all,

- 13:00 **were there emergency procedures if a Catalina was coming in and lost... ?**

No. No one ever... All that you had was the crash boat. He was the equivalent to a duty pilot we'll call it and he just cleared it away and said it was clear to land, that was it. I suppose the emergency procedure would be the fact that you'd have to go and pick him up. See the one at Port Stephens, I don't think any of that crew survived. There was no one to...

- 13:30 They went in, that was it. Who was going to pick them up? Do you follow? Safety... During wartime they don't regard safety as a great factor, do they? Can I put it that way? Is that a good way of putting it?

Did the Japanese ever hit where you were?

Never. Never. Not over there on the Gulf. We were opposite Groote Eylandt as well.

- 14:00 I landed at Groote Eylandt once. You ever heard of Groote Eylandt? It's the old flying boat base for the Empire Flying Boats before the war. People used to spend the night at Groote Eylandt.

Why didn't they put your base there?

I don't know why. They had a few people there during the war.

Coming now to weather patterns you might fly in,

- 14:30 **did you ever encounter Tropical weather patterns?**

We had terrible weather patterns. Have you heard of the Inter-Tropic Front? All the flying I did went through the Inter-Tropic Front. We were crossing the Equator each time and it was absolute shocking weather. Cumulonimbus, big thunder heads, thunder storms, rain pelting down. That's why I put my ground sheet, ground sheet they used to call them, over the charts. The water would pour in from the rain. Absolute shocking weather.

- 15:00 Lightening everywhere. It was really bad. The Inter-Tropic Front was worse than any of the action, I'd say.

An Inter-tropic front is rain, thunderstorms... ?

All hell let loose.

Is it also heavy winds?

Oh, yes. Everything. Being in Sydney when a dirty big thunderstorm comes with hail in it. You know what it's like.

- 15:30 The wind comes, that's the first. The roll scud, all that type of, it's the whole of that experience in the air.

How would that affect your calculations for point of no return?

Very badly. You'd have to use a lot of commonsense then, because we had no weather radar. Like modern air lines today have weather radar, you can see the weather. We had radar, but it was such a primitive... It was called ASV, Air to Surface Vessel

- 16:00 and it wouldn't pick up weather. It just picked up, if you were lucky, we picked up a hospital ship once. That upset me a lot. It was coming up Leyte Straits. It was a Japanese hospital ship, we did break... as soon as we... What they call a first sight report, a hospital ship, which is was. It had all the big red cross, it was Japanese obviously. About a week later I read in the paper how Americans
- 16:30 had bombed and sunk a ship off Leyte Straits which was that bloody hospital ship. For all I know it may not have been a... It may have been a fake. I don't know. It does upset one to think that you sent the message, in all good faith, it's a hospital ship to see it sunk.

You were telling a story

- 17:00 **about working out your calculations to drop your bomb load and return home, when other people had returned home. There was no fear in your mind that you might hit one of these Inter-Tropical Fronts?**

I knew we were going to go through it. I knew it, yes. Every time we went through it, we had to go through it.

You'd already taken this into your calculations?

Yes. Fortunately, I was right. Put it that way.

- 17:30 I could tell you some funny tales there, but I won't because it will upset the whole system, of going to deal with Qantas, but you've heard of Ashmore Reef being mentioned a lot on the news. That's where the Indonesians... That used to be what they called a Roger Point during the war. It meant that if we looked like we weren't going to make it, we'd land there and there'd always be fuel dug in a certain spot.
- 18:00 Had to memorise all these things and they called them Roger Points so you could get fuel and... No one living there, often wondered what those Indonesians... Bet they've flogged off all that petrol by now.

What are some of these funny stories with Qantas and the Inter-Tropical Front?

I'll tell you about Ashmore Reef as well. Going back, this would be about 1961 I suppose,

- 18:30 I was on both Super Constellations and Douglas DC4s. We were going to go to Jakarta and when we arrived in Singapore, at Darwin, we faked, in those days, I suppose still, you've got to put a flight plan into the port where you're going to go and we faked this flight plan to Jakarta. The whole thing was, the pilots and Civil Aviation knew this and everything. It was for us to divert to Ashmore Reef
- 19:00 and shoot it up. Not with guns but just to frighten the hell out of the Indonesians which we did regularly. Used to... No one could blame anyone because our flight plan said we were going to Jakarta. The crew went and diverted to Ashmore Reef and we had a ball at 200 feet coming across all these fishing trawlers and frightening the hell out of them, and they'd run for the lick of their lives. To them, they thought Australia was really hot shot on to us, so they'd clear off for a while.
- 19:30 Did you know that went on?

You were trying to stop the Indonesian fishermen getting to...

And fishing as well. No one lived on Ashmore Reef.

Fascinating. And with Qantas, the Inter-Tropical Fronts?

You went through them, but you had weather radar as well. A lot easier with Qantas. And also when I finished on Boeing 707s, we were flying at 35,

- 20:00 36, 38, 39,000 feet. You're clear of everything. Not clear, but you were up near the tops of everything. No sweat whatsoever. In fact, on Boeings, in daylight, I used to use stars at times and planets, which sounds incredible. In daylight I used Venus and I've used Cirrus to take fixtures. I could see them. We were so high up I could see them in the daylight for the sextant.

You made your calculations

20:30 **off Venus... ?**

Yes, cos I had the Air Almanac, which gave the position all the time of Greenwich. I had to have granometers.

I asked you earlier about the Bismark Sea. What did you know about the battle there?

I knew it had been on, that's about all. And I knew it had been a... I also knew, that I think one of the Australia ships was sunk by the Americans. Is that so?

21:00 We were told that. I can't remember what the name of the ship was. I knew very little about it.

A friend wrote to you?

No, I just heard about it on the grapevine. But as far as the first siting, he was a friend of mine. When he told me I asked him could he give me a description. He only gave me a description about two years ago. I thought I better get a description before he dies. Be nice to keep a record of the first siting of the Bismark Sea.

21:30 I do feel the turning of the war was the Battle of Midway, frankly. That was long before the Bismarck.

Coming back to the hospital ship you sited. No matter what mission you were on, was it your responsibility to site ships and report them back?

Yes. That's what I did. What do they call that, general reconnaissance school I went to? I learnt ships and the codes and how to use them, masts,

22:00 all the descriptions, and there was a code for everything which I've forgotten the codes now. Yes, it was my job to send back any ship siting whatsoever.

What other ships of the Japanese navy did you see?

I saw a couple, I can't recall now. I didn't take a great deal of notice, because at night time you don't site much. The reason, I'll be honest. We only saw that hospital ship,

22:30 it was like a Christmas tree. It was all white and they had all the lights on it. It was just this big white ship and it still disgusts me to think, if it was a hospital ship, it was sunk. If it was a hospital ship. You didn't know what the Japanese had been up to.

What news were you getting in respect of the American navy?

Only what you

23:00 received, what the average civilian received. Exactly the same. As I said about Darwin, to think only seven people were killed. It was just the Post Office bombed. And places like Broome. They even bombed as far as Katherine. Tennant Creek, down those areas. cos the Americans had a lot of Liberators. Lot of big Liberator bases down there and I think they were after them, you know, the Americans there.

23:30 **Back to the Catalinas, given salt water and metal aren't the best of friends... ?**

It's a good question. They were coated with lanolin. Believe it or not.

What's lanolin?

Ask Claire. What's lanolin? It's sheep's oil. Fat from the sheep's...

And that would stop the...?

Theoretically it's supposed to have helped. It did corrode and also, we grew weeds.

24:00 You know how boats get weeds growing on the bottom? Ours, we'd take off, and there'd be all these weeds. Stuff had grown on, especially in the Tropics cos stuff grows very rapidly in the Tropics.

You were required to clean off those...?

No. cos unless you... When we saw it was too bad we had it beached. See, these Catalinas, we had all the landing gear taken out. Catalinas are amphibious. We had the landing

24:30 gear taken out to give more, less, you know more, carrying capacity for weight and we had all the false ceiling taken out of the fuel tanks so we could put more fuel in, so they were stripped really down to a very bare aircraft. But when we saw some weeds, they used to be able to hook wheels on it and have a slipway wherever you were, like at Melville Bay, it's still there. A friend of mine just went there. I asked him to have a look at it and they just pulled it up and they'd scrape the bottom

25:00 like a normal boat and get rid of the weeds and what have you.

After 42 Squadron you were taken out, then you enlisted?

No, no. I was posted because of my experience, to 38 Squadron who basically, it was a transport

squadron to bring out POWs and that and I was sent to, it wasn't based there but I was sent for three months to Morotai and I just did a regular

25:30 runs to Singapore and those places, basically picking up. Then it became, the Dutch were being tossed out by the Indonesians. We were picking up the Dutch as well. A lot of Dutch we picked up. Very arrogant. God, they were arrogant people. I hope you're not Dutch. Are you?

26:00 **You said the Dutch were...?**

Very, very arrogant women, people. I always remember one time, I think it was from Macassar. We brought a load to Labuan and one of the women came up to me and said, "I want my suitcase taken to such-and-such," and

26:30 later on she said, "We've got no sheets." The war hadn't been over for more than a few months and here they are worrying about sheets, me carrying their suitcases. Do you follow? I felt there should have been a little bit of gratitude. They were most arrogant. Very arrogant. That was the colonial Dutch. I'm not saying...

At that time though, they were being moved out of Indonesia altogether.

Yes. They were.

Were they going back to Holland?

27:00 They set up big camps for them. I can't think of the term. I think they called them Kampongs. One was at Morotai. They were all being repatriated back to Holland.

What plane were you flying?

Dakotas.

You were navigating?

Yes.

How many people could a Dakota take?

Roughly about 24-25, I suppose.

Can you talk about

27:30 **the layout of a Dakota?**

Yes. Up front were the two pilots and the right hand side in those days was the radio operator. Then I was on the left, very small navigational table. Navigating a Dakota was a piece of cake because you never flew for more than about three or four hours. It was only about a four hour flight and it was very simple. Map reading virtually, half the time. One thing I do remember. We used to get

28:00 an issue of boiled eggs and a few other things, because there was no galley for us to eat in, and I found a very good way of keeping the aircraft clean. I found a little hole, a hatch I could put a pipe through and I used it as a vacuum cleaner. I used to suck up the eggs and everything that were left over. They used to go straight out. Being a navigator on a Dakota was a piece of cake. Nothing to it at all.

What a fantastic story. Back on the Catalinas, you were

28:30 **going for say, a 12 hour mission...**

I never did less than about 20.

Okay, 20. What food was supplied for you to take?

With the Americans, everything. The fitter would cook a stew for us and we'd have eggs, bacon. Even a piece of ham. Peas, all these sorts of things. On the other runs we'd have, basically, trying to think now. Not a great deal, at all.

29:00 The cook would have cooked bread and they must have got.... I know, he used to open tins of, we called it M and V, meat and vegetables. And he'd make a stew of that, whoever did the cooking on board. So we had enough to eat, but when we got to the army it was terrible.

There was petrol, gas stove?

No, I better explain it. The auxiliary power unit was purely starting the aircraft up. Because you...

29:30 Modern aircraft you might have a battery cart and you plug it in. Well, you can't very well have that in a flying boat so they had the auxiliary power unit. The auxiliary power unit was also used while it was on the water for lots of various duties. Pumping bilges out, it operated lots of machinery. It also operated coupled to an electrical stove, but before we took off, that was closed down, the auxiliary power unit and batteries then did the stove. We had an electric stove. I know nothing about the cooking. I never did any.

30:00 I know it was on the starboard side, that was all. I didn't want to know anything either.

Given that you're flying for 20 hours, what happens when Mother Nature calls?

You had, oddly enough. I never had that problem, well, I did part of it. But we had two things. There was a tunnel hatch, which I'll show you, on the Catalina,

30:30 where I used to get adrift at night and you'd remove that hatch, and the slipstream didn't come up at it, and that's where you'd... They had a pan there if you wanted and then you'd throw everything out of it and it would go straight into the slipstream.

That was underneath the aircraft?

Underneath, yeah.

So you could relieve yourself in the back?

Oh, yes.

Are there any more stories about the Dutch?

Not really. I just found they were a very arrogant lot.

31:00 We weren't that happy about doing... Well, we never finished a trip with a feeling of... Because at the same time, the Indonesians were being very nasty to us. We had to, we ended up sleeping under the wing of the aircraft because they were trying to sabotage the aircraft wherever we stopped. One example, and oddly enough, again this was Labuan, this is all after the war, you realise this. You know in your car you have, to drain your

31:30 oil you have your little... Well, on all the aircraft motors you had the same drain plug, but they had a wire that goes through and locks so it'll never unscrew with vibration. They partly unscrewed it and cut the wire and we got airborne all right. We weren't very far off airborne when we lost all oil and it was again, sabotage. It was the Indonesians.

What did you do?

We made a forced landing. That was all. No sweat.

32:00 It happened very quickly. It didn't happen right on take off, thank God. We managed to just come back on one other motor that was still going and it wasn't till we... The oil pressure dropped off everything. We didn't know what was happening. A fair bit of smoke was pouring out and it wasn't till we landed that we found what had happened and that wire had been sheered. A nasty little lot. I don't suppose you know where Merauke is in Dutch New Guinea? We came in there and the Indonesians had the

32:30 control tower and they started to machine gun us as we landed. But it was all over in no time. Whether they thought we were Dutch or what the hell, I don't know. I haven't got much faith in Indonesians.

Who was responsible for the airports? Were they Australians?

No one. They'd taken over the airports so it's like... May I tell you another tale, which is a true tale? I may as well. If this goes on the history there'll be a... You've heard of Sukarno, didn't you?

33:00 He was the big leader. Gold at the moment is something like \$408 or \$420 American an ounce. Back about 1962, gold was pegged in Australia at \$30 an ounce. That was pegged. That was it. A Super Con [Lockheed Super Constellation] is a four-engine aircraft and it's a freighter. We left Sydney to go to Jakarta. On board we had an envelope we had to open to

33:30 find out what was on, and we had with us a security guard. So it was only just the crew, me as the navigator, two pilots and two flight engineers. We landed at Jakarta. It was chartered by Sukarno and it was all gold sovereigns and it was that much that we didn't know how we were going to make landing weight. You know, if you're too heavy for landing weight and we're only going Jakarta to Singapore,

34:00 and we had a hell of a battle trying to fiddle things that we wouldn't be too heavy on landing. And the whole lot was gold, going to Switzerland from Sukarno at Jakarta by courtesy of the Australian Government knowing about it. What we had the security guard for. I said, "What the hell are you up to?" He had of all things a compass. He said "If there's any metal the compass would swing around so the gold doesn't affect the compass, so as they loaded all these wooden crates on board with gold.

34:30 And I said, "I wouldn't be surprised if Sukarno put a bomb on and then claimed insurance." Bear in mind all this time, Qantas was owned by the Commonwealth Government. It's not like it is today. So that's where Madam Sukarno has all her money. You know how she's always flashing money around the place? Well, that's where it came from.

Was that Indonesian wealth?

Yes, it's all Indonesian wealth. A lot of it was Australian sovereigns, oddly enough. Australian sovereigns are purely

35:00 from a, not a numeristic value but a bullion point of view. If you have Australian sovereigns, I found this out. If you have ordinary gold it's got to be assayed and so on. But if it's a sovereign, it's cut and dried. There's no argument that it's 92 or 99. Whatever it is, pure gold, and that's it.

How long were you working with the Dakota... ?

Not for very long. As I said,

35:30 I only spent four years total in the air force so I would have only been about four months. I discharged then.

The war's over, you're discharged. You returned home?

I returned home and I applied under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme to do a training as a mechanical draftsman, which I completed. I brought all those over here. It wasn't till, I didn't go back flying till 1960,

36:00 so I was out in 1946. At that time I became an associate member of the Institute for Refrigeration, all those sorts of things. I had to study for the... I became chief draftsman actually of the Bryant Brothers, but I saw the light and that's why I went back to Qantas. Went into Qantas.

Qantas you returned in 1960. Is that right?

I started flying. I returned to them around about

36:30 I'd say about '59 because I acted as a flight service officer for them a while to get my flying up. I had to get my flying hours up and I flew from Darwin. I was based in Darwin at the time.

Given there were 14 years since you left flying, had you lost... ?

I'd lost everything as far as knowledge was... Not theoretical knowledge, but practical.

37:00 I was null and void and I had to start from torse [scratch]. I can understand why the Department of Civil Aviation insisted, plus the fact that new things had occurred. Such as Loran. Lots of things. Pressure pattern flying, lots of dramas of new things.

Pressure pattern... ?

No, I won't bore you with that. It's...

Give me an outline of it?

Well, another way of getting a position line, providing you were in latitudes around about

37:30 at least 25 south or north, if you were flying over the ocean. When a pilot takes off he sets the theoretical pressure of sea level. So if he sees a hill that says 5000 meters, his what's-his-name is going to register 70, he'll know he'll clear it. Do you follow? But it's set at that. This is very highly theoretical. You start off from Sydney to go to Christchurch. It was on an Electra I used to do it.

38:00 The pilots set their Q and H which was the barometric pressure at sea level and he's reported at those at 23,000 feet. In fact, that chap that rang me was a skipper, I just spoke to then. He maintained that altitude of 23,000 feet, but it wasn't that 23,000 feet, because that was the pressure at sea level where he left. Not where he is at present. Do you follow? He could be 23 and a half thousand feet or he may only be 22 and a half.

38:30 When you see the weather chart you see those isobars, those funny looking... There's a high going anti-clockwise or a low going clockwise. There's a formula. We also had a radar alto-meter on the Electra, which would tell the, your height above the sea. By a formula I could see what the height above sea was. I'll say it was 23,300 feet and the alto-meter is still set for 23,000, therefore I've flown on an isobar

39:00 constantly, so I then plotted the equivalent of that isobar. Gave me a position. Do you follow? All these were very new things. It's getting too technical obviously. I tried to explain this to a few navs a while ago. They'd never heard of it.

That was unique for the time.

Tape 9

00:41 **Did you ever get any Japanese aircraft?**

Well, I don't know. Over Manila we did have, according to the radar operator looking at the radar, he said there was an aircraft coming at us. Whether there was or not, I didn't see anything. Bear in mind all this was night time. I wouldn't know whether...

01:00 None of us would know, really. We did... This was most odd. Near the end of the war we were mine

laying Banda Straits, which they thought they were going to do an invasion on Singapore, and at Kuching, we used to take off at daylight to get to Banda Straits at night. And Kuching in Borneo... I think it was called Abetty. Another flying boat, which the Japanese used to take off, giving communications

- 01:30 to Singapore. It was a sort of milk run thing for them. We were given strict instructions if we saw them, not to try attack because, we were always told this. Our primary object was to mine. We weren't there to shoot down aircraft. We weren't there to shoot people. We were there to mine that harbour. And I don't know whether that Japanese was told the same thing, that his primary target was to get to Singapore, because we used to see one another
- 02:00 in opposite directions, so I don't know. I may as well continue on that. We had some idiots that were, we called gong happy. We were always strictly told we were never to fire our guns if it was a mine run, unless we were attacked. That was it. The mining was the most important thing. And everyone used to hate this bloke to be near, because he used to stir so much up. He'd come over the target and get them to shine torches in the blister and that so
- 02:30 he'd be shot at, so he could then shoot at them. That's fair dinkum. It used to be, anyone that came after him was just... I had a friend who was in Qantas as well, came after him one night. Said it was bloody hell. Everything was thrown at them. But this bloke, because he was going to be a... He ended up getting the DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] ultimately. In fact I'll tell you how he got the DFC. Remember I told you a chap was shot down twice?
- 03:00 The second Catalina landed with all cruisers and everything firing like mad at him, picked up the very badly... The sea was on fire - the very badly burnt Liberator crew. I don't know how many of them. He got them back to safety. He deserved the DFC. But that was Corrie. He was going to get the DFC. He got it.

You're going to get it some way or another.

Incidentally,

- 03:30 they sent Corrie to an air-sea rescue squad and they took him off the mine laying because it was safer for everyone.

Why did you return to the air with Qantas?

If you can put up with a long story. I started off with Tooth's brewery, a Resch's brewery to build a thing called the

- 04:00 Lortar tongue. It was thrust upon me. I didn't know a thing about how to brew beer and in those days it was a hell of a mental strain and I had to bring out three Englishmen. Today everyone can weld stainless steel, but I had no one could weld stainless steel. It had to be built in situ and I had these Englishmen. Typical Poms [British] the three of them. One turned up with a tie on and a coat. He never worked. He told the other two
- 04:30 what to do. I also then had fitters and turners working for me. I collected their pay one day, and they were getting more than me, because I'm staff. In those days they had what they called staff, you got a fixed salary. These other people were on award rates, double, triple time. They were getting such a terrific amount of salary and it made me rather... Considering I was taking the full kick of the responsibility of this thing, and so I was on
- 05:00 board the Melbourne at this christening. I met up with a few chaps who went straight from the air force to the flying and they said, "Why don't you come back in?" I said, "No." That's when I contacted the Department of Civil Aviation. They said, "You've got to start from torse again." I got hold of this, I call the College of Knowledge. Did all the exams, thanks to Bev. I was up till two o'clock in the morning studying. I passed those then Qantas said they were getting me into flying. Once I got the flying, there were very few people who ever wanted to be navigators.
- 05:30 In fact my license number is only 290, or 292 or something. That's how many navigators there were in Australia from the beginning of time. There's no glamour in it. But there was pay. I also enjoyed the job very much.

Everyone obviously wanted to be pilots.

Everyone wanted to be pilots.

Given you are out of the air force and in Qantas, and in the air force you were on the same rank, same pay, was that the same?

I was getting quite a good pay.

- 06:00 Up near the First Officer's pay. Not quite the captain's. I was sort of... I was getting more say, than the second pilot or the engineers. Quite a good rate of pay.

While you were at Qantas, did computers come and change... ?

Yes. In fact, two major things happened. I'll stress one of them, which is an amazing thing. The first

thing that came out to get rid of a navigator was Doppler. Do you know what I mean by Doppler? You stand in a railway station

06:30 you hear a train coming don't you? And as you listen, as it passes, the sounds changes. The Doppler converted that sound into speed, so you could tell what your ground speed was and what's theoretical. But the whole thing was based on magnetic compass. That's where it all... It was a fizzer, because if your compasses are out, it didn't matter how good the system was, you were history. So I still continued with Doppler as a... Not Doppler,

07:00 ah, Doppler. Then, I did trials on this, the inertial guidance system which I think was may have been brought about by these rockets going to the moon. Can you bear this out? The property of a gyro, rigidity in space. You see a gyro, not the rotating, but it's moving like this. It's not moving at all. It's looking at that spot in space and the earth's moving. Do you follow?

07:30 It's staying all the time looking. But you can't make a giro if there's any pressure. You had to have frictionless bearings because if there's any pressure, the direction of rotation also makes it trans-sectional. So they brought out this Doppler system and they brought out somehow or other to make a frictionless bearing. It may have been supported by air, and what have you. One of the trials I did was Honolulu. You didn't just set Honolulu as coordinates,

08:00 You set the bay in Honolulu where you were and once that started up, that giro all the time looked into that spot in space. The computer took into consideration the movement of the earth. You follow? So any other movement, the computer could work out from that difference. And it was so accurate that I went from Honolulu to Sydney and it was 180... It was me against it. It wasn't really, I had to navigate properly.

08:30 And it was 186 yards out when we landed in Sydney. That was the inertial guidance system. And Qantas put three of them in. It was the finish of the navigator. But by that time I'd failed. Before it was really. How can I put it? You know, they'd set up workshops etc. well, that's... I'd failed my medical and I was out. That was the end of the navigator, that inertial guidance system.

What year was that?

I'd say... I'm assuming, because I'm out of Qantas now, I'd say about

09:00 '76, '77. They gave them all a golden handshake. Some, they went as pilots. They were young enough to stay as pilots. That was the finish of the... Do you remember the big scream about the Air New Zealand crash in Mount Erebus, the one in... See, you cannot use a magnetic compass in the South Pole, because every direction's north. But the inertial guidance system will work.

09:30 But whoever programmed that, didn't program it correctly. It's got to be programmed and once it's programmed... The big mountain they hit there and that was purely because it was incorrect program. It wasn't the pilot's fault. It could have been a fault that they didn't program it correctly, but it wasn't a flying fault.

What planes were you flying in?

I started off in DC4s, Electras,

10:00 and Super Constellations and Boeings, 007s. At that time, they still are I'd say, were the fastest commercial aircraft in use. We were flying at mach... On the Pacific runway we were cruising at mach 8, or 84 per cent of the speed of sound. That's fast, isn't it?

Faster than the 747?

I'd say it would be. I don't know what 747s fly at, but I don't think they'd be going at mach 84.

Is it true to say that Qantas had problems with the constellations?

10:30 They had more with the... They had problems with the constellations, yeah. They had one crash and destroyed completely at Mauritius. I came there after that one. But one of their big problems was their 707s to start with. If you can understand this. The first lot they got were 138As. You're flying at that terrific speed of 84 per cent the speed of sound. The curve of that end of the wing tip,

11:00 the air was flying over that faster than the speed of sound and the wing tip would stall and they called it a Dutch roll and the aircraft would go like this all over the damn place and human being couldn't pull that out. They, the only way they could get out was to engage the automatic pilot. And they'd have to come back on speed as well. That was a very big problem, but they overcame it. They put those little spoilers along the wing tips and so on. No, they did have a bit of problems I suppose with the Super Connie [Super Constellation]. The Queen [Elizabeth II] went across didn't she,

11:30 from Perth to South Africa in one and they had to turn back with an engine failure. I quite enjoyed them.

In your time with Qantas, did you fly to the Middle East to places such as Egypt?

Yes. Iran. I used to... I'm quoting when I slipped. When I say slipped, where I stayed. I'd stay in Tehran and Iran quite frequently. I stay in Delhi.

12:00 Karachi was another. Had a lot of fun in Karachi. Damascus, not counting the Europeans, like London or Rome and places like that. Qantas flew, really flew around the world. In those days they went from Sydney to New York to London direct, like all the way to New York-London. They went Sydney, Mexico City, Bermuda to London.

12:30 They flew to South Africa. I used to be South Africa to Mauritius and Johannesburg. Golly, they flew everywhere, Qantas.

Given you're flying all over the place, were there air space problems you had to avoid as a navigator?

Oh, yes. Terrific space... Especially when you came across, say, coming into Cairo. There's about five different Arab States there. If you cross on to one,

13:00 all hell breaks loose and the jet stream hits you there as well, so you had to really watch. I used to watch the air temperature, because suddenly the temperature changed I knew something was wrong. Because you could get... Coming into the [United] States, there was no danger, but our chief navigator got caught and it cost the company \$25,000. He had a fighter interception. Had to come into Hong Kong... When I say the States, this is from Nadi or to Honolulu.

13:30 You had a position in Honolulu, a mainstream position at sea to report to and if you weren't at that position they sent fighters up. I suppose the Pearl Harbour dramas, but they knew that it was civil aircraft. Don't get me wrong. They weren't going to shoot the Qantas down, but of all people who got caught, it was our chief navigator.

The \$25,000 was a fine?

\$25,000. Because they had to pay for the aircraft interception.

With navigation in Vietnam, what did you

14:00 **have to be careful... ?**

Nothing much at all. Everyone... Originally I used to... This is when I was bypassing Vietnam. You've heard of Da Nang have you? I'd come down from Hong Kong to Da Nang, over there, going towards Bangkok and you pass over the top of the Americans doing their air raids, but you'd be well up. I'd be up 30,000 no danger at all. And then coming into Saigon, people tell me there was danger, but I couldn't see any danger.

14:30 None of the Qantas aircraft got hit.

The North Vietnamese had no air support... ?

I'd say, I know nothing about the Korean War really, but I doubt whether they had any of that type of thing because surely Qantas would have had a hit by that stage.

Sorry, North Vietnam?

I know. North Vietnam. I knew only Saigon. That's where we used to come in. Pick up the troops or take the troops there.

Obviously you stayed in Saigon?

15:00 No half the time not. I can't remember. It's a little bit... I did quite a few of them and they have a record of it, the Department, obviously, but I didn't. I don't think I ever... I think I just stayed for a day. I don't think I spent the night there even.

You don't have any impact images?

There was no impact. Just a trip to me and I felt always sorry for the troops. They all got fairly tanked on the way home. They were the best behaved lads I've ever met. Better than any football team flying.

15:30 **What would you like to say to future generations about war?**

That's a very difficult question. First of all, it's not the individuals

16:00 that start... The people that start the war are not the peasants, if I may call them that. The run of the earth people. It's hierarchy and I feel that half the wars are brought about from economics point of view. I think they're all completely ridiculous and I think things could be solved a lot better than having war. And I do feel... I'm not against Bush when I say this, but I think economics enters every

16:30 state of it. I only hope the Chinese don't suddenly... They're wanting so much, bloody, at the moment, minerals, you know for their... They're growing at such an alarming rate, their commercial... I only hope nothing ever happens there.

Do you have any final comments you'd like to add to the Archive?

I am glad I had the life I had when I had it and I'd hate to be going

17:00 through life today with... Life is fairly simple to me. Today life has become very complicated. I get on my hobby horse. Everyone must have a university degree for some unknown reason. You're going to have that many chiefs and no Indians, you'll find an electrician or a plumber will be getting more than say, a doctor shortly. People don't get off the university bandwagon. Now I don't know whether you agree with me on that. I think it's very sad that we're not seeing

17:30 more apprenticeships and things.

Thanks so much for your time.

I hope I haven't bored you too bloody much.

INTERVIEW ENDS