Australians at War Film Archive

Hugh Bonython (Kim) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Well good morning Hugh, sorry, Kim. Thanks for giving us your time and speaking with us today.**

That's okay.

First of all I'd like to ask you if you could give us a brief introduction to yourself?

Well I was born in Adelaide in September

01:00 1920. I grew up in Adelaide. Left school in the end of 1938 and I didn't know what really I wanted to do with my life. I was mad about speed, and I was mad about jazz and not keen on scholastic,

01:30 unlike some of my family I wasn't a scholar and my brother, half brother John, who was the original founder of Santos, the oil search company, said to me "What ever you do decide to do with your life a knowledge of accountancy would stand you in good steed." Through his

02:00 brother-in-law I became a junior at a chartered accounting firm in the city called J F Kiered and Company and I spent my first year after school doing stock checks and going to businesses with my senior associates and they always say that I was saved by the gong by the advent of World War 11,

02:30 because nine months after I left school the war broke out. In those days there was a cadet corps at school and after I left school I went into the militia, as it was customary in those days and I used to go every Monday night to the Torrens parade ground for drills and

03:00 we'd go up to the Woodside Army Camp for exercises a couple of times a year. But I decided when the war came that if I was going to go to war I'd rather be in an aeroplane than a tramping across the battlefields, so I imagine about October of 1939 I volunteered for the air force and waited around then

03:30 to be called up. Now to kill time I drove up to Sydney to see a pre war friend of mine who was an amateur pilot and was an instructor at the New South Wales Aero Club at Mascot and he said before I left to drive back to Adelaide "When you go through Melbourne,

04:00 why don't you go to Victoria Barracks and ask to see a certain Squadron Leader Davis" who was more or less in charge of the recruitment intake of trainees, "To see how long before you're likely to be called up." So I did that and Squadron Leader Davis said "It will be a few months yet", because the Empire Air Scheme hadn't even started.

04:30 And he said probably two or three months and he said "Just a minute" and went out of the room and came back and said "Can you be in Sydney tomorrow?" And I was taken back and said "Yes" so I then turned around and drove back to Sydney. I had a rather odd experience on the way. There was a lady in distress. The car had broken down and I stopped to give her a bit of assistance,

05:00 and she turned out to be a gypsy and she said "If you cross my palm with silver, I'll tell you your fortune." So I did and she said "Yes, I can see it. You're going to be killed in an air crash in March." She didn't say which March and I didn't really believe her but as I've said subsequently I was always rather glad when April came around and I'd survived another March.

05:30 In fact two years ago I thought the March had come because I sat next someone on an American airliner between Florida and Los Angeles and I'm sure he had mayhem on his mind. He pulled out a book with Taliban written on it and he had all sorts of nervous twitches and some of his baggage started to hum and I thought "Now this is the March,"

06:00 but it wasn't. Anyway years later I discovered, I went to a dinner at the Rose Bay Golf Club with some friends and the well known Australian pilot, Clive "Killer" Caldwell, who'd I met a couple of times, said "Did you know that it was me that you replaced on that course?" I said "No, I didn't know" and of course he became probably Australia's

06:30 greatest air ace of World War 11 and it was just the luck of the draw. I've had a few things happen in my life. Had things happened differently that may have made a vast difference to my career. In this case it turned out to be the last of the so called air cadet courses before the Empire Air Training Scheme started. The

07:00 graduates from this course, and we finished our training at Point Cook, were either made instructors, or else like we were put into general reconnaissance squadrons operating around the Australian coast, escorting troop transports and things like that and we were the ones who were more or less

07:30 involved when the Japanese war started. Most of the people who would have otherwise been my contemporaries when the Air Training Scheme started would have trained in Canada and finished up in the European sector. But because of what happened I finished up in the South West Pacific sector and didn't get

08:00 into action till the end of forty one, subsequent to Pearl Harbour. So I did my training at Mascot. There weas no accommodation there. We were billeted to start with at the Brighton Le Sands Hotel and bussed to our flying training every day and at the end of the training at Point Cook

08:30 I was posted to nearby Laverton to a Hudson general reconnaissance squadron, Number Two Squadron, as the lowest of the low second pilot and I was there for a year before we actually moved up north on the advent of the Pacific war. We went to, in September of 41 we went on a familiarisation flight of

09:00 the Netherlands East Indies bases where we were to spend the first months of the Japanese war but we were actually on route from Melbourne to the East Indies when we landed to refuel in Oodnadatta in the middle of the night and that's when we first heard of Pearl Harbour. So we went on various sections of, the squadron went either to Ambon,

09:30 nearby Malaya or in my case Koepang and we carried out operational escort and bombing duties. I was then transferred from being a second pilot to being captain of the aircraft. An incident occurred a few months ago,

10:00 one of my crew members was a air gunner from near Albury and he said "Did you ever wonder how John Schofield", another South Australian, "and I became members of your crew?" And I said "No, I'd never given it any thought." "Well" he said "You were made a captain, the commanding officer called for volunteers for your crew and nobody volunteered. So I said to Schofield 'look with a name like that, there's no

10:30 way he won't survive the war, let's volunteer." I said "Thanks for telling me. I always imagined that I had a reasonable reputation as being not a bad pilot, but certainly not because of my name." He volunteered to serve in my crew. So anyway we operated out of those NEI [Netherlands East Indies] bases until we were forced back

11:00 to Australia just prior to the first raid on Darwin. I'd picked up dengue fever in the jungles of Timor and I was actually in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base hospital on the day of the raid and one of my squadron mates came to see me that morning and while we were talking we heard the sound of many aeroplanes and

11:30 like everybody else thought "Whoopee the Yanks are here at last" until we then heard the all too familiar sound of falling bombs which we'd been subjected to on a daily basis.

Well we'll come back and talk about that but just sticking to our sort of summary, after the bombing of Darwin, you then did a conversion to Beaufort's?

12:00 I was, I stayed with 2 Squadron until about the middle of June 42 when I was posted to back to Laverton and did a conversion course on Beaufort's and subsequent to that we were then transferred to Nowra, New South Wales where the formation of a torpedo training unit was based and we did a

12:30 torpedo course for I don't know what, a week or two weeks. And then loaded up and left for Milne Bay and I was in Milne Bay from, I think, the end of August 42 until Christmas 42, by which time I had virtually twelve months on operations, with the exception

13:00 of that conversion period. So I was then transferred back to Nowra as one of the instructors there and I subsequently became chief flying instructor and during this period we also moved from Nowra to Jervis Bay and I was in this capacity until

13:30 August 44, almost a year and a half. And then I was sent to Williamstown and did a conversion onto Mosquito aircraft and spent the rest of my air force career until just before the war ended on Number 87 Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron flying Australian built Mosquito's out of Coomalie Creek,

14:00 which was about forty miles out of Darwin. And I was on leave from that particular unit when the atomic bombs were dropped and the war ended.

And you were also married in late forty two, was that correct?

What happened was when we went to Milne Bay every time we dropped a torpedo,

14:30 they had no stocks of torpedos in New Guinea and we had to fly to back to Townsville to get a new torpedo and while I was there I made the acquaintance of a WAAAF [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] signals operator, called Jean Payne, and we married. My mother in my childhood used to be quite a dab hand at the

15:00 ouija board. You know you've got a table with letters all around the perimeter and you put your fingers on it and it glides and she asked the ouija board "Will Kim marry?" and it spelt out "Madly, at an early age". So I think that's probably right. I mean the first I ever saw my wife to be in anything other than air force uniform was the night before we

15:30 were married on a little island off Balmoral beach, where her family lived and I hate to say it but I thought at the time "What have I done?" Her taste in clothes was not exactly what I expected. Anyway we had a happy marriage and two lovely children and she came with me to Nowra and we rented a house and

16:00 lived there at Jervis Bay and then when I went to Darwin with the Mosquito's she had an apartment in nearby Walkerville, Medindie, an Adelaide suburb and then after the war I went on the land and we had a farm at Mt Pleasant, about thirty five miles north east of Adelaide

16:30 and it was there that we spent the rest of our married live until we divorced about 1955, I think, 54 or 55. And I married again in the end of 57. My children are now, I've now got from that first marriage I've now got three great-grandchildren, so time

17:00 marches on.

And I'm just also wondering if you can give us I guess, some of the highlights from your post-war time?

The post-war, yeah well I started off, my father had a sort of a hobby farm at Barker, about twenty five miles out of Adelaide and I used to go up there. In fact after the war the first thing I did was I went up

17:30 and worked at his Barker farm and the manager, he was a business man in the city, my father, and he had a manager and I sort of learnt the ropes of farming from his Mt Barker farm manager and anyway my original intention was to breed fat lambs but I made the

18:00 acquaintance of a Mt Pleasant resident named Frank McCrow, who was a Jersey breeder and through him he enthused me to get into the breeding of Jersey cattle and I went to the Sydney Show, must have been about 1949, and bought a few foundation stock.

18:30 And built what was, I'll say it myself, probably the most beautiful dairy shed in the country and it was surrounded by acres of irrigated Lucerne and brilliant green surroundings and this white building, with a cantilevered roof and red roof and white silo. It

19:00 was a sight to behold and the Jersey cattle were like pets. If you went out in the paddock and you didn't make a fuss of the cows they would come and bump you with their horns until you turned around and gave them a bit of attention. The females were, as I say, like deer. The males were a different matter.

19:30 I used to exhibit my cattle at the Royal Show in Adelaide and at certain country shows and one particular bull that I'd imported from Jersey Island I'd been harassing him for weeks, polishing him up, clipping him and came the day of the local show and I was leading him onto the truck that was to take him onto the show and I was perhaps a bit careless

20:00 and lost concentration. And the next thing I was flying through the air with his horns stuck into my left leg and as I hit the ground he came again and stuck his horn in my right leg and obviously I must have yelled out because the young dairy hand I had came running out with a staff and he whacked the bull across the rump and

20:30 the bull lifted his head to see what that was and it gave me time to roll out under the fence and escape further injury from the bull. But it was a couple of pretty nasty tears in both legs and one learns that with bulls they are not to be dismissed lightly. You've got to be on your guard that

21:00 they don't, I mean he'd been perfectly docile until then but he'd had enough obviously and showed his displeasure by goring me rather dangerously in both upper thighs. But it was a very fulfilling period of my life and when I look back, I've got a painting that was done by a

21:30 well known Melbourne artist, Charles Bush, of that beautiful setting and I treasure it today, bringing back memories which of I'm extremely proud because we broke all sorts of production records and lots of beautiful cows and bulls eventuated. In fact there's a little story, one of the, people

22:00 are amazed to hear that I once had a horse running in the Melbourne Cup. One of the Jersey breeders to whom I sold Jersey stock was also a race horse owner and he persuaded me to instead of paying me the seven hundred guineas that the bull would have normally brought, he persuaded me to take half an interest in a race horse. It was

22:30 quite a successful horse and won a number of races and started in, I'm not sure what year it was, Melbourne Cup. It ran about third last but at least it did and for someone who doesn't know one end of a horse, I've never been, gambling has never been one of my weaknesses. I don't go sticking my money in pokies or betting on the races. I've got other ways to lose money like putting on jazz concerts and things

23:00 like that but it was a period of my life I can look back on with a lot of affection and pride for creating something that was nationally regarded, well by fellow breeders I think.

That's absolutely fantastic. Thanks Kim. Now what we're going to do is go back to the very beginning.

23:30 Well during that time I started when I was at school, at age seventeen I started doing a radio program on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] on jazz and right through to 1976, apart from the war years, I did what was subsequently a nationally broadcast jazz program, so that in my Mt Pleasant days I was still doing my jazz program.

24:00 I played drums in a couple of local groups and only quite recently some of the music we made has been reissued on CD because my acetate copies of performers were all destroyed in the fire, so that I had a few, I've always had a few things going at the same time. And I eventually

24:30 gave up my active playing in a jazz band when it interfered with Jersey breeding and then in the end of 1976 when I was defending my Australian title in hydroplanes the boat blew up and I was on crutches for over a year. And that's when I gave up playing the drums because I couldn't get within a crutch length of the drum kit. But as I say

25:00 at one stage I had the jazz program, I had art galleries in Adelaide and Sydney, I was on the Australian Council for the Arts. I was the first chairman of the experimental film fund and all these things took a bit of juggling, going back and forth to Sydney. Then I ran the speedway for twenty years, so life was a bit hectic at times.

25:30 And I always used to say over my career I crashed four aeroplanes, spent over a year on crutches when the hydroplane blew up, I had a two man submarine and I almost drowned myself in that. And I used to say I'd escaped a hair's breath from death so many times that the good Lord would obviously say

26:00 it was saving up something particularly horrendous for me. And I used to say this until this little old lady said "What do you mean, like old age?" And I said "Yes, the most horrendous of all, old age." So I'm still here, went to a funeral yesterday but still here. But the people used to say to me in my racing days "You'll be sorry" by the time I've reached eighty three I'm beginning to think they might have been right.

26:30 I can't walk too much now. Had to give up my beloved motorbike but I'm still here.

Well I'm very glad because that means we can talk to you. Going back to your childhood, can you tell us a little bit about your mother and?

Yes, my mother was a wonderful woman. My father was very conservative.

27:00 His father, John Langdon Bonython came to Adelaide as a five year old and at an early age he started as a, well like a cub reporter for the Advertiser, and by the time he was, I think thirty seven, he actually owned the paper. And he was a generous, but God fearing man,

27:30 very conservative but he and my father were strict teetotallers [didn't drink alcohol] and I wonder whether that rubbed off on me. I always say, there used to be a church near us that had a saying every week, on its noticeboard every week and there was one by which I have lived and it said

28:00 "It's better to be neat and tidy than tight and needy", so I've never acquired a taste for alcohol. I've made up for it in other things I shouldn't be indulging in like chocolates and meat pies. But my father was a God fearing man. Never swore, never told stories and I always say typical of my father was, he had the story "Did you hear about

28:30 the pilot who decided he'd go home one morning and surprise his wife, and by helicopter." Now Dad thought that was terribly risqué and that was about as far as he went. My mother was a much more outgoing sort of person, a wonderful woman. We had a rather reprobate chauffeur come gardener who had a

29:00 taste for alcohol which was his downfall and eventually my father had to get rid of him when he was worse for wear when he should have been driving my mother round, who never drove a car. And poor old Slattery used to come to the door of our house, at all hours of the day and night, begging for something to eat or a hand out and Mother would always

29:30 give it to him. And he would say to her "You're an angel from heaven Lady Bonython" and as I said in my book when she died in 1977, we scattered her ashes under a tree that she particularly loved and in our hills garden and I thought at the time that would be a nice thing to put where her ashes lie "You're an angel from Heaven". But she was much respected. She was on umpteen

30:00 committees and one of the things that the family really took a bit of exception to, in later years she wrote an autobiography called “I’m No Lady”. It was a wonderful book but it would have been much better had she done it prior to having a stroke, when her memory was what it was. She used to ring up friends

30:30 and acquaintances at all hours of the day and night asking them about certain incidences, so I went the wrong way. I decided to succumb to people’s suggestions that I write a book by doing it ten years too soon. For the very reason that I didn’t want to leave it until I’d had a stroke but a lot of things happened subsequent to that book coming out in 1979, but

31:00 I suspect there’s not another book. I keep a little notebook of anecdotes as they happen but Barry Humphries, he’s one of the one’s who urges me to write a sequel. He said “I’ll even give you a title for it. Why don’t you call it ‘In Ever Decreasing Circles’?”. But it hasn’t eventuated. But

31:30 Mother was, because of her having written this book, she had also written a book of poetry that came out in a limited edition, back in the thirties. But she, they rather erroneously ended up, her entry in the biography, Encyclopaedia of Australian Biography saying “Lady Bonython was known for her gaffs”. Now I know exactly what they were referring to and believe you

32:00 me it was no gaff. One of her roles she was President of the ABC’s Orchestral Subscribers’ Committee and whenever a visiting celebrity came to Adelaide, she as president would introduce the guest of honour to the assembled ladies. One the occasion of the visit to Adelaide of Sir Malcolm Sargent she told the ladies that in order to get some background of him

32:30 she’d looked him up on Who’s Who and was surprised to find he that he had eight inches. Now she would have said that with a glint in her eye and it was no gaff because when Katherine Hepburn died the local paper had a big two page spread of Katherine Hepburn’s visit to Adelaide in 1954. And one of the several photographs reproduced

33:00 showed two unidentified ladies talking and the heading above it was “Shocked society matrons” and I felt inclined to write a letter to the paper, which I didn’t telling the story of Sir Malcolm Sargent and saying “I can assure readers that my mother would not have been shocked by Katherine Hepburn wearing men’s pants.” But she was a wonderful woman. Everyone who knew

33:30 her remembers her fondly. She was on umpteen committees. She was in charge of Adelaide’s first flower day in 1936. She did the shop window at a shop called the Unemployed Sales Depot and it was quite a talking point in Adelaide to see Lady Bonython’s latest flower display. She was really good with flower arranging and she was a very caring much loved person.

34:00 And I was lucky to have a mother who introduced me to, I remember she took me one night to see Pavlova, the Theatre Royal, I went to the symphony concerts and heard Walter Gieseking and all those sort of people that visited Adelaide. Very often Larry Adler, Richard Talber came to our house and she

34:30 instilled in me an appreciation of things that were much in advance of her contemporaries. For instance when her contemporaries were buying traditional paintings she was the one who saw something in Sidney Nolan and Jeffrey Smart and Elaine Haxton [Australian Artists] and it was from her that I developed an interest in art.

35:00 I remember after my father died she had to decide which house she wanted to live in, the city one or the one up in the Adelaide Hills and she chose the latter. And I went there one Sunday morning and she told me she’d just finished hanging a hundred and nineteen paintings in the house, which were souvenirs of a hundred and nineteen art shows she’d opened. So she was a great patron of the arts

35:30 and a very kindly person and I was fortunate to have her as my mother.

Well I’m just wondering Kim, about your childhood. Can you tell us a bit more about what your childhood was like. I understand you were also left in charge of your Aunt Min?

Well no, Aunt Min

36:00 was, my mother her name was Warren. Her mother was Alice Downer, a relation of the present Foreign Minister. His father, Sir Alec Downer, was my mother’s cousin and what did you ask me?

About Aunt Min?

36:30 Oh Aunt Min, yeah. Aunt Min was a spinster relation of my grandmother’s side of the family and she lived a pretty lonely life. She went to China as a younger person and collected all sorts of Chinese memorabilia but she lived on her own

37:00 and one night she was sitting in front of her fireplace and a piece of firewood exploded. There must have been a bit of gelignite or something left there and she lost her hearing and occasionally she’d come and baby sit for my mother. Because of my mother’s role she was Lady Mayoress when she was only twenty one. My father’s first wife, who was the daughter

37:30 of a Premier of South Australia, died shortly after giving birth to her third child, so some four or five

years later my mother married again, my mother, and Aunt Min was one of the relations that was often pressed into baby sitting for we three children. The story I always tell about Aunt Min was

38:00 she used to walk around the house breaking wind. Because she was deaf she wasn't aware that it was audible to other people. But yes, my sister, who is still alive aged ninety seven, Lady Wilson, the widow of Sir Keith Wilson, who was a Senator in the Federal Parliament for a number of years,

38:30 I think she always claimed that she used to bring us children of the second marriage up but Aunt Min was just one of our many relations that we saw a bit of in my youth but she's been long dead.

Okay, well our tape is coming to an end so we'll just change our tape and keep on going. Would you like a little break?

Tape 2

00:33 **Kim we were talking about your childhood. I was just wondering what type of child do you think you were? Were you?**

Spoilt probably. One of the stories that one of my elder brother's girlfriends tells is that the first visit our house on East Terrace one Sunday lunch

01:00 when it was traditional to have roast chicken for lunch on Sunday and we had a domestic wearing a black dress with a white lace collar and etcetera and this girl was introduced to the family. I hadn't arrived at that point. Eventually I came into the dining room clutching a paper bag

01:30 and while the rest of the family were consuming their roast I was slumped in my chair eating a meat pie out of a paper bag and fixing her with crossed eyes, and that was her introduction to the Bonython family. And I suspect, well the story that I was told was my father used to get a bit annoyed occasionally

02:00 about my slovenly ways and he extorted my mother "Slap him across the mouth Jean" and when she didn't he laid me over his knee and administered a firm hand slap on my upturned bottom. And I said "You brute" and he gave me another one and I said "You bloody brute" and he gave me a third one, and I said "You bloody bugger"

02:30 and the family all collapsed into laughter, including, but that was fairly indicative of the abominable manners that I had in those days. Undoubtedly my mother spoilt me and my father was a God fearing non violent type person, but that was me I'm afraid.

03:00 I can't deny it that I was probably a bit of a handful but I hope not an uncaring handful.

And what about your relationships to your siblings?

My children?

No, your brother and sister?

Well they were both

03:30 more studious than me. My brother, my half brother, John, whom I said he was a lawyer by profession but he started off the Santos Oil Search Company. My two sisters, my eldest sister, John or Jack as we called him was the eldest of the family. His eldest sister

04:00 was Betty, now Lady Wilson, formerly married to Senator Sir Keith Wilson and a very formidable dame. She was a very serious member of the family. The flapper of the first family was my sister Ada, who was very much like her Bray

04:30 relations. Her mother was a Bray and she married a Englishman, called Dennis Heath. His family were brass manufacturers in Birmingham and there was a rather bitchy writer on Truth newspaper called Victoria Reynolds and on the occasion of my sister's engagement

05:00 to Dennis Heath she headed the occasion with the words "More brass for the Bonython family". But she lived in England until her husband died and she came back to Australia and some of her children came to live in Australia.

05:30 The son remained with the family business in England. My brother Warren was the eldest of the second family and he was a, although he was the owner of an early MG sports car, he was rather studious and his hobbies were astronomy and he built a rather excellent telescope,

06:00 but he was much more studious than I. My sister, Catherine, the middle of the family, married an Adelaide businessman called Colin Verco, who was in another Hudson squadron, No 1 Squadron at Kota Bharu at the time of the Japanese entry into the war. And

06:30 all three members of the second family are still alive and only Betty Wilson remains of the first. We were

a very amiable family. We didn't live in each other's pockets but I see a

07:00 lot of. My brother Warren, in his later years is most known as a conservationist and a bush walker and it always used to amuse me, although he tends to not agree with this story. He married the daughter of a man called Frank Young, who lived in the Adelaide foothills at a place called Magill,

07:30 which had a large, well stocked cellar and I always say one of my father's dictum's was "Waste not, want not" and Warren bought his father-in-law's house with it's well stocked cellar and rather than see the wine go to waste, he became a wine connoisseur. And I can never quite believe it because up until that stage, he, like the rest of the

08:00 male Bonython's was a teetotaller but now he's a connoisseur. But he denies that's the way it took place but it's an odd coincidence that that's how the well stocked cellar disappeared and now he fancies himself as a bit of an expert on wine, something that I've never learnt. I mean during the war when I was up

08:30 in Timor, sometimes I'd come back dying of thirst and the only water available was had been boiled to destroy the germs in the water and was too hot to drink, yet there were ice cold bottles of beer on hand, but I couldn't stomach them. In fact I've been back to Indonesia a few times since the war and on one occasion I went to the

09:00 adjoining island of Lombok from Bali. In my last period in Mosquito Photographic Reconnaissance we used to photograph Indonesia and as far north of Borneo, all those islands, mainly from fifteen, eighteen thousand feet. But occasionally we'd be required to go down to tree top level to take pictures so you could see what was

09:30 going on under the trees. And one of the islands I used to do that for was Lombok, and as the inhabitants of Bali, somewhat cynically remarked "When the syphyllisation of Bali is complete, the tourists will move onto Lombok." So we decided to go to Lombok and have a look around. It was then not on the tourist

10:00 track but there were a group, the only other tourists that were there when we went there was a party of eighteen Japanese, who'd apparently been stationed there during the war and they'd come back to visit the graves of their fallen comrades. And when it became known that I was one of the enemy that used to, well the cameras came out, the arms went around the shoulders, and a pint of

10:30 beer was thrust into my hand and I knew there was no way I could say "I'm sorry, I'm a teetotaller", so for the one and only time in my life I drank a pint of beer, but I hated every drop of it. So my family made their marks in various ways and in the paper recently somebody, a journalist wrote there were some

11:00 names that ought to be commemorated by naming streets or suburbs after them while their memory is still fresh, not forgotten and one of the names mentioned was John Langdon Bonython. Now I'm not sure whether they referred to Grandfather who was John Langdon, or my brother John, the founder of Santos, but

11:30 they both have contributed far more to South Australian life than I know I have.

Well just to complete your childhood picture, can you tell us a little bit about the family home and where it was and?

Well the first home, we were born

12:00 in 329 Wakefield Street, which is still a private house, which is almost on the corner of Wakefield Street and East Terrace. My father used to walk to work at the Advertiser from there. In fact he lived his entire life, he died when he was eighty five, in the square mile of

12:30 Adelaide. In those days it was the accepted practise for children to be born at home and all three members of my family were actually born. In fact Mother used to tell the story that when my brother Warren was born the respective heads of Warren and the doctor

13:00 arrived at their various portals at the same moment. In other words the doctor just arrived at the front door as my brother Warren started to emerge. So we were born at the Wakefield Street and when I was eight my brother John had been to Cambridge and came back with his new bride and he moved into the

13:30 Wakefield house and we bought a house on East Terrace facing Victoria Park Racecourse on the corner of Gilles Street and East Terrace. It was called 'St corantyn' after some old Bonython family residence in Cornwall. So from the time I was eight

14:00 onwards until I joined the air force I actually lived at 'St corantyn' and my father was still living there at the time of his death in 1960. I had a rather useful way of telling our ages cause when I was fifteen my brother John was thirty

14:30 and our father was sixty, so if I wanted to work out how old we all were I could use that formula to do so. But anyway when father died in 1960, as I said, my mother had to decide whether she wanted to

stay there and make that her home or whether she wanted to go and live in the house in the hills.

15:00 Well she decided to do the latter, although she had an apartment in North Adelaide and she'd spend the winter months in the city and a longer period and we used to spend in the hills during the warmer months. So I joined the air force from East Terrace and when the war was over I soon went onto the land and never went back

15:30 again to the old house. It was turned into a sort of an out-patients, I'm not sure if this is the correct description but it had something to do with Glenside Mental Hospital. And I always used to say "The nuts were back in St corantyn once again" and I remember there was a charitable function at St corantyn

16:00 one day and the next day I went to help clean up the mess from the party and I said "At the time when I left East Terrace originally I never thought I'd be back thirty years later vacuuming the floors", which was what I was doing that day following the function which was held in our old house. It's now been subdivided

16:30 and into various apartments.

And who do you think you were closest to when you were growing up? You mentioned your brother's quite a bit older than you?

I've always been a bit of a loner. I mean I suppose my mother was the one that I empathised with most because she was

17:00 a very lively, busy, much admired person and I think I possibly inherited more of her qualities than, oh I inherited some of the more frugal habits of my old ancestors but I always said I've got other ways of losing my money than splashing it around

17:30 on grog and gambling.

Well that's a good point. I'm just wondering about your quest for a dollar at a young age. When you were going to school?

My mother as I said used to go to what they called the Floating Palais, a dance floor that was floated

18:00 on the Torrens, down near the rotunda now and she used to come back from functions there and she'd bring little coloured balls of paper back and I remember having a tray around my neck and walking down Wakefield Street trying to flog off some of these things, make a few. But unlike my children and grandchildren I never,

18:30 well at one stage I did work at a garage up at Crafers in the Adelaide Hills sort of pumping petrol, but unlike my grandchildren who are doing waiting jobs I'm afraid I was never that industrious to go out and earn a bob [money] on in my spare time.

19:00 **I'd like to talk more with you about your childhood but we do need to move on. I'm just wondering, I guess, during the Thirties what signs of the Depression do you recall?**

Well my father was Lord Mayor on three or four occasions and one of them was during the

19:30 Depression and I do recall my grandfather amongst his many gifts to education and good causes in South Australia, used to have, used to have meal tickets for the unemployed and during the Depression I still recall queues of people lining the Weymouth Street,

20:00 alongside the Advertiser building while he'd be giving the unfortunates tickets to get something to eat. But my mother, as I said, her initial involvement with the Unemployed Sales Depot, that would have started during the Depression times. But I suppose that we were fortunate

20:30 in as much that we weren't deprived like so many others may have been at that time. We had a fairly fortunate childhood and it didn't personally affect me, glad to say.

21:00 **And how did you find your schooling? You were at St Peter's College?**

I was, yes and I was much too interested in speed, jazz and girls to take it very seriously until my grandfather who was a great one for the family excelling in whatever they did, made the rather rash

21:30 offer that if I could come top and perform he'd give me what I wanted. I think it was a fairly safe offer to make because on past performances you wouldn't think I had any hope in the world doing well scholastically. But by some fluke I did manage to top one of my sub-intermediate classes every term. I even won

22:00 the scripture prize that year which I always claim was an event of unbelievable inappropriateness but so having achieved that unlikely goal of coming top I awaited the opportunity to tell my grandfather what I wanted but he got in first and he told me to come over. He had a watch he wanted to give me

22:30 and I imagined it was going to be a gold watch on a gold chain and instead it was a stainless steel five

shilling Big Ben pocket watch on a black bootlace. But I wasn't going to let him get away with that because what I wanted was a motorbike and I more or less blackmailed my poor father into getting me my first motorbike in the end of 1935. And until four or five months ago I've never

23:00 been without one since. It's one of the greatest pleasures in my life was riding motor bikes and I'm lost now without it. Right through the war the air force always had bikes. I had bikes from the time I was fifteen onwards and the last bike I had was what was described as the Rolls Royce

23:30 of motorbikes, a four cylinder Italian bike called an MV Augusta, which of only a hundred and thirty five of them were made. I was conscious of the fact that it was heavy and getting to be more than I. I was alright on the move but if I had to stop for traffic lights, particularly if there was a cambered road, if it started to tilt I wasn't strong

24:00 enough to hold it up and it became increasingly embarrassing to have to call on passers by to lift it off me, so reluctantly I decided the time had come to dispose of my heavy bike. And I'm not sufficiently developed to cope with the internet and things like that so the fax machine is about my limit,

24:30 so a speedway friend of mine offered to put my motorbike for sale on the internet and with the statement "Reluctant sale by eighty two year old owner" and it was subsequently bought, unbelievably by the headmistress of a girls' school in Kent and what's more she flew it to England. And

25:00 I've now got photographs of my beloved MV running around the English countryside. She and her husband have got ten other motorbikes and I miss it terribly. I was thinking of getting a lighter bike but one of the things that deterred me is that on my particular bike the brake pedal and the gear shift pedal were on opposite side to every other motorbike

25:30 and I thought I'd probably kill myself getting used to the change. Particularly as fifty years earlier when I was on the farm I got a new tractor that had the same problem, the clutch and brake were on the opposite sides and I allowed my five year old son, foolishly, to ride on the back of the new tractor while I was doing some

26:00 disc harrowing. We started off with a bit of a jerk, he fell off and I was pushing on what used to be the clutch and was actually the brake and by the time I woke up that I was pushing the wrong pedal the discs had actually gone over him. One of the discs must have been just above his head, the next one went across his chest and broke his collar bone. If the blades had been sharper and the ground underneath had not been already

26:30 Ploughed I undoubtedly would have killed him and I thought "Well fifty years later I'm not going to be any quicker to respond to those things, so it might be a blessing in disguise that I don't continue to ride a bike". Although I must say particularly in my old age when I'm having trouble walking with a motorbike you can invariably drive exactly where you want to go and park outside.

27:00 Where even with a disabled permit you've generally got to walk a couple of blocks from where you park to where you're going.

And what was the first bike that you got at fifteen?

Well it was a small 175 cc Triumph, just a light bike. I mean I had it until just before the war when I got a much beloved

27:30 Czechoslovakian bike called a Zundapp. And then I've had a succession of bikes since then. After the war when I was on the farm I had a Vincent HRD, which is a well known classic motorbike and unbelievably I used to run around the paddocks on my Vincent HRD checking that no sheep were on their backs and couldn't get up.

28:00 It was something that any normal person would use a sort of a scramble type bike, not a classic bike like an HRD, Vincent HRD but I think it's one of the greatest pleasures in life. In fact I've been a member of the Ulysses Motorbike Club, which is an oldie, a club whose motto is

28:30 "Living disgracefully". I wrote a letter saying how I'd sold the bike to this school teacher and finished up by saying "Ride on you lucky bastards." So I really, more than anything else in life I miss, it's changed my whole way of life because my son lives in a beachside

29:00 suburb and I'd often say "I'll just hop on the bike and go for a bit of a run" and I'd go down and see him. I don't go down as often now as it's not the same hopping in your car and driving down as it used to be just to get out and I'd go for a run up the hills and there's nothing more pleasant than riding a bike through the hills in autumn. And it's a hole in my life

29:30 that I'm finding hard to take.

Well what were your hopes and dreams do you think as a young lad when you were finishing schooling?

Well it's something I've always driven, whatever I do I like to do it well. I mean in the speedway

30:00 I always, from the time I was about nine I used to go to the local speedway at the showgrounds and then

it moved to a nearby suburb of Camden up until the war when cars started to race as well as bikes and speedway has always been one of my great enthusiasms and the opportunity came when I was still farming

30:30 at Mount Pleasant to take over the lease. I'd already started competing in what we call speed cars, what the Americans call midget cars. These speed cars had mainly Holden engines. In latter years I had American cars but often with our engines. And I used to put on a hell of a show.

31:00 I mean it became internationally known as one of the great speedways of the world and it used to give me great satisfaction to know that I put on, if not the best, one of the best such entertainments in the country and it was known far and wide. Over the years so many people who have made it big time in life have

31:30 come to me and said "I used to sell meat pies, or programmes or soft drinks at Rollie Park" or "I used to go" and they were doctors, lawyers, entertainers. John Farnham [Australian singer] used to be a regular and I thought it would be nice to include the words "Prime Ministers".

32:00 So it was rather unfortunate timing, I wrote a letter to Tony Blair [Prime Minister of England at the time of interview], because it's not widely known he lived some of his years in Adelaide. His father was a lecturer at Adelaide University. And I thought though the biggest money makers I ever put on were regrettably not the racing, it was the novelty events, like demolition derbies, figure eight car racing, fire works displays, the most exciting races of all were the regular

32:30 England versus Australia solo motorbike test matches. And I thought during his sojourn in Adelaide Blair may have conned his father into taking him down to Rollie Park to barrack for the Poms [the English]. But I didn't get any answer because I wrote the letter just as it turned out just before the Iraq War erupted and he probably had more things

33:00 on his mind than that. But I spoke to John Bannon, former Premier of South Australia, who is a master of a university college down the end of our street and he told me that when Tony Blair lived in Adelaide he was only five or six years old. He would have been too young to have been interested in speedway. If he'd have been a thirteen or fourteen year old it was quite likely that he might have urged his father to take him to

33:30 the speedway, so I can't add Prime Ministers to the list of people. The best one I've had I was on a charitable committee and I'd heard all the stories before and this lady said "My Dad used to sell sly grog [alcohol] at Rollie Park" and I said that was one I had not heard because when Rollie Park was going the pubs used to shut at six and there was probably a roaring trade in sly grog sellers moving amongst the

34:00 crowd selling their wares to the patrons there. They were great days and as I say I look back with some pride on the fact that I made it happen. Similarly with my jazz entrepreneurial I started off as an enthusiast that used to buy records from record shops

34:30 in America. One of the places I dealt with was a famous record shop called the "Commodore Music Shop" in New York that made their own records. I didn't get to meet the manager of the shop until I went to America for the first time in 1950 and his name was Jack Crystal. He is Billy Crystal's [American actor] father and Billy Crystal is just the image of his father who

35:00 used to not only sell records at the Commodore Music Shop, but on Sunday afternoons would promote jazz concerts. And I remember shaking hands with anticipation opening a new box of 78's I'd ordered from New York that would come to Australia on one of the Mariposa or the Monteray, taking months to get

35:30 here, never dreaming that those people that I idolised that I would be eventually bringing them to Australia for concert tours. Starting in 1954 and occasionally, very occasionally still do it but my hay day was in the sixties and seventies really when I bought most of the jazz giants to Australia.

36:00 And to the people that ask me I say "It might be old age but I simply do not believe as the traditional giants die off they are not being replaced by people of equal stature as they were." The big name now that everyone knows is Wynton Marsalis [Jazz musician]. Now I'll admit that he is

36:30 technically brilliant but I'm not convinced he's a wonderful improviser like his predecessors were. So it might be old age but I don't think that jazz has developed the way that I would have hoped as it was in my teenage years.

Well we'll hear more about your gramophone but I'm just wondering what about King and

37:00 **Country and allegiance to Britain, did you have a sense of that growing up?**

Absolutely. When the Republic push came I started the "No Republic" movement in South Australia.

I'm not really, I'm just wondering about early days?

Early days?

And your family traditions?

My family were

37:30 loyal, I mean our ancestors came from Cornwall and we had an admiration and respect for the royal family and it's something that I've grown up with. I mean the war, when England declared war I think we all felt that it was our duty to support the mother country,

38:00 and I've supported that. It's not that I'm against a Republic. I just think that what we've got is something that we should treasure and not cast aside and I believe that as long as the Republicans are divided amongst themselves, as they are,

38:30 certainly not within my life time will that ever eventuate. Maybe when my generation has all gone they'll look at it again but I just don't think change for change sake is justified.

I'm just curious about your interest in joining the militia when you completed school and what motivated you?

Well it was the thing.

39:00 I'm patron of the Darwin Defenders Association who commemorates the first raids on Australian soil and I had to speak a week ago at the annual church service that our association arranges. And I said "When I was a boy, cadet

39:30 corps and the militia were a part of one's life". Now day's they're not even encouraged too. And I said "The Second World War started in September 39 and it wasn't until December 41 that it actually came to Australia and we were unprepared last time and we're even more unprepared now because not only

40:00 does cadet corps and militia no longer exist but I think it's the duty of all Australians to have some basic knowledge, male and female, of protecting their country." And I said to Tony Abbott [Australian politician] a couple of years ago "When is the government going to start talking about national service because I think Australia is not going to be given the option that they had last time. In these high tech days things are going

40:30 to happen much quicker and if we're totally unprepared, as I believe we are, we won't be as lucky as we were". And I believe that not only do young people need a sense of discipline, which they get from military service, but it also brings you in touch with people you'd otherwise never get to meet and you learn to live with and understand their problems.

41:00 And I think it's a nation building exercise for people to be more involved in the way that national service gives you and I just think it's about time the government started thinking about national service again, because it's something we all need.

Well on that note, we'll just change out tape.

Okay.

Tape 3

00:33 **I'm going to pick it up with your militia training with the cadet corps. What exactly did that entail?**

Well we did a preliminary training at Mascot Aerodrome and what was unusual about it was we pupils were practising take off and landings on the same strip as the commercial airliners of the day were taking off

01:00 and landing. You can't imagine it been permissible today to have pupils landing in amongst the jets, so we did our elementary training, starting at the beginning of March 1940 and because of things were just getting organised we were there for three months before being

01:30 transferred to Point Cook in Victoria for our intermediate training. And after when I finished that, that was on Anson's. First of all we started off in Sydney on, A Flight had Tigermoths, which was the former

02:00 Kingsford Smith Flying School had the earlier D8 60's, De Havilland 60's, which were a sort of a predecessor of the Tigermoth. And then we went after completing that elementary training we went to Point Cook where those that were thought to be more suitable as fighter pilots were trained on Fairey Battle

02:30 aircraft and those more suited to bombing type flying, such as I was considered to be, did our training on Avro Anson's and at the end of that course I then did a special navigation course, also at Point Cook and finished up having completed my training just before Christmas

03:00 of 1940 and I was posted to the adjoining air force base at Laverton where the Number 2 Hudson Squadron was located. So that was my training. From then on I was just a junior second pilot in a reconnaissance squadron whose duty

03:30 it was to escort convoys and do sea patrols looking for submarines, but mainly escort duties. The CO [Commanding Officer] of our squadron was Wing Commander Freddie Thomas who was later, after the war, Lord Mayor of Melbourne, in the flour milling business I think as far as business is concerned. And there were some quite well known people on that.

04:00 John Ryland was one of the senior flight commanders and he finished very high up in TAA [Trans-Australia Airlines]. Bob Law Smith, a well known former South Australian family, was one of the pilots. Wilbur Wackett, the son of the aircraft designer and builder, was another of pilots.

04:30 After the war a famous poet by the name of David Campbell was another of the pilots. Rob Burn, coming from Adelaide, who was killed up in Timor, there were a lot of people who went on to become well known in their various fields providing they survived the war,

05:00 and I guess half of them didn't survive the war.

Going back to your time at Mascot, can you tell me what it felt like the first time you actually flew?

No, I never felt myself to be a born pilot. When the war ended I haven't flown a plane since. I sort of felt well, I lived through that. If I lived on a country property or something like that I might have carried on flying,

05:30 but I was a fair enough pilot. I mean even now I'm going to be eighty four in a few months, I still consider I could keep my speed activities to the race track up. I'm not a dangerous high speed driver on the road.

06:00 My wife rather sarcastically told me a few months ago that my reactions weren't what they used to be and we were going to an art opening and coming back an hour later, we turned into our street outside here and were just getting ready to turn into the side street here and a child

06:30 suddenly appeared from nowhere. They'd let the child out of the car and came racing out in front and I stood on the brakes and finished up no further away than I am from you from that child. My reactions were alright when the chips were down. And as I say, my friends, because I'm a teetotaller, I'm a popular chauffeur because my friends who go to parties and things always know

07:00 that they're not going to have a drunk driver at the wheel taking them home. So that I think I'm a reasonably cautious driver, although my wife says I do tend to drive a bit close to the vehicles in front. But so with my piloting skills in my first assessment at Mascot, the instructor wrote "Slide slipping approaches

07:30 dangerous", but I managed to improve it to above average by the time I'd finished my training. And as I say I'm competent but not spectacular. I don't do rash things in aeroplanes. I'm conscious of the fact that there's not much of us that needed to

08:00 turn a joy ride into a fatality and I think I've survived the war and that's behind me. I've no desire to become a pilot flying his own plane around the world or anything like that.

And what qualities were they looking for in a good pilot?

Well I suppose someone who

08:30 did the job but didn't take unnecessary risks. I mean I used to get a bit upset occasionally when certain pilots, one of their roles was to deliver planes to the squadrons and some of them had the disconcerting habit of putting the planes through

09:00 manoeuvres which could have presumably weakened the plane structurally and I'm aware of a couple of occasions when planes disintegrated with a loss of life and it could have been that they were subjected to strains that were unnecessary. I mean putting planes through slow rolls and things like that

09:30 before you left it for somebody else to take it out on operations, I think it was unnecessary and could have been detrimental to the well being of others who followed flying. And I was conscience of the fact that you had to treat aeroplanes with a certain amount of respect otherwise they'd turn around and bite you.

Did you see a lot of fatalities during training?

10:00 We had a terrible run at one stage. I was flying in my torpedo years Australian built Beaufort aircraft. Now there were seven hundred plus Australian made Beaufort's and they did have, in some quarters they had a bad reputation for unreliability. I mean my navigator when we were

10:30 at Nowra had to instruct pupils on the use of radar which was coming into use at that point and he was just flying along with what we considered to be the most talented pilot of that particular course and all

of a sudden the plane suddenly, out of straight and level flying, nose dived in. Something had obviously let go, a structural failure.

11:00 We did find about that time some of the planes with control cables partially sawn through. There was obviously a saboteur working. Whether that crash could be contributed to just plain structural failure or whether there was a saboteur involved, no-one knew. But there was a period in

11:30 my time as an instructor at Nowra when we had I forget what it was, twenty or thirty people killed in a thirty six hour period, accidents of some sort. And one was never sure what had contributed to those accidents, whether it had been structural failure or the saboteur.

12:00 I had nothing but admiration for the planes. They never let me down and I thought they were a pretty efficient work horse and I had no complaints about their reliability at all.

And what was Point Cook like when you first arrived there?

Point Cook? Oh it was, hard to remember now. It

12:30 was a well run establishment where a lot of the earlier pilots learnt to fly the various planes and went on to in many cases to great reputations as war time pilots. So I think it was adequate, good and turned out a lot of

13:00 very good pilots.

And what were your comrades like there?

My comrades? Oh we were a motley lot from all walks of life, as I say like business men like Nick Grace, one of the Ashton brothers who were famous at that time as a polo playing family. There was a

13:30 cross section of Australian society and I guess it was like every other activity. You had people that were memorable. I mean some of my instructors, my particular instructor Allan Clancy was a contemporary of Kingford Smith [famous aviator] and he and his wife were

14:00 very kindly towards me and took me out for meals and we had a good rapport with not only the fellow pupils but the flying staff as well. So I think I had no complaints about, I think we were lucky to train as we did and at that time,

14:30 in the early days of Australia getting ready to go to war itself.

And at this stage were you flying Avro Anson's?

At Point Cook I was, yes.

And can you walk me through your plane?

As I say we started off with the De Havilland 60's at Mascot airport. One of the stories I often tell about those days was in those days there was no such things as parachutes and in one particular occasion we used to

15:00 do our aerobatic and forced landing training over an area which is now occupied by golf courses in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, Bonnydoon, and I forget what the other one is. Anyway one of the particular instructors was giving instruction in aerobatics and he obviously forgot to do up his safety harness and he turned upside down and fell out of the plane

15:30 and was killed, leaving the as to yet go solo pilot to find his way back to Mascot and land. So that was one of the more regrettable incidents of a pretty exciting period. One thing I remember we had a

16:00 World War 1 pilot as one of our instructors, not in flying but in the theory of flight, and lecturing in that and at the end of the course I remembered him saying "Well boys, I've been rather busy lately, so you're going to have to mark your own exam papers." I don't think anyone got lower than about ninety three percent. But one

16:30 met a lot of characters and we were, to start with we were, as I say because there were no accommodations at that point had been built at the aerodrome, we were billeted at a nearby hotel, the Brighton Le Sands. And we used to be bussed from the hotel to the aerodrome every day and then half way through the course the aerodrome accommodations were completed

17:00 and we then spent the second half our course in galvanised iron sheds sleeping on boards with straw palliasses and before we then moved onto the more established facilities at Point Cook.

And what was the type of training that you did at Point Cook that

17:30 **was different to what you were doing at Mascot?**

Well at Mascot we were just learning to land a plane, fly and get used to flying upside down and all that, so elementary as the name implies was the basis of flying and then when we went to Point Cook we concentrated on bombing and air gunnery and

18:00 practising shooting at aeroplane towed drogues tied onto back which you actually shot at these things trailing after other planes. And the skills of finding your way to and from, I mean I remember when night flying exercises were, there was

18:30 one time when we went out over Bass Strait in the middle of the night and there were mountainous seas and you hear about the terrible conditions sometimes in the Sydney to Hobart boat races and we were flying thirty or fifty feet above the water and these huge waves. Makes you realise how

19:00 potentially dangerous it must be to be in a sail boat in that weather. But it was a mixture of day and night flying and theory and navigation and bombing and air gun raiding.

Now you were making films at this time, is that right?

Not then, it was when I went to, my father bought an amateur camera

19:30 when I was a school boy and I took a lot of films of family affairs and prior to the war but I didn't start taking any war films, which of course were highly illegal, until during my first year in 2 Squadron, which was

20:00 1941. I went to 2 Squadron after Christmas of 1940 and I took a film of life in 2 Squadron. As I say it was terribly amateurish but fortunately unlike the rest of my films, those air force films survived. I got into hot water [trouble] because what I was

20:30 doing was strictly illegal and somehow word got out that I was taking these films and I was paraded before the air commander. It was the office commanding that particular section of the air force and the films were confiscated and I was severely reprimanded. Now because I had a group captain,

21:10 a wing commander and a couple of squadron leaders playing acting parts in my film I probably got off a bit lighter than if they'd been all pupils like me but because these high up officers were participating, I didn't get anything more than a severe reprimand. Now the films, as I say, were confiscated but later in the war my then

21:30 commanding officer, Wing Commander Freddie Thomas was posted to a position where these films came under his jurisdiction and on the quiet he smuggled them back to me and I had them thereafter. Now what was fortunate was amongst the films that I'd taken that hadn't been intercepted was one of a convoy

22:00 of AIF [Australian Imperial Force] troops being conveyed to the Middle East and it had the Queen Mary, the Isle de France and the Normandy escorted by HMAS Sydney. It was in one sequence. It was quite a historic convoy. They didn't see that one or they mightn't have been quite so lenient.

22:30 The objection of the film they got was it showed the inside of a Hudson bomber and the silhouette of a bomb site which I'm sure wouldn't have been of much interest to the Nazi's. But when I went to Jervis Bay at Nowra I more or less got official permission to make a film of torpedo training,

23:00 finished up by our flight to Milne Bay and films, colour films, that I took of planes taking off and landing at Milne Bay. And the war memorial got to hear about these films and borrowed the originals to copy them and sent the originals back to me. They arrived back to me about a week before Ash Wednesday,

23:30 so they arrived back in time to then be destroyed together with all my other family films and speedway films that had accumulated over the twenty years running the speedway, but I was able, because the war memorial had copied my film I was able to get another copy of their copy to which I then added a sound track,

24:00 so that the two anonymous people shown in the film were identified for posterity. And I've always said as films they were amateurishly shocking but historically they were invaluable, because they identified some of the people who went on the make names in various fields. And it's

24:30 just lucky that I've still got that film to look back on those days when I was making films in the war. I mean films, underwater films that I took subsequently and so much other they were all destroyed in the fire. Only those forty minutes of war

25:00 time film is all that's left of the hours and hours and hours of sixty millimetre film that I lost in the fire.

Back to Point Cook, when you completed your training there, where did you move from then?

Well we stayed at Laverton. 6 Squadron was based in Richmond in New South Wales and they would sort of do

25:30 what we were doing along the east coast of Australia. We would then, you might as well say, from the south east corner of Australia, right through to the Australian Bight, we would cover that area and I can't think of the name. Might have been 7 Squadron, in Perth, another Squadron in Perth, took over from our limit of responsibility

26:00 ended. And what happened was in September of 1941, when the situation was developing in the east

that seemed to indicate that war with Japan was becoming increasingly a probability, the squadron was sent on a familiarisation

26:30 flight. I mean it was a bit ludicrous that we couldn't wear our uniforms when we walked around Ambon, and so on. We had to wear just open necked shirts and no badges or anything like that, so we spent a few days travelling around an area which we were eventually to serve on active service a few months later. So

27:00 that was September 1941 and then at the beginning of December, 41 we were actually on our way to Darwin when we heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor [American Naval Base in Hawaii] and we went on to, various flights went onto Ambon, and a place called Namlaya, which was sort of

27:30 west of Ambon and Koepang on Timor. Our squadron and Number 13 Squadron, which was already based in Darwin took over the responsibility of, well everything, because there was no fighter aircraft. We were jack of all trades [doing all jobs] through necessity until a bit later on the Spitfire's

28:00 arrived in Darwin and the American aeroplanes came to Australia and operated out of Australia but for a little while we were the only allied air force to be operating in that area of the South West Pacific. So we went up to Darwin and joined with the

28:30 existing 13th Squadron in the defence of the Northern Australia and the islands to the north, which were then held by the Dutch.

And what aircraft were you flying at that stage?

Lockheed Hudson's.

Right.

And I was converted, at that point I was converted from being a second pilot to captain of my own aircraft.

And how was that position?

29:00 Oh well it was a bit more responsibility and there was very little intelligence about allied forces. I mean you'd see a cruiser and you weren't sure whether it was a Japanese cruiser or an American cruiser. You'd sometimes if you were lucky you were able to identify from silhouettes that it was such and such an American naval ship.

29:30 No we were, as the Japanese moved south they started to attack our bases, the NEI [Netherlands East Indies] on a regular basis, almost daily. Some of my contemporaries were lost to enemy action and so by the

30:00 time we had retreated to Darwin, we had been chased out of those islands, the squadrons had both been so depleted from enemy losses that the two squadrons combined as one and we used each others maintenance crews and facilities as if we were one squadron instead of two separate

30:30 squadrons.

You would have seen quite a bit of fighting in the Netherlands Islands?

Yeah it was mainly, as I say, we were operating out of those and the closer the Japanese came the more regularly we were strafed and bombed by Japanese planes. And I just got back to Darwin just in time for the first raid on February 19,

31:00 1942 and there were to be sixty four raids in all on the Darwin area during the rest of the, the Japanese war started from then.

So you went back to Darwin because of illness, is that right?

We were evacuated out of Darwin, oh Timor,

31:30 on the last day. The CO called for volunteers, people that would stay behind and look after various things on Timor and he, I presume because pilots were a bit of a shortage, he said to me in a quiet aside, "Now I don't want you to volunteer." One

32:00 of my contemporaries wrote a book called 'Trapped On Timor' and in the book he made the statement "When the CO called for volunteers everyone except one person volunteered." Now no names were mentioned but I wondered whether that one person was supposed to be me, but he wouldn't have known that I was instructed by my CO that I was not volunteer. That he wanted

32:30 all the pilots he could. My second pilot stayed behind and alas contracted dysentery and died in the hills above Dili and eventually there was talk of landing on the beaches of Timor to evacuate the people who remained. But that never happened. In the end they were evacuated on a submarine.

33:00 No, I went back to Darwin I think the night before the raid and I went into, because I had dengue fever

and a high temperature I went into the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] base hospital and was there when the first raid took place. And I checked myself out of the hospital because

33:30 I thought it was more important that the limited hospital beds should be available to people who were actually physically injured, rather than people like myself who just had a fever. I checked myself out of the RAAF hospital and bunked in with my mates again in either the partly damaged

34:00 accommodation or in tents. And after a while we were moved from Darwin to Daly Waters, about two hundred and fifty miles south. And for a few weeks we were based at Daly Waters. We'd just land at Darwin for refuelling before we went out on raids to the north because it was very impractical the operation from Daly Waters.

34:30 And before long we were back in some of the, not the RAAF base but there were other aerodromes, like Hughes field and Batchelor, other strips that were outside of Darwin town and we operated from there rather than having to go that extra distance to and from Daly Waters every time we went out on ops [operations].

Just going back to your time on Timor, how were

35:00 **the conditions there?**

Oh quite luxurious. I used to carry a wind up gramophone and a couple of boxes of jazz records with me whenever I went and we had Indonesian kids acting as sort of houseboys you might say and I was known amongst those

35:30 people as "Tuan Lagi Muchan", which is Mr More Food, because I had a reputation. I was also known as Glutton Guts because I'd eat all sort of rubbish and also "Tuan Music" because I was always playing my gramophone. But we had, until

36:00 the Japanese got closer we had quite an idyllic existence on Timor. I must admit not only in Timor, but also in Darwin being a non drinker I didn't join the other guys by going into town to the local pubs and things. I tended to stay closer to the base but the Dutch

36:30 influence was still, until the Dutch evacuated, that sort of colonial life was sort of rather idyllic. But things changed as the Japanese got closer and the old original inhabitants left the area and fled south.

I'm just curious during the time of rations and not a lot of food especially when you're in the air force,

37:00 **how did you come to be known as "Mr More Food"?**

Well whatever there was I suppose, my mother used to send me tins of shortbread up. We had a friend who was chief pilot in the airways, John Chapman, and he used to bring me delicacies like that. He even, there was even, dry ice was a new product that had just

37:30 been invented and she used to send me up a thermos of AMSCL [Adelaide Milk Suppliers Cooperative Limited] ice cream in it, packed in dry ice. By the time it would get to Darwin and then wait for the next plane that was going further up, by the time it got to me it was probably half of it was froth but there was generally a firm centre to the ice cream. And

38:00 I can tell you that I was noted for having some of the good things from home that were unobtainable on the spot. No, I've always, even my present, I've always been noted for my outlandish tastes in food.

38:30 I don't eat healthy food and I take the attitude that if I can continue to force myself to go to gymnasium three times a week then I can continue to eat all the sorts of food that the doctor's would tell you to keep away from. I'm noted for the fact that I don't like any healthy food. My intake of greens is limited. I love fruit but I do

39:00 eat a lot of pastries and chocolates and things like that, that undoubtedly I shouldn't. I had a bypass [operation on the heart]] in 1990 and it's served me pretty well and I've attributed that to the fact that I do get the blood pumping on a regular basis by going to the gymnasium.

39:30 **So actually winding up this tape.**

Tape 4

00:32 **We'll take the pace down a little bit and take a step back. We've got a lot of time to talk today so we'd just like to get as much detail as possible. I'd just like to go back to your training days. Oh, there's one more thing that I'd like to do. I've noticed your hair is a little bit flyaway. (TAPE STOPS) All good? Okay. So now I'd just like to go back to Brighton Le Sands,**

01:00 **you've just come out of high school, you're still young, you've been doing cadets for a while, can you tell me about those high school boy, or boy high school sort of spirits that you took**

into the air force with you?

Well I wasn't, as I say, I wasn't a great scholar. I never passed my intermediate or leaving, I'm afraid.

01:30 I suppose I was a bit self indulgent by being more interested in things like jazz and speed. As far as speed was concerned it was inevitable that my generation, when car and bike racing

02:00 started a young person would be enthralled by all that, whereas previous generations copped that sort of exhilaration from horse riding and hunting and that sort of thing. I was not an outstanding sportsman. I was in about

02:30 the school's lowest football team. I got into the third cricket eleven at school and on a few occasions got promoted to the second, so when I was uncharacteristically successful as a batsman. But my son, no thanks to me, was an Australian amateur golf champion in 1975, and

03:00 my brother John was a good tennis player and I think he captained Cambridge in lacrosse but we weren't particularly a note worthy family in the sports. Although I think to say John and my brother Warren were pretty good intellectually.

03:30 **And why, what was it about the flying and the air force that attracted you?**

Well I suppose it was a further manifestation of my love of things that went fast and speedway racing was something that had just taken on when I was about nine and I was a regular at the speedway. My father's secretary at the Advertiser was the sister of

04:00 a one of the more successful motor bike riders and as a result I used to go with her family to the speedway every Saturday night and my mother and my father who didn't share my interest in those sort of matters, then didn't have to

04:30 take me. They had the Litchfield family that would look after me there so they weren't personally involved in that aspect of my life and enthusiasms, so that I was able to indulge my whims more than some who were more unfortunate.

What did you know about the air force

05:00 **and flying before you joined up?**

Not much. My brother Warren learnt to fly at Parafield. We used to go out, it was a ritual in the pre-war days that we would go out to Parafield Aerodrome on Sundays to watch the planes taking off and landing and I met a lot of people who became firm friends, who were fellow students

05:30 in those days. And as I say speed in its many manifestations was an integral part of my life really.

And what about the glamour, I guess, of flying? Flying was still a relative novelty in those days, still fairly new?

06:00 Yeah, well I mean in those days, one of my long time friends has been Nancy Bird, the woman pilot and she was a competitor in the Brisbane to Adelaide centenary air race in 1936 and when I started my training in Sydney, in early 1940

06:30 she was living in Sydney. I used to spend time with her at the weekends at her North Shore home and we've been firm friends ever since. Whenever she comes to Adelaide on speaking engagements she stays here and we have many mutual friends in aviation circles,

07:00 so it put me in touch with the flying crowd of whom I've maintained contact throughout my growing years.

Well I'd like to hear a bit more about your time at Brighton Le Sands, and some of the fellows that were there. Fellows like Pat Osborne and Laurie Brown?

07:30 Oh yeah. Well as I say the members of that course, in the main were Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane people. I don't think there were any other South Australians on my course but they were boisterous mates and they were always

08:00 getting into little bits of trouble. Unlike me they'd have a few drinks and they'd, I remember one occasion there was a nightclub called Tom Uglies, a bit further away from Mascot aerodrome than the Brighton Le Sands Hotel. And I remember one time they went to

08:30 this club there and one of them made a play for a good looking girl who just unfortunately happened to be the girlfriend of the current New South Wales light heavyweight boxing champion. And they were invited to come outside for a minute and both got beaten up pretty severely. So that I learnt that a few of the facts

09:00 of life at the Brighton Le Sands Hotel and I thought, I learnt about the facts of life, shall we say, at Brighton Le Sands and the roistering of my more extrovert fellow pupils. The Ashton's were a famous Sydney family who were noted

09:30 polo players and there were other people on the course who came from well known families who's names were almost household names in the eastern states. As I say about national service it brings

10:00 you in touch with people you would not otherwise never would met and I think that's an invaluable experience for any young person, to meet people from other walks of life, who otherwise would never have come into contact with, to learn of their problems and to learn to live their aspirations. I think that's an important role for all young people to realise that there are others perhaps

10:30 not as fortunate as yourself. People who should be listened to and acted on as equals rather than somebody that you never had any interest or belief in what their aims in life are.

And the planes

11:00 **that you were flying at Mascot, it was normal or quite common to learn on Tigermoths?**

As I say I never learnt on Tigermoths. After five and a half years in the air force never once did I fly a Tigermoth and I just flew the 8 60's and the Anson's and the Hudson's and then

11:30 the Beaufort's and while I was on the Beaufort's we also had a few planes like Whackit trainers and Moth Minors and Oxford's and Wirraway's and I flew a comparatively small number of different compared with some of my contemporaries who flew a lot wider range of aircraft. I didn't fly that many other

12:00 aircraft from those which I was actually serving operationally.

And did you want to fly a Tiger?

I always rather regretted that I never had the chance to fly a Tigermoth but it wasn't, but the facts of the matter were that the ultimate that one could aspire to was a

12:30 Mosquito and I did fly for the last year of my air force on the Mosquito and got to appreciate the fact that. Being a photo reconnaissance squadron we had no armourment what so ever in the plane and the space that was normally filled with guns and bombs was extra fuel tanks and camera gear and we were aware of the fact that we could

13:00 probably outrun just about any plane that the enemy might have. The thing you had to guard against was not being on guard, that you didn't let somebody come up behind you that you weren't aware, cause that only happens once and you're gone. So one had to keep an ever watchful eye that there was no other aircraft coming at you which you weren't aware of until the

13:30 first bullets hit the plane. A couple of times I came quite close but I always managed to dive into a nearby cloud and as I said the other alternative if they were behind you was just to open the throttles wide, put the nose down slightly and you could outrun them. Anything that the enemy had to

14:00 throw at you, you only had to worry then about anti-aircraft fire. And I always used to say, rightly or wrongly, was my closest calls during the course of the war came at the hands of the friends rather than the enemy, when you had to check out pilots who hadn't flown for a couple months in planes without

14:30 dual controls. And a few of the times when things like that happened and disaster was just averted by a fraction of a second. I had a few close calls with the enemy but as I say the most dangerous was either when I was doing things either on my own.

15:00 One occasion I was at Nowra and there was a lot of hills around Nowra and there was a bank of cloud and I thought "I'll just dive down and pull up through this cloud in front and come out in the brilliant sunshine above", and I did that and by the time I came out of the cloud I discovered I was almost on my back. And if I had stalled

15:30 and lost control we would have been into the mountains and that would be the finished. So a few lucky strokes of fortune that happened to come my way at the right moment and by my good luck than management I managed to avoid what could have been a disaster.

Well we'll hear more and talk more about that but just going back to your time at Mascot,

16:00 **I'm wondering about any leave home to Adelaide you might have got during that time?**

Oh yeah, one of my friends was Brian Monkton, who as I say was a pilot at the Adelaide South Australian Aero Club and we became good friends prior to the war and then he was actually teaching and an instructor at the New South Wales

16:30 Aero Club at Mascot, when I was in Kingsford Smith Flying Club on the same aerodrome. And on my first Easter leave, that would be in April 1940, I suppose, we had a few days off, so I hired one of the Aero Club's planes, a Push Moth it was actually,

17:00 and Brian flew the plane. But we flew over to Adelaide for that Easter and I don't think we went above two hundred feet all the way there and all the way back. We were in heaven, doing all that low flying all the way. You couldn't do it now. You'd be hauled up before the authorities for not sticking to pre-

arranged courses and altitudes

17:30 but in those days it wasn't frowned on to the degree if you tried to do it today and that was a memorable weekend at home, when we flew this chartered plane from Sydney to Adelaide and then back to Sydney in time for the resumption of training.

And where did you land in Adelaide?

At Parafield, that was the only

18:00 airfield in those days, long before the present West Beach was in operation.

And during your training days were there any occasions when you blotted your record, so to speak?

Well, when I was doing my

18:30 intermediate training at Port Cook, one of my tasks was to do a cross country flight and on this one occasion I think I flew from Point Cook to Deniliquin and rather carelessly I attempted to land instead of into the wind, down wind, and I woke up to what I was doing when the

19:00 plane, the boundary fence was looming up and I put the power on again, just scrapped over the boundary fence and the tail wheel caught in a wire fence surrounding the aerodrome and I think a couple of fence posts and a bit of wire was trailing behind the plane. No damage was done

19:30 to the plane. I was able to disentangle the gear from around the tail plane and fly it back but that was a momentous day because it was on that very day that the Number 2 Squadron, the squadron I was to become a part of a few weeks later, had a plane load of cabinet ministers

20:00 top brass and they crashed and killed all aboard on that very same day as I was making a fool of myself trying to land down wind at Deniliquin.

And what reprimands did you receive for that incident?

I don't remember. I don't seem to remember that anyone was particularly upset.

20:30 I mean if it had damaged the plane it might have been more severe but I don't recall being hauled over the coals [reprimanded severely] or anything. Probably just put down to experience that you'd take more care that you landed into wind, not down wind in future.

Well given that you had, I guess

21:00 **a little bit of superstition were there any kind of, I guess were you superstitious when you entered the air force?**

No, I don't think. I'm not overly superstitious by nature. A bit pessimistic at times I suppose. I remember there was one occasion when things up in Timor were particularly

21:30 grim and we'd been strafed and bombed on a regular basis by the Japanese. My friends were being shot and killed left right and centre and my greatest friend, Neville Hemsworth, pulled out his revolver from the holster that he was wearing around his waist,

22:00 held it against my arm and said "Shall I pull the trigger or will you take what's coming to you in the next month?" And I said "I think maybe you'd better pull the trigger" because things didn't look too bright. Of course he didn't pull the trigger but if he had of I would have been the loser because I came through the war unscathed, whereas he

22:30 was involved in a regrettable incident where he was flying off the New Guinea coast and an overanxious American gunner, thinking he was a Japanese plane fired on him and set his Hudson on fire. And he had to crash land in this

23:00 burning plane in the water and he got very badly burnt in the face and the hand that he used to throttle back to land the levers were, well not red hot, but bad enough to burn his hand very badly. So he would have come out of it worse than I would have had I said "Go ahead and shoot" because

23:30 I came through without any bullet holes or whatever in the year's that followed.

And where did you get your wings? Tell us about the day that you passed out?

I can't remember the parade.

24:00 I guess there was a parade but I just don't remember now when we actually had the wings pinned on us. I can't recall that moment at all but must have been some sort of a parade at Point Cook, but it's escaped my memory now.

What did your family think of you being in the air force?

I think my father of course

24:30 was proud to think that I was doing my bit for God and Country. I suppose my mother was apprehensive. We were not a very demonstrative family but my father always was

25:00 secretly proud of the fact that I'd joined up and done alright. But no, nothing memorable about those sort of parts of my life.

Well after you passed out and now had your wings,

25:30 **you now received your posting, what did you know about Number 2 Squadron before you joined them?**

Well Point Cook and Laverton were only a few miles apart so we would have seen the Hudson's flying around but of course I as a junior pilot I

26:00 was seconded to various crews in those first months. I'd fly as second pilot with a number of different people like Bob Law Smith, who went onto become one of the bosses of TAA and Bob Dalkin who finished up, he was in the permanent

26:30 air force and he finished up as Administrator of Norfolk Island. Neville Hemsworth who came from a well known flying family, his brothers were all quite noted pilots. One of his brother's was, first sighted the Japanese at the Coral Sea and he was

27:00 instructed to shadow until further notice and that was the last that was ever heard. Undoubtedly some of the fighters from the carriers would have taken off and intercepted him and shot him down. But yeah, they were all quite noted people. One was an architect, I can't think

27:30 now. Only recently I, a week ago I attended a book launch of one of my fellow pilots, who's brother was also a pilot and one of the family had written a biography on these two. Robilliard was his name, brothers who were pilots and the

28:00 one in my squadron only died about a couple of years ago. But yeah, they were a lot of well known people. One of the pilots was related to Sir Frank Packer. He used to live with the Packer family and he was shot down and

28:30 killed during service, but a number of them went on to make. One of the more colourful people was a fellow called Bill White, who was a very active living life to the full. His bar bill must have been horrendous and I remember on

29:00 one occasion while we were at Laverton he decided to take off, not in the dark, he decided to take off at forty five degree angle, the flair path and as his wheels were retracting they bumped into some sand bags on top of a bomb dump, so he was lucky to escape from that. But he was a

29:30 an amazing character and he was up in Ambon when the Japanese advanced and he insisted on one more go at the Japs and the plane was so damaged that it was then no longer flyable and he was left on the ground at Ambon, captured by the Japanese and beheaded a few days later.

30:00 But there were a lot of colourful characters, former commercial airline pilots who joined the RAAF. I can't think of them all now. One of the great losses of the Ash Wednesday fire was the fact that my flying log was amongst the casualties and so often these days I read something about

30:30 things that happened on certain dates and it would be nice if I could look at my log book and see if I was any way involved in that particular day but I've no longer got the book to refer to, to see whether, where I was that day. And that's a great pity to me that I've no longer got that point of reference.

31:00 **And one of the things I haven't asked you yet is about, which often happens during training, is air sickness. Did you suffer any air sickness?**

No, never. No I never. I had a few frightening experiences once in my early days as an airline captain. I flew into a, I must have been operating out of Timor or Ambon or somewhere and I was foolish enough to fly into what was a tropical storm

31:30 and the plane went, I put it on automatic pilot, and the updrafts and the downdrafts were such that all the needles on the instruments were spinning around one way and then the other way and then there was what we called St Elmo's Fire dancing across the windscreen.

32:00 These blue and green phosphorus type of light dancing along the wings and then you get into the middle of it and it's dead calm and you know you're going to have to go into it again to get out because it was just the patch in the centre of the turbulence. And the plane was virtually out of control and

32:30 I've never felt so terrified in my life because there's nothing you could do. All I learnt from that was if you see a cloud like that again, go around it, don't try and fly through it. And I learnt, one of the rules I learnt was whatever you do, don't panic cause if you panic, death is waiting for you.

33:00 You've just got to think it through and no matter how frightened you are, try and keep a clear head and hope for the best. And as I say I learnt from that experience to avoid a repetition of it because getting inside one of those tropical storms is an experience I never want to suffer again.

33:30 **Well I imagine you must have been absolutely terrified. When you were learning to fly were you scared?**

No, I suppose apprehensive when you first try inverted flying, or what they call rolling off the top of the loop. You do a loop. When you get to the top of the loop

34:00 you then reverse the controls and roll out of it instead of completing the circle, you roll out. It was bit daunting to think of it but you soon got used to pushing the control the opposite way to what you naturally would. Instead of pulling it back you push it forward but it was a bit

34:30 daunting but I think, I don't think it was particularly frightening. You just think "How can I do this?" and you soon find out you can.

And what was the feeling you had the first time you flew solo?

Well I suppose exhilaration that you were finally able to do it on your own

35:00 without somebody being there to tell you "Don't do that, do this". A feeling of satisfaction that you've gone solo.

And when you joined Number Two Squadron, you would have been the new boy on the block, fairly low down on the totem pole.

Oh absolutely, yeah.

Can you tell me about what that

35:30 **was like?**

Oh no, you just realised that you were the rookie there and you had to do the right thing. There was one potentially dangerous situation when we'd been doing convoy escort duty out from Mount Gambier and south eastern South Australia

36:00 and when we came back to the base at the end of our patrol duties the weather had turned very nasty and there were probably eight or nine of our planes all trying to land at the one time at Mount Gambier. And it was pouring with rain and we were all probably milling around in the same small bit of cloud and the

36:30 pilot on that particular day was another South Australian called Michael Cowan and he instructed me as his second pilot to lower fifteen percent of flaps to slow us down in preparation for leaving. And I pushed the lever down and no sooner had I done that then I suddenly saw right in front of us a big mast, a radio mast.

37:00 I said "Look out Mick, mast" and he swung away and I'd forgotten all about the lowering flaps and by the time I'd woken up they hadn't, it wasn't fifteen percent, it was a hundred percent flaps. And so he had to put, if you then pulled the flap lever up you'd have a sudden loss of altitude and you'd crash into the ground.

37:30 So that the only thing he could do was apply full power and in a very awkward attitude with the nose down and the tail up. We came over the fence and landed on the aerodrome which by then was an inch or two deep in water and it was a very nervous moment when we finally

38:00 got onto the ground safely but that was probably as close a shave as any that I was to have in the years that followed. But all's well that ends well and we did land and there was a certain amount of indecision because there was somebody at the one end of the aerodrome flashing a green order's light telling us to land

38:30 and someone at the other end of the runway was firing off a red Very pistol which was "Don't land", which was these conflicting signals on the ground, but the way we were we had no alternative but to carry on and land, which all worked out satisfactorily in the end. Another lucky escape.

39:00 **Good. Well we'll just stop and change a tape.**

Tape 5

00:36 **Your time in Darwin, prior to Timor, with the familiarisation flights, what places did you visit during those times?**

Well the only, when we went on the familiarisation flight all we did was land in Darwin and then we

went onto the places like Ambon, Amlaya and Koepang, where

01:00 a few months later, a couple of months we'd be there on active service but I mean while we were at Daly Waters after the Darwin raid, we'd land at Tennant Creek and we'd operate out of

01:30 Northern Territory, Western Australian places like Drysdale River Mission Station and I can't think of the names of the other places. I mean there was one place we landed in the corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria where the space was a bit limited and in order to maximise the power in the short available take off,

02:00 we had a gang of Aborigines lying across the tail plane of the plane, and we opened up the throttle full, and at a given signal they jumped off and the plane took off. Similarly when we used to land occasionally at Dili and that was, I'm sure the present day Dili airport would be in a different place to what that was,

02:30 but it was barely big enough for a Hudson to be able safely take off again. You'd have the throttles right through the gate to get maximum power. And they weren't really suitable for anything other than light planes, not twin engine bombers. So our familiarisation really was just in that area

03:00 which we were to serve once the war came to south west Pacific.

What?

One of the things, what was interesting was when we were in Ambon amongst the acquaintances we made was an American missionary there with his children, stationed in Ambon. And they were stranded with the advance

03:30 of the Japanese. They were stranded there and I was able to organise to get on a flying boat and be evacuated and only a few years ago one of the missionary's daughters and her husband came to Australia on a holiday and they got onto me from the internet some way and after all those years

04:00 I met again with this girl and this girl was aware of the fact that through my intervention I enabled them to escape what could have been less happy consequences by getting them on one of the few planes that was available that could evacuate them.

04:30 **Did you undertake many evacuations during that time?**

No, not at all. No, some of my fellow pilots sort of overloaded their plane with people to get them off there but I had no, I was never required. In the earlier stages I was sort of under my own steam and when I got

05:00 out myself I was then evacuated because of my illness. I didn't even fly myself out. I was on one of the planes that got out just in front of the Japanese paratroopers who landed the next morning.

Well how did you actually here the news that Japan had entered the war?

Well we landed at Oodnadatta in the middle of the night

05:30 to refuel in our journey up northwards and it was while we were there we heard that Pearl Harbour actually had been attacked, so that was where we were when we got that rather fateful news.

And how did you feel when you got that news?

Well apprehensive I suppose. We realised that what we'd been fearing was in fact now upon us.

06:00 My brother-in-law, Colin Verco, was in a fellow, Number One Squadron, also Hudson's up at Kota bharu and I recognised and they were attacked right from the very start and he managed to escape when they had to actually refill tanks in the air from petrol drums, otherwise they wouldn't have made

06:30 the distance. But I was never in a position where I had to evacuate other people. That circumstance never arose.

So from hearing the

07:00 **news did you then feel that you would actually be really getting some, seeing some action now?**

Oh yeah, I thought "Is the beginning of the end?" And while we were in Darwin we were flying every day for I don't know how many hours, but every day we were. As I say I haven't got my log book to verify the amount of flying I did during that time

07:30 but we were on patrol and attacking day after day after day. So that it was a pretty strenuous time with the knowledge that the Japanese were pushing everything between them and Australia. Everyone was moving southwards,

08:00 closer and closer, being moved out of where they were back to Australia.

And what was the feeling like in Darwin?

Well I think after the raid, particularly after the raid and of course it wasn't helped by the fact that I had a high temperature but we were pretty apprehensive that come the dawn probably there'd be

08:30 a landing of some sort by the enemy but that didn't happen. As I said in my speech the other day that it was one of those occasions like after Dunkirk, if Hitler had decided to keep going onto England it would have been horrendous casualties and it didn't happen.

09:00 I recognise the fact that if they'd landed in Darwin they would have been in a pretty difficult position, the enemy. They'd be isolated from their main supply sources. It might have been pretty untenable but never the less it could have catastrophic for the people who would first face the actual enemy

09:30 hand to hand. So that one knows the difficulties they would have faced but it could have prolonged the war while if they'd got a foot hold in Australia.

And you did come face to face with them in Timor?

Well only as in much as they I never saw them on the ground. My only contact with the

10:00 enemy on Timor was the regular raids, day and night, on our base there but I was never on the ground when they were at the other end of the airstrip or anything like that. When I was at Milne Bay the Japanese were at the other end of the airstrip. We

10:30 got up there shortly after the actual land invasion had started. In fact by some irony had I stayed in the militia I would have been on the ground, cause it was my old battalion that was there repulsing the actual enemy, had I stayed in the army

11:00 I would have been as the ones at Milne Bay were. First at Tobruk and then back in Australia or New Guinea and we arrived there with our torpedoes at a time when in support of the ground forces, the Japanese Navy used to come in every night and shell the Australian positions

11:30 in Milne Bay, in and around Milne Bay. And we arrived and were on standby for the next appearance of the Japanese, which came the next day and we went out. There were nine of us, I think, three flights

12:00 of three, supported by Australian Kittyhawks and Australian Beaufighter's and we attacked this force of Japanese cruisers and destroyers that were making a regular nightly practice of coming in undercover of darkness and shelling the Australian troops. Now

12:30 the fact is I don't think we didn't hit any of the ships. We were using an American torpedo which had a rather dubious reputation for when you dropped it into the water, instead of running straight and deep it would tend to come out of the water and then flop back in and make a bit of a turn. So

13:00 they were unreliable direction wise. But the fact is the Japanese knew then that there was a torpedo squadron and they never came back and they left the forces to their fate and that was the beginning of the end of the Japanese attack on New Guinea because of the deterrent of knowing that there were now torpedo bombers there. They didn't

13:30 try that tactic anymore and they left the surviving Japanese land forces to their fate, so we achieved something by our very presence. Even while we were there we would go out and drop torpedos on moored ships up in the Solomon's, some hours north of where we were.

14:00 And the mere fact that the Japanese recognised that these sort of aeroplanes were there and could do damage to them caused them to pull their horns in and not advance further south.

Must have been a very exciting time for you?

Well it was a bit, a young artist has done a painting which I've got,

14:30 I gave the painting itself to the aviation museum at Port Adelaide. They've got it hanging down there but I've got a photographic copy of the picture and it was typical of those attacking, the enemy is shooting, throwing everything they've got at you and there was sort of water, splashes of water

15:00 where the shells are hitting the water in front of us. You couldn't negotiate round them and you were actually attacking through a barrage of water spouts where the guns and shells were landing. They were being strafed by the Kittyhawks and the Beaufighters, while we with the torpedos

15:30 were endeavouring to aim the torpedos to hit the ship. As I say I don't think we hit any of them but they never came back.

Now you said that you weren't superstitious but were any of your crew, did they have any mementoes that helped them through?

No, I don't think, no, I'm not aware. They may have been still under the hopeful delusion

16:00 that my name would pull them through.

Just going back to Timor, how did you find the Timorese when you were there?

Well we didn't have a lot of contact with them, other than I say we had young boys sort of washing our sheets and cooking the meals and things like that but

16:30 it must have been fairly daunting for them. I mean it, I think the Dutch probably lived in some luxury there but I think the local inhabitants were fairly impoverished. I don't think that they had a luxurious life.

17:00 It was just an easy going backwater of the Dutch East Indies at the time.

And did you have some very hairy moments there?

Well mainly because we were being constantly bombed there and the Japanese woke up to the fact that our aerodrome anti-aircraft defence was minimal and they treated it almost with disdain. I

17:30 remember there was one occasion, the runways were made of white, compacted coral and they joined in the centre and where the two runways met there was quite a big area of paved, well paved, coral like a big football field. And I can remember one audacious Japanese pilot came down and actually ran his wheels along the

18:00 ground with his guns firing and he did a big ground loop, with the guns firing all the time and then took off, just showing how with what contempt he viewed the extremely limited anti-aircraft defences that we had. In between raids I'd be listening to short wave radio and catching a bit

18:30 of jazz from the American shortwave stations and I spent a lot of time listening to music on the radio in between flights when I'd go out to attack any shipping that was around or whatever.

And did you have any crash landings or?

19:00 No, what happened to me was that we didn't have the facilities in Timor for major overhauls. Whenever any major service had to be done we'd have to fly back to Darwin, they'd do it there and then we'd fly back. Our bases in the NEI, now I was coming

19:30 back from one such service one day and the radio, I was advised by radio that our aerodrome was under Japanese attack and not to proceed with landing. Instead to land in the, there was a very big open space on the south west corner of Timor called Mina River, M I N A

20:00 River and no-one had ever landed there but it did look a big emergency landing area. So I was told to land there and wait for further notice. Well I made what I thought was a normal landing only I didn't realise that the grass on which I was landing was about six feet tall and instead of landing smoothly the bottom fell out of the wars as we sank through

20:30 this dead grass and we were dead lucky because inspection proved that there were a lot of shallow water holes that the buffalo, who lived in that area had wallowed in the mud and that if we'd run into one of them it would have snapped the undercarriage off. But by another stroke of fortune where I landed it was clear.

21:00 So we, because we had to stay the night we cut branches off trees and things and camouflaged as best we could our aircraft on the ground but they made us keep regular touch by radio with headquarters and my belief is that the Japanese got a fix on our radio signal

21:30 and come the dawn the next day and a whole flight of Zeroes came over. On the same day they shot down a flying boat called the Corio that was off Broome harbour but they found our plane and shot it up and destroyed it and I managed to get my gramophone and records out

22:00 and a tin of my mother's shortbread was not so lucky. I had photographs of that and the blackened tin was lost in the fire but we were told to stay there till further notice when we'd be picked up. It didn't happen but they did, a few days later they did drop a message saying that an American destroyer called the Peray, P E R A Y,

22:30 was going to land a quantity of drums of aviation fuel for the use of American fighter planes that were due to arrive and actual fact never did. So we actually had to walk down to the nearest beach, a mile or two away and late one afternoon this Japanese warship

23:00 headed to off shore, unloaded a number of forty four gallon drums. I think from memory they had groups of three or four roped together and they were floated ashore, guided by a long boat from the American ship. They were sort of guided till we

23:30 were able to get hold of the ropes and then we had to pull the drums up above the high water mark for future use of the fighters, that never came. And in the midst of all this the American long boat overturned in the surf and all of a sudden we had four or five bewildered American

24:00 sailors join our disconsolate group and we were still told to wait there. But after a couple of days one of the sailors was mucking about with his revolver and he accidentally shot off his thumb so as the senior

officer present I said “To hell with our instructions, we’ll walk back to base.” So I guess

24:30 it must have thirty or forty miles away or something like that, so we actually, I was able to get a couple of Timor ponies and one of them carried my gramophone records and we started to walk back towards base. And I think we were walking for a couple of days and we spent one memorable evening

25:00 at a local village. I should say that the low lying area was sufficiently unappealing that even the local inhabitants didn’t live there. The mosquitoes and other bitey insects were so prevalent that they, the locals lived in the foothills rather than the low level area, which was most unpleasant.

25:30 I won’t tell you, there were a couple, the one that I can tell you is one of the sailors was a hardened American bosun and we were sitting in our roughly constructed bush hut that we’d constructed and this fellow said “I know now what that guy meant when he said it could be worse.”

26:00 And that was pretty much the way it was. It was pretty grim. Anyway we spent this first night in the village and we were fed eggs and tough chicken by the local inhabitants. I got the gramophone out and started playing Benny Goodman’s Sing, Sing, Sing with Gene Cooper on the drums and they were much entertained by this and they got their local gamelan band to perform

26:30 and I impressed them all no end by taking over the drums with the Indonesian gamelan band and playing along with them. Anyway the next day we managed to get to a village where there was a telephone and we were able to get onto the base and they sent a truck to take us back to the

27:00 air force base, but it was a fairly, for city guys like we were it was a pretty rough old journey back, from where the plane had been destroyed back to our base. But from then on

27:30 it was daily attacks from the Japanese on a regular, several times a day basis and when we’d be out on patrols and from there until I was eventually evacuated back to Darwin.

And when you were evacuated back to Darwin, how did you feel leaving Timor and leaving?

Well I suppose I thought “Thank goodness I’m out of there, at

28:00 least we’ve got away from the troops”, which we knew inevitably were following, so it was relief to get out of there. And I can’t remember how many remained there. There was an army force called the Sparrow Force that waged sort of guerrilla warfare

28:30 against Japanese in the weeks ahead and some our air force were part of that group, more or less on the move, keeping one step ahead of the Japanese who were aware of their presence, but they, with the exception of a few who died of sickness,

29:00 they were all eventually retrieved by a Japanese submarine, oh American submarine.

And so when you came back.

Oh the other thing I should say that the Peray, the one that had the drums of fuel was sunk in the first raid in

29:30 Darwin. Ninety one of their crew were killed on that first, on February the 19th, 1942. They were one of the many ships that were sunk on that day and any of the ones that were on Timor with us I was never able to find out whether any of them had survived or whether they were amongst the ninety one. I think there was a crew of about a hundred

30:00 and thirty or something like that, so all but a few were to die on that first big raid on Darwin.

And back on Timor the squadron that you left behind did they survive?

Well we all left about the same time, the day before, other than those few that stayed up in the jungle with the army people, so yeah we were evacuated from

30:30 there I think just the night before the Japanese landed.

And when you got to Darwin, what were your duties then?

Well I went straight to the hospital, but we continued on, on reconnaissance and bombing raids of Koepang and things like that but I was out of action for a week or so, until I recovered from the

31:00 dengue fever and I was there for three or four months subsequent to that before I went down south to go onto Beaufort’s.

You mentioned before about the difference between the Japanese fighting and your own fighting, what were their planes like compared to your planes?

Well of course there was a lot of cynicism about anything the Japanese, wire and string

31:30 and all that but the mere facts of the matter was the very construction of the Japanese plane made them so much more lighter and more manoeuvrable that up in Milne Bay, for instance, the Americans had a

squadron of Air Cobra's that were allegedly more heavily armour plated for their size than a battleship. So they had a lot of

32:00 bullet proof metal behind the pilot's seat which made him very heavy and unmanoeuvrable. So despite the mere fact that the Japanese planes were crude and all most, not home made, but flimsily constructed it did make them a

32:30 formidable fighting force because they could outmanoeuvre anything that we had to offer against them and they were very successful for that reason, because of their flimsy construction it made them better fighting vehicles than the sort of planes that we had.

33:00 We were more conscious of the safety of the people who flew them.

I mean you've come out of these fights fairly unscathed but what was it like seeing your first fatality?

Well the incident that I found most horrifying is I was coming back from patrol one day, and I'd only been a captain for a matter of weeks

33:30 and one of our planes was crashed at the end of the runway and burning. What had happened was one of our squadron piloted by an Adelaide man called Robert Burns Cuming had come down to Koepang to take on more personnel and more supplies and they

34:00 apparently loaded the plane rather unwisely. Instead of distributing the weight advantageously within the plane they were unbalanced and when they took off the plane stalled and crashed and burnt. And for the one and only time in my life I went to the wreck and was horrified by the

34:30 sight of my twisted and contorted and blackened mates. Their bodies were, there were about ten or twelve people in the plane, plus a lot of food and things like that and I vowed never again would I go into a crash and I never did. Whenever there was an air accident I kept well

35:00 away from it. It was such a shocking experience to see those broken, twisted, burnt bodies that I never wanted to, I felt it must be like that every day for infantryman to see their friends shot and killed. But to see that horrible

35:30 aftermath of the plane crash it was a experience I vowed I'd never again put myself through and I never went near another crash in my entire air force career.

And did you write to the family of that crew?

I don't think I did, no. I knew the sister of the pilot well

36:00 and I know when I came home on leave I went to see her but actually one of the odd things was when I was made a captain much to his annoyance, one of my air gunners

36:30 was a warrant officer, which I was, he was a senior air gunner and he was quite perspicacious about having to fly with a rookie like me. Now he was Burns Cuming regular air gunner and if he hadn't been posted to be a member of my crew he would have been one of those black and twisted bodies. So in actual fact what

37:00 he was being so outspoken about really saved his life. Because there were a few other occasions like that when circumstances arose that if they had have been different would have been the finish for the people involved. One of them was me. I was posted to a certain squadron to replace a certain second pilot in that

37:30 plane and that plane was the first shot down by the Japanese and all crew were killed and this was because before the war I was given a certain shirt which gave me dermatitis and my posting to that role was cancelled and this other guy went in my place and he was shot down the first night of the Japanese attack. So there have

38:00 been a number of weird happenings throughout my life which had things worked in another way could have been finished for me, so I'm aware of the fact that I have, I was once described once as the man with ninety nine lives and I have used up quite a few over the years I'm afraid.

So when you came back to Darwin,

38:30 **after Timor were you ill at that time?**

Yes, I had a high temperature from dengue fever and then after that I was getting cramps because, they made me eat slices of bread and butter with like half an inch of salt on it to

39:00 replace the salt that I sweated out. I was okay in a week or two. I was back on duty and these were just temporary things at the time but things probably seemed a bit worse than what they were because you were in a semi-delirious state. But

39:30 as luck had it I survived and luck stepped in and saved me one way or another.

Okay, I think we might wrap it up there for lunch.

Tape 6

00:33 **Well Kim I'd like to spend a bit more time talking about your first tour and one of the things that I'm interested to hear about is a bit more about the fellows in your squadron. You've mentioned Neville and you told us a little bit about how he was burnt, but when you joined the squadron and you met them all what**

01:00 **type of characters were they and what type of character was Neville?**

Neville was, as I say, he was a member of a well known aviation family. All his brothers were or would be commercial pilots and he, himself was a commercial

01:30 pilot in post-war years. But it's, one needs things like log books to jog your memory on names etcetera. I can't, I mean I know one of our pilots was a fellow called Parker Hodge,

02:00 who was shot down with the loss of all crew in those pre Darwin raid days. One of his air crew was an air gunner called Jack Mawdsley, whose mother lived up at Lobethal, and she was sort of, for the rest of her life, I wouldn't say she

02:30 treated me like a son but the mere fact that I was with her late son virtually until to the end, she had a special relationship with me and it was after her death that the circumstances of his death became known. One of the Japanese fighter pilots that was involved in that action

03:00 described how they hit Hodge's plane and set it on fire and he was sort of, half sitting, half standing, trying to keep the aircraft straight and level so the crew could bail out.

03:30 Some of them were in the water for twenty four hours before they were found and rescued but Jack Mawdsley was not amongst the survivors but it was only after the mother's death that we learned more details of the actual events which led up to his death.

04:00 So there were stories like that. And as I say about the air gunner that was taken out of a senior pilot's crew and put into my inexperienced crew. There were a lot of, another one of our pilot's was a school friend from my St Peter's College days. He was John Goodfellow from Port Pirie and the

04:30 last Easter before the war started we drove up to Port Pirie for the weekend. I borrowed my sister's car and a stone flew up and smashed the windscreen and we had to return back in pouring rain and the rain was streaming through the window and my sister wasn't too pleased to get

05:00 her car back much the worse for wear. And he was one of the pilots who was shot down by the Japanese when we were in Timor.

And who was CO? What was the?

Uh?

Who was the CO?

The CO was Wing Commander Frank Headlam his name was. He was in the permanent

05:30 air force and I think he went on to become air vice marshall before he retired and I think he died about late seventies, but he was a permanent air force. He took over from Wing Commander Thomas, the one whom I said later became Lord Mayor of Melbourne and

06:00 he was CO until some time after the Darwin raid when the two squadrons, 2 and 13 combined and operated as one unit using the same planes, same ground crews and the CO

06:30 became Wing Commander Tich, that's T I C H, McFarlane who went on to become the Secretary of the Minister for Air, in I think in the Gorton [John Gorton – Australian Prime Minister] government and he got that motor neuron disease and I went up to Canberra

07:00 for Arthur Boyd's [Australian artist] memorial service and a mutual air force friend took me to see McFarlane in his hospital bed. He was a hundred percent mentally but just couldn't get out of bed and tragically eventually died. But he was a much respected CO and I went on one particular raid for the ride with him on Anbon and I took

07:30 photographs of a low level attack we did on Anbon and my, one of the pilots in our squadron, John Venn, from Perth, got too close to the action and his plane was destroyed when he got caught in the blast from his own bombs. And he crashed into the sea and was killed and he was

08:00 only a few days earlier crashed landed on I think Melville Island and one of the photos I lost in the fire

was a picture of him wearing his tin hat, looking skywards, holding his hat on and he was saying “It’s alright boys, the bombs are going to overshoot us” and the next minute they were all around us and

08:30 I had this photo of him of the moment he was saying we were going to be okay and anyway he died. I think in some way he was related to the Lee-Steer’s. I think he was a reasonably well known Western Australian family and I went to the Adelaide Festival show last night with some arts person from Perth who said there

09:00 was a Venn Street which is named after him. But it’s hard to sort of recall the names of all the people and their respective characteristics.

Well how did you find the chain of command in Number Two Squadron?

Oh good, yeah it was, everyone was very dedicated to doing the job

09:30 as best they could and as I say there was a lot more fraternising with the local community by the people who were going to town to the pubs and things and I was quite happy to stay at the air force base and play my records, rather than go carousing around in the fleshpots of Darwin. But

10:00 it was, when I went back there a few years ago the only place I could recognise was the old Darwin Hotel. I think even that’s gone now so there’d probably be nothing there now that reminded me of those days.

I’ve just got one question, very out of order and without notice, but before we move on, I seem to recall that the

10:30 **WAAAF camped at Laverton in round about February 41. Did that have any affect on fraternisation?**

Oh yes, I had, there was one, I’m trying to remember her surname, but I can’t remember it, the name, had a bit of a flutter with. But

11:00 I had my own car with a gas producer on it but I used to use to go into the city so I wasn’t stationed around there. I had a lot of friends around Melbourne. I used to spend quite a bit of time of my spare time staying with friends, with

11:30 whom I’m still in touch in some cases, but I can’t remember the impact the WAAAF’s had on life in general, except that there was a fair bit of fraternisation going on between the guys and the girls. But they

12:00 were more, by the time I got to Nowra in Jervis Bay they were much more established. I met my first wife, I think I told you about coming down to Townsville to pick up fresh torpedoes or something like that and she was working in the signals office

12:30 in Townsville. And we moved to Nowra when I was posted down there at the start of 43 and we rented a house in an area called Bombaderry which was on the northern side of the Shoalhaven River. And one of the stories I told, we had no telephone

13:00 and we did have some light planes, a Whacker trainer and a Moth Minor which we used for observation purposes. We’d do courses of training pupils to drop, aim and drop torpedoes and the instructors would often go out on these observation planes to watch the results. And sometimes I’d come home,

13:30 return to base via the township and circle over our house until my then wife came out into the backyard and then I’d throttle the engine back to an idle and yell out “I won’t be home for dinner”, and power on again and go on back to the base. So it was the necessity is the mother of invention and a few

14:00 things like that that brightened up the normal air force. And there always sort of parties and things on the banks of the Shoalhaven and it was a rather windy place and quite often the water would be blown to a froth and

14:30 so there were sort of white flecks and I would say it was sperm on the water.

Well going back to your first tour I am very interested to hear where you picked up your beloved gramophone and how?

15:00 Well I don’t remember, I had it with me at Laverton when we were posted to the north, so undoubtedly I just took it from, but the mere fact that I had this airline pilot friend meant that a lot of things that would have been difficult to take to Darwin I often got him to bring up for me on his next flight.

15:30 I mean he’d bring me up the latest Benny Goodman or Tommy Dorsey records which had just reached the shops in Adelaide and I’d write to my mother and say “Go to Allan’s and get me this one” or the other record, and she’d do that and send it up with John Chapman. Quite a lot of stuff in addition to the shortbread and ice cream would come up through that route which was

16:00 fortunate for me that it was available because it would have been much more difficult if it had just been through the mail or whatever.

And can you describe your gramophone?

Well it was about the size of one of your fibreglass boxes there with a handle on the side. It had a steel needles. The thicker the needle the louder the noise.

16:30 If you wanted it quiet you'd use a needle that was made out of sharpened bamboo or even a thin needle like a ordinary pin, but for the maximum level you got a thick, stubby steel needle and you'd put, I forget now, you'd play

17:00 it until maybe the sound started to get a little bit less clear then you'd put another needle in. But it was, until the advent of electrical player, which was really after the war, that was the only method we had, the old wind up portables. Well I mean there was a more grand

17:30 something about so high, but it was still the same old wind up mechanism that drove it. But it was the advent of the electric loudspeaker type that fortunately became available by the end of the war. In my early farming days I

18:00 had such a machine going overtime.

And how, why was it that you were allowed, or permitted to take your gramophone when you were posted overseas?

Well you could do what you liked. I mean some of my non-jazz friends used to grit their teeth when I played certain records for the umpteenth time in succession but

18:30 mainly there was no objection to it. Certainly no official objection. I suppose it almost came in the category of raising the morale really, rather than criticism, because jazz in those days was the popular music of the day. I mean

19:00 like the Beatles were later, the latest Tommy Dawsey or Benny Goodman tunes were what the masses were playing or listening too.

And who were your favourite artists?

Well undoubtedly Benny Goodman and I idealised his drummer, Gene Cooper. I used to carry on a correspondence with several of those musicians,

19:30 never dreaming as I said that in the post-war I'd bring a lot of them to Australia. And I stayed for a week in New York at Gene Cooper's house and that was a wonderful experience to look back on. At that time he said "Would you like a pizza?" And I said 'What's that?" And we didn't even know what a pizza was in those days, never been heard of in

20:00 Australia. And the story I always tell was in which people have difficulty in comprehending the whole time that I was staying in Cooper's house he had an in-house sound system and the only music he played over that sound system was not jazz but Bach. And I said to him "Why is this so?" And he said "Well Bach", he said

20:30 "Was the greatest improviser in the history of music" and this is what appealed to Cooper because improvisation is the very basis of jazz. I mean Dave Brubeck said it adequately when he said "Jazz is about going out on stage and taking chances. If you want to listen to perfect music, listen to the classics." Now what he meant was

21:00 jazz is basically improvising and if you get group of musicians all improvising it can be wonderfully exciting, or if it doesn't come off it can be terribly jarring. If you want to hear Clare de Lune or something like that you can pretty sure it is going to be played tonight just as it was played last night, ten years ago, fifty years ago. There's no element of

21:30 improvising or inspiration on the spur of the moment which is the very basis of jazz. So what he was saying was it can be exciting or it can be abysmal if it doesn't gel.

Well as you say you, one of the roles I guess of having that gramophone was to lift morale.

My morale

22:00 mainly, yeah.

What about LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] and your encounters or what did you know about LMF?

LMF, what?

Lack of moral fibre?

No , I don't think, I wasn't conscious of any such, I mean we were all, everyone recognised that there was a strong element

22:30 of danger there but nobody in my experience ever refused to take off or be a part of a particular attack but I've no doubt like me, they all felt apprehensive but it was an exhilarating feeling to go and do it and

then get back safely and feel that you'd come through it unscathed.

23:00 **Well perhaps you can tell us I guess about a typical operation that you were on in Timor during that first duty. Take us through the day and what would you do.**

Well mainly it was looking out for convoys of enemy ships and

23:30 if instructed to attack those ships, mainly they were light. I never came into contact with, other than that specific torpedo attack at Milne Bay, I never came on anything other than the odd isolated ship that the enemy was in.

24:00 Our job was mainly, as I say, to keep an eye on what build up of planes there might be on various enemy occupied aerodromes or what shipping was in the harbours that might be carrying enemy troops, bombing the occasional air fields and things,

24:30 generally at night. And avoiding the odd fighter plane that you happened to find was in the sky at the same time as you were. I mean I had photos, again gone in the fire, of enemy planes taking off to intercept me but as I said as long as you kept your eyes peeled you could

25:00 generally outwit them anyway. You relied occasionally on convenient clouds to duck into if they were getting too close but the more daunting task was like the attack on those ships off Milne Bay where a lot of guns are shooting at you from several miles away. And you know

25:30 you've got to get within a few hundred yards at a hundred and fifty feet before you can drop your missile at them and you had to go through that sky full of enemy shots, terrible.

Well we'll come back and talk a bit more about Milne Bay but you've told us

26:00 **the story of the Mina River incident but I'm wondering what did you and your mates think of the Yanks?**

I mean they used to call MacArthur "Dugout Dug" and all that sort of stuff but I think most of us realised that we didn't have the population to withstand

26:30 the enemy alone and we were ever so dependent on the support of big nations like America to win the battles that we knew had to won before the war would be over. So I think we were conscious of the necessity of their assistance and I believe we acted accordingly

27:00 appreciating. I mean some of them were big mouth braggarts but by and large I'm sure that our troops appreciated the force that they represented and were grateful for our, helping us protect our country.

27:30 **Well going back to, picking up that story, the Mina River story after your plane was burnt and you got your things, some of the things out of the plane, you set out for Koepang on a two or three day walk, can you tell us about that walk?**

Well as I say the local natives didn't live there. They lived in villages in the foothills and they came down

28:00 and I have a feeling we paid them for the use of their ponies which carried what gear we had left and they gave us enough food. We had a bit of tin food that we'd also salvaged from the plane before it was burnt, so between that and what was dropped to us

28:30 by friendly aircraft while we were waiting, we didn't have gourmet meals but we survived on the food that we had, supplemented by the chickens and eggs and stuff that was provided by the locals on our trek. It wasn't

29:00 any great saga like going to the South Pole, it was just a long trek through bush tracks until we got to the point where we were able to make telephone contact with the base. So it wasn't particularly newsworthy.

29:30 If we'd waited until we'd been given further instructions we might still be there. I don't know. Because of the injury to the American, somebody had to do something and I took a chance and said we'd leave.

I was going to ask you who made the decision and who's responsibility was it to make that decision?

Well I was the senior

30:00 officer. I was only a flying officer but the rest of them were either, even the navy people were either able bodied seamen. There weren't any higher ranking members of either Australian or American forces, so I was within my rights as the senior officer present to make the necessary decisions I think.

30:30 **And how many men were there?**

Well there four of our crew plus another four or five Americans, so eight or nine people. Nothing very dramatic or earthshaking.

Well your rank was captain by this stage?

31:00 Oh no, I was still a flying officer, I probably was, I probably was a flying officer at that point. I'm not sure when I became a flying officer, maybe not till. I think I was a flight lieutenant when I went to Milne Bay, so maybe by then,

31:30 no I was a pilot officer in Timor I think. It must have been about the middle of the year I became a flying officer I think. This is January, February we're talking about now.

Well you say it wasn't newsworthy but still it was a decision you needed to make and in a sense it did save your life,

32:00 **cause had you had stayed?**

Yes, we would have been eventually captured by the Japanese and who knows how that might have panned out. We might have been beheaded like so many of my friends were. They didn't really take many prisoners. They just disposed of them violently.

32:30 Can't say much more than that really. So undoubtedly had we stayed there we would have come to a stickier end than in fact we did.

33:00 **Well when you arrived at the village and were able to make contact, who were you able to call and?**

I'm not sure how we got, I can't remember now when we picked up the phone how we got onto, eventually got onto the air force. Whether whoever, I can't remember who we got onto when

33:30 we phoned cause it was on a sort of domestic telephone system. Whether we made ourselves understood and they then, whoever it was we spoke to, put us through to the RAAF, I can't remember that. But they sent a truck out to pick us up so we finished up going the final part of the journey by air force truck.

34:00 **And how was your health and the health of your crew by this stage?**

Oh it was only some days later that we suffered the dengue. It's not something which you get bitten today and you're sick tomorrow, probably takes a few days to incubate I suppose. My health was good until,

34:30 I guess by the time I left Timor I must have been getting some symptoms of fever cause by the time I got back to Darwin I had a high temperature, so probably in the last couple of days I was in Koepang I must have been going down with it, though I hadn't got to the high temperature point of the illness that stage.

And how did

35:00 **the members, the other members of your four person crew cope with that two day walk and?**

Oh okay, yeah. It's as I say a long time ago now, it's hard to, what is it? Sixty years ago, over sixty years ago but I think we joked our way

35:30 through it and were optimistic about the fact that we were getting back to comparative civilization by comparison with the rough conditions in the last few days in an area which is as I say even the locals wouldn't live in because as I say it was so uncomfortable in there, all the biting

36:00 insects and things.

So how did you make a cup of tea or what liquid did you have?

I've never drunk tea or coffee. I don't remember what they did. I suppose we must have drunk water from creeks and things in which case probably lucky we didn't get

36:30 more illnesses than we did.

How did we know where you were going?

Well we knew from the maps that we'd used to get there where we were in relation to where the base was and then the locals more or less led us from there back to where we found the telephone.

37:00 So we had the local inhabitants as our guides. That's not a stirring saga of battling the elements and things like that. It was all a bit tedious

37:30 but we were determined to get back to the squadron and we did.

And how did you travel back to Darwin?

I can't remember that. I think it must have been another Hudson, I think. There was a flying boat but I'm very sure I didn't go in the flying boat.

38:00 I think I went back in another Hudson. The normal crew as I said was four and quite often they'd carry four or five extras. They could quite easily carry four or five extras for invariably short distances but unlike when they were evacuating Ambon and

38:30 Namlayo they had to really, I think one plane had twenty three people onboard. And it must have been quite a frightening experience to get it actually into the air with that unusual weight of people onboard.

Okay we've got to change our tape, so we'll just do that

39:00 **and Louise [interviewer] can pick up the story.**

Tape 7

00:32 **During your time in Timor there was a major raid on Ambon, do you recall much of that?**

No. I don't remember our unit being involved. That might have been when I was in Mina River or, I don't

01:00 remember being involved in that in anyway, so I couldn't have been there. I mean I know the Japanese would come over on a regular basis, virtually every day and sometimes several times a day but I can't remember the unit ever taking off from Koepang to go and attack Ambon.

01:30 No, I don't.

During your time there you shared a lot of correspondence back home. Who were you mainly writing to?

Well not a lot. My brother gave me my letters that I wrote to my mother, only three or four days ago, and I've been reading them but it doesn't say much about life

02:00 in the East Indies other than the fact that I loved playing my music and what the boys in the mess called me and etcetera and etcetera. There wasn't anything very illuminating that we haven't already covered I don't think of those days in Timor.

And what news about the war did you hear from home?

I can't

02:30 remember now. Not much I don't think. I don't think they were too informed anyway. I'm not sure how much the family knew about what was going on. I mean they knew where my brother-in-law Colin Verco had been overrun by the Japanese but I don't think

03:00 the population down south was told much at all. I mean even when the raid on Darwin occurred I think they were, the public down south were pretty much kept in the dark about possible casualties and things like that. In their wisdom there wasn't much news

03:30 that the public were given about those happenings.

Did you share much news about what was happening?

No, even the letters we wrote were censored and we were conscious of the fact that we weren't say much about the situation up there and what we were doing so the

04:00 letters were fairly nebulous. We didn't talk about the bleak future ahead that appeared inevitable so that they would have been fairly briskly ignorant of what was really happening.

04:30 **And could you describe the raids on Darwin, how you saw it?**

Yes, the first raid was mainly on the harbour and the wharves. In addition to that though, the Zero fighters came and strafed the aerodrome, because there were a few American Kittyhawks there

05:00 and I do remember looking out of my trench and seeing them being shot down by the Japanese while their undercarriages were still extended, hadn't been retracted. And I remember seeing there was a ship called the Neptuna, which was loaded with explosives and things and that suffered a direct hit

05:30 and there was an huge atomic like black, towering black cloud of smoke above the ship and I can still remember great bits of timber slowly rotating, catching the sun as they went up and up and up. And we weren't aware until later the damage to the wharves and the wharf workers and

06:00 the post office and ships sunk. That was all, we learnt that later and two hours after the first raid the bombers came, fifty four bombers came back again and this time their sole target was the aerodrome. And they were extremely accurate in as much as their first bombs fell just

06:30 inside the boundary fence and the last bombs just inside the fire boundary fence, so that every bomb

landed within the confines of the aerodrome, RAAF aerodrome and they did a lot of damage to buildings. They destroyed a number of parked aircraft. Seven, I think there were seven airmen killed

07:00 on the aerodrome but the commanding officer of the area was a Group Captain Scherger, who called the aircrew together and we could see the steady stream of people, almost running southwards past the boundary of the air force and he told the aircrews that we were

07:30 to stand firm and set an example by not panicking . Which we did and then that night was a bit unnerving. We had to attend the burial of those people who'd been killed by machine guns and bombs on the aerodrome

08:00 and we were all fairly apprehensive that come the dawn there'd be some Japanese troops landing on the mainland, which of course didn't happen but the future didn't look bright. We were on standby looking,

08:30 some of our planes were out looking to see if they could find the aircraft carriers from which the Japanese planes had been launched, but we found out later on they were all on the other side of Timor. They weren't in the sea between Darwin and Timor. They were launched either from Timor itself or ships just to the north of Timor. There were no ships

09:00 in the area between Timor and Darwin. Had there been I have no doubt that any aircraft that sighted those ships would have been in for a pretty hot reception from the fighter planes which would have been on those aircraft carriers. But it did seem

09:30 fairly ominous that the worst was still to come and as it was it was just more raids, not any land based attack. I mean I recognised the fact had they formed a base in Australia it would have been pretty hard for the enemy to service such

10:00 a base but it would have been a costly distraction to have to get rid of them. But it was just strategically I suppose, too difficult to have an isolated enemy base on Australian land compared with the apparent ease it was to

10:30 land on the Netherlands East Indies.

And could you describe some of the aftermath in Darwin?

Well the buildings, well not all of them but a great number of the buildings were either destroyed or damaged and there was,

11:00 they really plastered the area of the aerodrome. As I say I didn't go into the town but I have no doubt there was a fair bit of destruction in the town on a par with what happened, except the aerodrome was a more concentrated area than the city of Darwin.

11:30 And there's been lots of speculation about how many people were killed. A friend of mine is a Adelaide historian called John Bradford, who's fairly convinced that the death toll that was ultimately worked out, about two hundred and fifty three, I mean there's been a lot of speculation about it. It might have been as many as

12:00 a thousand but he thinks that the death toll was pretty much he said. But one of the problems was the lack of specific information of what ships were where. A lot of bodies were never recovered. Undoubtedly some floating bodies would have been eaten by

12:30 crocodiles and things like that but I must admit I thought myself that maybe the true figure would have been at least double what they were saying but according to John Bradford it was in fact somewhere in the vicinity of two hundred and fifty three. But what I was able to work into my recent speech

13:00 was that the night before the bombing two troop carrier ships arrived in Darwin. One had eleven hundred and thirty AIF troops onboard. Fortunately they were disembarked the night before the raid. The other had five hundred and sixty American servicemen onboard.

13:30 That was damaged but if either of those ships had been sunk the death toll would have been several times what it eventually turned out to be, so that was another fortunate coincidence that they had in the main. They were unloaded the night before the raid and were not still aboard in the middle of the harbour the next morning when the raid came. So the potential for

14:00 a much bigger death toll was narrowly avoided. But we had only a few ground casualties on the raid on the aerodrome, the RAAF base aerodrome. As I say a number of planes were destroyed and

14:30 crews were lost in the days preceding and following the raid but as far as the actual casualties from the raid itself the air force was fairly fortunately placed to lose only seven people.

And where were you during the raid?

I was, in 1992,

15:00 during an Adelaide Festival I opened an art exhibition of an artist friend of mine called Louis James, a

South Australian artist, and I said, I opened this exhibition on February 19th 1992 and I said “Had I known fifty years ago today when I was lying petrified at the bottom of

15:30 a slit trench that fifty years later I’d be in Adelaide opening an art exhibition, I might have lived my life a bit more recklessly.” So it certainly didn’t look too bright on that day in 1942 and unbelievable that one could successfully avoid the bombs and things that were flying around

16:00 so thickly at that time when I was down in the slit trench with my gramophone and records with me.

So where were you when you actually heard the planes coming in?

Well I was in my bed in the RAAF hospital and we went out onto the balcony outside my room and we saw this great mass of planes

16:30 which we, as I say, mistakenly thought were the Americans finally arriving in force before we realised to our horror that they were in fact Japanese planes. But yeah, I was there and believing there would be a lot of injured people who would need hospitalisation, I

17:00 said “Well I’m checking out of the hospital and they can use it for more serious cases than I was.” And I think I did eventually go back into hospital, a different hospital, a couple of days later just because there were a number of injured

17:30 American fighter pilots and so on being treated there but it was only for a couple of days. I was then able to leave under my own steam, the higher temperature had gone.

So where was the trench in comparison to the hospital?

Well it was right along side of it, only a few yards away.

18:00 **And how deep was it?**

Oh I suppose about six feet. I mean if you stood up your head would protrude but the idea was not to stand up, but by looking up you could see the planes overhead but if you wanted to look around you wouldn’t be putting your head above the trench top, if actually the planes were individually attacking

18:30 at that moment, kept down in the narrow confines of the trench.

And who was with you in the trench?

Oh my friend Neville Hemsworth. He was with me the first time. I can’t remember who was with me the second time but it wouldn’t have been, Neville would have left to do other things long

19:00 before they came back two hours later but I can’t remember who was with me when they came back.

And where was your gramophone?

Where was it?

Yeah?

It was in my room in the officers’ mess but I guess I must have gone and retrieved it from there from the time

19:30 that the first raid on the harbour finished and before they came back the second time. Because it was definitely in my trench by the time of the second raid because a number of the buildings around had been damaged and.

You said that you attended a mass funeral

20:00 **after the first raid?**

Yes, it was only seven people but I mean they were just bodies wrapped in blankets and put into graves that had been dug within the confines of the aerodrome and ultimately they would have been disinterred and taken down to the war cemetery at Adelaide River but on that day

20:30 they were buried on the aerodrome.

Did you know any of them?

Yeah, one of was a Squadron Leader Tyndall. I didn’t know him well. He was in the administration. Not in 2 Squadron but he was in the administration so I would have known him from the officers’ mess

21:00 but I think he was shot by a fighter, a machine gun.

And when you saw people heading south did you want to, was there a part of you that?

I was a bit horrified actually. There were rumours that some, a lot of them were civilians but there were rumours that some

21:30 service people had been told to get out of town. I think army, from memory it was army officers were alleged, some army officers were alleged to said “Get out, get away” but as I say our commanding officer in the area,

22:00 Scherger, was determined that we hold fast, stay where we were. As he said “Set an example to the others who were panicking to get out of town.”

And what was your biggest concern at this time?

22:30 Well I mean I think as I say I was convinced there would be a land war and invasion to follow but that proved not to be the case and I suppose in a way it was unrealistic to think that there would be because our squadron would have been recognising the area and

23:00 had there been a sizeable task force they probably would have seen it coming the day before or something like that. But nothing was revealed but nevertheless I think we still thought well they must be somewhere, maybe they’ll be here with the dawn but they weren’t.

23:30 **Now from Darwin, how long did you stay in Darwin after the raids?**

I think there left there about the middle of June. See I went there about the beginning of December, so I would have been six or seven months since I’d arrived in Darwin and then all I did was go south

24:00 long enough to do the conversion onto Beaufort’s and then to go to Nowra to do maybe a week long course on the torpedo attack procedures before I went back to Milne Bay at the end of, must have been the end of August. Yeah,

24:30 that was nearly two months so I’d obviously had a couple of weeks leave somewhere but I think we got up to Milne Bay towards the end of August, in the midst of the land, the Japanese land attack on that area.

So can you describe to me the move to the Beaufort’s? How different that was from?

Oh that was

25:00 just like a conversion to a different sort of aircraft. I don’t know how many hours I had by that time but I did a lot of hours in Darwin because we were out virtually every day for five or six or seven hours, so I had quite a few flying hours by then and it would have been a relatively routine business to learn how to fly another

25:30 sort of aeroplane, so it wouldn’t have been difficult. It would just have been the difference between driving a baby Austin and finishing up in a Jaguar or something like that, so it was no great shakes. It wasn’t at all daunting to do the conversion because the method of

26:00 attack was completely different because with the torpedo thing it involved a very low level operations rather than the higher level that was the general thing with bombers. Torpedos you had to be close to the water whereas with the bombers you more often than not a few hundred of a thousand feet above the water.

26:30 **You were saying you were flying for five or six hours in Darwin, were they reconnaissance missions?**

Yeah, yeah, going into covering enemy harbours and aerodromes to check on the build up of planes and shipping and also to the occasional warships which mainly turned out to

27:00 be friendly but because of the lack of intelligence around you were never sure whether when you saw a warship whether it was one of theirs or one of ours. And we’d have to then wireless back to base we’d seen such and such a type of ship in such and such position and they’d say “Keep away” or “Attack it” or

27:30 we wouldn’t attack on the spot without first checking with base as to whether it might be a ship that they already knew about.

So what was day to day life like in Darwin after the raids?

Oh, a bit boring. I mean the heat was, it was the wet season

28:00 and the humidity was pretty horrendous and often the flying conditions were less than favourable, a lot of rain and heavy clouds and thinking back on it now when I read about the torrential downpours in the last few days and realise this was the time of the year when

28:30 I was there so it was probably comparable to the type of weather they’re having up there now. Which one likes to see where one’s going rather than flying into heavy cloud and hope that you’ll come out in the clear the other side. You were conscious of the fact that you wanted to know where the mountain

29:00 peaks were so you weren’t flying cloud anywhere near any tropical island with potential volcanoes and things on them. But it was just surveillance. Could be quite boring because it was

29:30 a lot of flying and not too much resting in between as the weather was such that you didn't get a good sleep as it was so oppressively hot on the ground.

And so when you came back from the reconnaissance flights was there a

30:00 **routine that you went into when you came back?**

No, you just gave a report on what you'd seen or not seen and the serviceability of the aircraft and just sit around and waiting for your orders for your next operation the next day's evidently.

30:30 **So when you finished your reconnaissance flights in Darwin, you went down to Nowra for torpedo training, can you describe to me what the torpedo training entailed?**

Well there was a wing commander who wrote a book

31:00 on those days and he chose to describe the torpedo training course "As the most dangerous course ever devised in the history of the RAAF." Now we old salts didn't look at it in that light but it might have been a bit daunting to young trainee pilots who had just graduated to have to fly in

31:30 tight formation only feet above the water, so close to the water that often your propellers would leave a wind water spray behind. They'd throw the water back so that might have been a bit strenuous for an untrained pilot but for pilots who had

32:00 a fair amount of experience, I didn't find it. I mean there was an occasion on Jervis Bay where Cinesound news wanted to cover torpedo training and three of the instructors put on a show of formation flying and dropping dummy torpedoes and one pilot clipped the

32:30 tail plane of plane in front of him and both planes crashed and killed, four or five people in each plane were killed. And that was all on the newsreel and so often you see it on television, they screen the same thing over and over again. But that was just a case of misjudgement and the

33:00 wingtip of one plane hitting the outer one of the other and they both crashed into the sea but the idea was that you flew as low as possible so as not to be silhouetted against the skyline, making it harder for enemy shipping to pick you when you were some distance away.

33:30 And then you had to drop the torpedo at about nine hundred yards approximately from the ship and making allowances for the ship speed and direction. We had a sort of a bomb site that had lights and a mirror behind your head and you set

34:00 speeds and things on a thing and that would indicate to you at the right distance which way you should be pointing so that your torpedo, the ship would run into your torpedo streaking towards it. Then having dropped your torpedo you pulled up from the water to about nine hundred yards away so you were about a hundred, a hundred and twenty, a hundred and fifty feet above the water,

34:30 drop your torpedo and then immediately go into the most violent evasive action so that you wouldn't be offering a stationary target to enemy gunners to aim at. You'd sort of zoom up and dive down and turn left and right and it was really quite violent manoeuvring and you wouldn't want to have another plane on your wing because you could very easily

35:00 collide. So you had to take the most violent evasive action that you could so you didn't give them a standing target to shoot at and that was a bit scary maybe to inexperienced pilots to be doing those sort of manoeuvres so close to the water. And then but we had, we'd be in a V

35:30 formation and then as we got near the target we'd go into line astern and you'd drop the torpedo. You'd turn in so you came in one here, one here, one here heading that way so that your three torpedoes would theoretically converge on the one spot of the ship

36:00 and then having dropped your torpedo then one plane would turn to the left and one to the right and the one in the middle would take his choice which way he went to avoid being shot down.

And, just have to check my notes, sorry. Now at this time that you were in Nowra, had you

36:30 **just got married or were you about to get married?**

No, I got married between the time I left Milne Bay and before starting up at Nowra and we were, let me think, we must have been down at Nowra for ten or eleven months and then we

37:00 moved down to Jervis Bay, which is only thirty or forty miles further south of Nowra. There was a naval training depot at Jervis Bay and that's where they had the torpedo workshop, it's in my book, where they serviced and prepared torpedoes for dropping and Jervis Bay was a, pre-war was a

37:30 well known holiday resort and I always said life at Jervis Bay was so idyllic that I even entertained thoughts of staying in the air force permanently, so that just shows how amenable it was that one would want to contemplate a permanent air force career.

38:00 But it was a holiday resort with the beautiful beaches and swimming pools and golf courses and

luxurious hotels and it was like Surfers Paradise I suppose. It was Sydney's Surfers Paradise of the pre-war years. And we, a friend of mine

38:30 his father-in-law had friends who had holiday houses there and we managed to lease one of the houses. He only used it a few weeks a year and we leased a house and one of my instructor colleagues and his wife and I shared this house between us.

39:00 And it was, like I say a glorified holiday in one of the most attractive parts of Australia. The only thing wrong with it was that when you were doing your low flying over Jervis Bay you were conscious of the fact that there were an awful lot of sharks in there. You could see the shark fins wherever you looked so you didn't want to contemplate coming down

39:30 and in the water there. Wouldn't have lasted long.

With your training, your torpedo training at Nowra they were obviously preparing you for bigger battles, what other types of training did you do there?

Well that was all really. They did have a, there was a thing called a link trainer that you learnt flying on instruments.

40:00 Now they converted, the same people that built the link trainer created a torpedo training, it was like a diorama thing where you actually are approaching a ship on this wrap around type screen and you make your attack as you would and theoretically you can see whether or not

40:30 your torpedo would have found a mark or whether it would have missed it. And they had a guy came out from the England to operate the set up and I've often wondered in retrospect now whatever happened to the torpedo training unit that was specially built there for those training purposes. The fact of the matter were towards

41:00 the end of my period there the air force decided to give up torpedo aircraft and this is when I did my conversion course onto Mosquitoes for photo reconnaissance.

Are we at the end? Yeah. We've just finished this tape.

Tape 8

00:32 **Alright well, just one more question about Darwin before we move onto Milne Bay. I guess you've told us all the events and what actually happened while you were there but I am interested to hear if you were aware of, I guess any notions of shame**

01:00 **or that being unprepared when the Japs hits Darwin?**

No, I don't, I think more in retrospect I'm conscious of the fact that we were unprepared and that we shouldn't be complacent and allow us to get into a similar position for the future when we're so vulnerable to the. I mean of the aspects of which I'm all

01:30 too conscious of that time when I went to Lombok, the abiding memory I got from that trip was seeing all these rows and rows of immaculately dressed young children, having spent all day at school, waiting for the school bus to pick them up and take them back to their families rice

02:00 farms and things and I worry now that we've given, well we haven't but now that they've got an education are they going to be satisfied to go back and be rice farmers or are they going to be looking for better opportunities for themselves and their families than they ever had under the old system. They're running

02:30 out of space in those islands to the north and a lot of them must be looking with envy at the vast empty spaces of Australia, perhaps not realising that a lot of that space is desert. But I'm not convinced that with gigantic efforts a lot of that desert area couldn't be irrigated and they must look and that space and think "Well we've got

03:00 a better chance of making a better life for ourselves in a place like that than we can ever hope to have if we stay where we've grown up." And I think that particularly in these high tech days of the type of bombs and that,

03:30 we're not going to be given two years grace to start from scratch and get our defences together that we did get in 1939, and I'm very conscious of the fact that we are vulnerable and we shouldn't just be trusting to luck that we'll get out of it as well as we did last time round.

04:00 **Moving onto Milne Bay, you spent three months at Milne Bay?**

Yeah.

Can you tell us about the conditions that you faced at Milne Bay?

Well it was a typical tropical spot. You'd have lovely sunny weather most days in the mornings and by afternoon the clouds would start to build up and

04:30 most days it would be raining by the end of the day. The aerodrome was a strip cut out from an area that was then, the runways were made of these interlocking steel grids that formed the, what you landed on.

05:00 If you didn't keep a straight course when you took off or landed and you went off the edge of the steel you'd quickly sink the axles in the mud that these steel sections were laid upon and quite often because of the torrential rain that was virtually every day, the ground around the strip would be very boggy.

05:30 And we had a creek running through it and you could cool off in the local creek and things like that but there weren't many amenities there and I know some of the troops, the torpedoes were run on an alcohol mixture

06:00 and sometimes some of the crew would bleed some of the torpedoes and put the alcohol into coconuts and it would ferment into a pretty lethal alcoholic drink. I mean I did hear of incidences where people got blinded, blinded by the result of the brew that was produced

06:30 by taking the fuel out of the torpedoes and fermenting it. We lived on plenty of bully beef. At least when we lived in Darwin there was some access to beef cattle and we'd get, we'd be able to supplement some of our tinned food with fresh meat that we got from properties nearby Darwin, but up in

07:00 New Guinea there was no bullocks roaming around so we lived pretty much on bully beef and tinned fruit and things like that. We never went hungry. The diet might have been a bit boring but it was adequate to sustain us, particularly

07:30 with the ability to go south every time we dropped a torpedo. We'd go down to Townsville to pick up another one so we'd have a night or two back at civilization. I remember the first time I went back I almost made myself sick eating ice creams which certainly wasn't available at Milne Bay. There were, in addition to our squadron there was a

08:00 a Beaufighter squadron there and one or two squadrons of Australian Kittyhawks, so there were quite a lot of Australians there. And there was a squadron of American Air Cobra's which were a very over heavy fighter plane that some distant relation to. My grandfather was a great one for

08:30 keeping up with the family tree and one of his correspondents came from Maine, where a branch of the family in the eighteenth century had established himself in the United States and my grandfather formed a friendship with one of the descendants of that branch of the family

09:00 and he wrote to my grandfather and said this was a list of some of his grandsons and nephews who were in the American services and may conceivably find themselves in our neck of the woods sometime during the war. Anyway when I got to Milne Bay and I saw this Air Cobra squadron I said

09:30 to one of the American's "Any of you guys know a pilot by the name of Todd Dabney?" And they said "Sure, that's him over there." And so I met this Todd Dabney from Richmond, Virginia and he was to become the godfather of my eldest child, Robyn, and I'm still in touch with him today in Virginia where he lives.

10:00 I've visited him a couple of times since then but the coincidence of striking someone through such a chance meeting was almost unbelievable. But there were a lot of planes on the Milne Bay strip and gradually they moved as the war advanced,

10:30 they moved further north. But for a while there and really I keep coming back to this, a lot goes back to that afternoon attack we made on that Japanese task force because once our air force started to reveal that we had lethal aeroplanes to their shipping, they

11:00 pretty much evacuated the resistance that they left behind. It was the start of the end as far as the Japanese attack in New Guinea was concerned, starting from that daytime attack on the Japanese Naval force. They more or less

11:30 said "Well you guys look after yourselves, we're not coming back to help you anymore." So that there was some landmark result from that aborted attack on the Japanese Naval force that day that we could see would expand considerably with the passage of time as progressively the Japanese left what troops there were to fend for

12:00 themselves.

I know you've already told us a bit about that day but can you just take us through again what happened and what were your orders?

Well somebody who just died a few weeks ago was a Group Captain "Bull" Garing. He was the air officer in charge of the area and when we landed in Milne Bay he immediately told us about the

12:30 regular shelling that the Australian troops were getting from the Japanese warships that came into Milne Bay virtually every night. And he decided that the next time they tried it we'd go after them and try to sink them and sure enough the next day the force was

13:00 sighted approaching and he ordered the planes to make an attack, the torpedo bombers, the Beaufighters and the Kittyhawks. And when they came in that late that night, no I mean when we attacked them that afternoon they didn't come in that night. The

13:30 previous night had been their last attempt to do that and with the advent of our arrival they no longer continued that regular practise of harassing the Australian ground troops that were combating the Japanese troops, who had already landed there, and they left them just to their fate.

14:00 But thereafter they didn't come back but as I say we used to go out at night trying to attack shipping that was. You'd try to get a ship between your own plane and the moon, silhouetted against the moon and then you'd attack the often anchored ships

14:30 that would have supplies or troops or whatever. And we'd try and attack them and I think one of the ones, I think I hit one, one night that was, what do they call them? They had some people, Australian agents, there was

15:00 a special phrase for it. I can't think what it is, sort of a coast watcher, yeah. A coast watcher reported that a ship I'd attacked had beached itself, so obviously it must have had a hit and rather than sink it ran up onto the beach and beached itself. So there were a number of similar incidents where ships used to

15:30 gather in quite considerable numbers round Guaralton Island [?], that area were targeted by this method of operating from Milne Bay to the north around, as I say around the Solomon Island and things. So that was the sort of thing we were doing. Occasionally we'd go out on bombing raids but basically we were a torpedo

16:00 dropping unit and that was what we were training them up down south to continue in that line of action until such time the other bloke decided to forgo. There was this rather unstable American torpedo which had a special wind tail fitted onto make its passage through air

16:30 more stable because they were inclined to dive in and hit the bottom and come up and on a different course from which they'd been dropped into the water. There was a more thinner, more stable English version of the aerial torpedo that proved more accurate than the rather unstable American brand of torpedo

17:00 that we started off using. And then when I finished training at Jervis Bay, for a while I ran a special, what was it? A torpedo development unit and I think they had, the navy had a torpedo testing range at Pittwater, near Avalon, out of Sydney,

17:30 and I think over a period time I dropped forty of the British type torpedo on that torpedo testing range to clarify the fact that they were more successful on their entry into the water and their ability to maintain a correct course. And then as I say, then rightly or wrongly

18:00 the RAAF decided to use Beaufort's just for plain bombing and strafing rather than dropping torpedoes so the whole thing fizzled out and that was when I did my conversion to Mosquitoes and into 87 Photo Reconnaissance Squadron.

18:30 **We'll talk about 87 Squadron but just a bit more on 100 Squadron. What was 100 Squadron like for you after Number Two Squadron? How did you find the squadron?**

As I say I had, I can't complain about my, the serviceability of my plane but I know there were a lot of people who didn't have a high

19:00 opinion of Beauforts because of inexplicable accidents that were either the result of material failures or maybe it was the saboteur thing has never been widely publicised but I can't complain about, the Beaufort gave me good service and

19:30 they were Australian built. The Australians built over seven hundred of them. There were tens of thousands of Australians throughout the country making various components that went together to make up the Bristol Beaufort. And I think, I'm glad that eventually Australia, the war memorial finally completed

20:00 an Australian built Beaufort because so many Australians were a part of creating it and it's now part of their collection in Canberra but it had, there's no denying the fact that it had a some what dubious reputation amongst some of the pilots.

20:30 There were a lot of people killed in training accidents, apart from those that were lost in action but I thought they were a good old workhorse and I was entirely satisfied with my experience flying with them. I've got no complaints at all about their reliability.

21:00 And but everyone aspired to fly a Mosquito because they were one of the glamour aircraft of the war. What was it? They completed a restoration of a Mosquito some years prior to the completion of the Beaufort and a writer of a

21:30 monograph on Mosquitoes gave me a wonderful quote that I was able to use in my speech on the unveiling day. Gerbels is quoted as saying every time he saw that Mosquito he turned green with envy. He said “Every”, I forget what the phrase was,

22:00 like “Every Tom, Dick and Harry is turning out these planes.” His final comment was “They have the geniuses, I have the nincompoops.” So obviously Garing was impressed by the Mosquito. Now the Mosquito version that we had had cameras that photographed vertically and also out the side they had no

22:30 armourment, no guns, no bomb bays. The bomb bays were filled with extra fuel tanks so we could go super long distances. I mean I think I made one of the longest flights from, whenever we were going over western Java, or anything like that, we’d fly to somewhere like Broome because it was closer

23:00 to fly over that end of the Netherlands East Indies than it was from Darwin. And the only drawback was the plane had no automatic pilot and you’d sometimes be sitting seven or eight hours manually flying the plane. And you’d be sitting on an air bottle for your

23:30 Life dinghy, life buoy and after an hour or two you’d start to be conscious that you’re sitting on something uncomfortable. By seven or eight hours it was agony and I think I went up to Borneo at one stage. That was the longest flight up till then that had been made in an Mosquito aircraft

24:00 and as I say our role was to keep a constant watch on ports and aerodromes, to notice if there was any build up of either shipping or aircraft that might be a preface to some form of land attack. And so we kept an eye on a lot of

24:30 Japanese bases on a regular basis to the degree that sometimes they’d anticipate our coming and the fighters would already be there waiting for us when we. But the main trick, as I said, was not to be caught napping, to be aware that you had to keep your eyes skinned or they’d jump you when you weren’t expecting them. As long as you were expecting them you could outrun

25:00 them.

Well we’ll come back and talk about 87 Squadron but I’d just like to spend a bit more time in Milne Bay. What did you know of 75 and 76 Squadron who were in the area?

Yeah, we were conscious of the fact that, “Bluey” Truscott was CO of one of those units. Les Jackson was the CO of the other one and we all, we were all sort of billeted

25:30 in the same area and have you actually seen my films of? Well what I could do is if you can guarantee to get it back to me you can look at the film. As I say they terribly amateurish but they are historically

26:00 valuable and I did, as I say, put some years after the war memorial, I added a soundtrack which identified the two anonymous people being shown.

Well where was 100 Squadron camped in relation to the other squadrons?

26:30 I can’t remember whether we were, I suppose we must have been, I don’t remember whether our tents were mixed up with theirs, but we certainly shared the same facilities of area headquarters, and probably the, I think they had a bar that the pilots frequented which was called the “Gilly Gilly Arms”, I think.

27:00 But as I say not being a drinker I wasn’t a patron but we certainly, I mean Peter Masters I see him regularly at meetings in Adelaide. He was one of the Kittyhawk pilots that was there and I still see him on a regular basis in Adelaide but we had a very amicable relationship with those

27:30 other pilots but I just don’t remember now how were accommodated. Whether we were all in together or separate areas, but all very close to the landing strip, that’s for sure.

And you mentioned being teetotaller and a bit of a loner I guess, how did you

28:00 **mix with your crew and the other squadrons in the area?**

Well I mean we used to sit around waiting around for calls to go out on ops and we’d all be mingling around on the end of the runway, sitting on slit trenches next to the operations room and we had a good relationship. But

28:30 of course we were bombers and they were fighters so we didn’t go on exercises together other than attacks like that on the Japanese warships. But we were friendly but separate units. I can’t really say much more than that.

29:00 **Do you think with hindsight and years to reflect on it, now looking back do you think that**

there was I guess, a hierarchy of status I guess being a fighter pilot compared to a bomber pilot.

No, I don't think so. No, I wasn't conscious of any

29:30 inter-squadron rivalry or anything like that. I think we were all like school boys, you might say, sort of all on the same team and undoubtedly people in each squadron had friends with whom they mingled in off duty moments. There was certainly no jealously or rivalry among the squadrons.

30:00 **And what about the notion, I guess of Aussie pilots flying by the seat of their pants?**

I mean it was generally common knowledge that Bluey Truscott, who was a football hero of his day, that he was a bit of a

30:30 rough and ready pilot, but I think it was conceded that he was a pretty good shot. He was successful, although he might have been a bit heavy handed on the controls, he was never the less a pretty good aimer of his bullets. And

31:00 I think one aspect outweighed the other and the result, the ultimate result was, was he successful as a fighter pilot? And yes, he was, although he might have been a bit less skilful than some of his pilots, his own pilots as a

31:30 pilot but he was outstanding as a gun shooter. So no, there was certainly no rivalry between the squadrons, I don't believe. We shared the same intelligence operators. They controlled the operations of

32:00 all the squadrons that were based there. One of them was the brother of the Ashton that I trained with in Mascot and when I was in Mascot I went a couple of times to the Ashton house and met the various other brothers who together were a notable

32:30 polo family in Australia at that time. And there were some naval officers who had been seconded to, as sort of a, I can't think what the word is, naval, not consultants, I don't know. Each one of those headquarters had in addition to air force they had a

33:00 naval representative to work in between the two services and some of them were, one in particular, no, two in particular, were actually down at Nowra and Jervis Bay, in a sort of advisory capacity, from the point of view of the naval

33:30 operations. Lieutenant Commander Jerry Haynes and one who lives here in Adelaide still, Lieutenant Commander Russell Greentree and they were much admired and their cooperation with the air force was outstanding.

And I have heard from others that, particularly Milne Bay, was a little bit, I guess wild west frontier. Did you have

34:00 **a sense of that when you were there?**

No, I don't think, I mean it was no, unlike Jervis Bay it was no luxury resort. It was pretty rough and ready but did the job and I think it fulfilled its role as well as one could

34:30 expect. I mean we were lacking in radar facilities in those days and I know if you went out on operations and you came back and the weather was closed in, the aerodrome was sort of in a valley and the system was you came over a certain point at the entrance to Milne Bay and if in a

35:00 certain number of seconds you hadn't sighted the aerodrome you did a tight turn and got out because you knew if you kept going you'd be running into the cloud shrouded mountains at the end of the bay. So there were a few people that lost their lives because they ran into the mountains in poor weather returning into base when in the meantime

35:30 the weather had closed in, yeah. But I wasn't conscious of the fact of it being like some western gun slinging centre. There was a job to be done and everyone adapted to the circumstances that were available, which weren't always ideal.

36:00 **And what were the losses for 100 Squadron for the three months that you were there?**

I can't remember now. A number of my contemporaries were either shot down or ran into hills or things like that but

36:30 it wasn't as severe as it had been through the initial push through the East Indies but we did have some losses to enemy and the elements during that period. But as I say I think the 2 Squadron era a greater number of the crews were lost on operations

37:00 than in the Milne Bay time we were there.

And what would your squadron, either Number Two or Hundred Squadron, do to mark the passing of pilots or crew?

Well we didn't have services or anything like that. I mean I think you just were aware this morning but they're not going to be there

37:30 tomorrow. It was regrettable but accepted as part of life. I don't think there was any, other than personal regrets, I don't think there was any other way we marked our losses. Seemed a waste of a lot of young lives,

38:00 but there it was, it was war and we accepted it as such.

Well as you say it was war and you had a job to do but what about going troppo [losing mental stability] in the jungle? Did you see anybody or come across that?

No, I don't think, I mean there

38:30 were those occasions like when we went up on our familiarisation flight, there was, Thirteen Squadron had been in Darwin for some considerable period and there were a number of people that we classified as being a bit troppo. One of them was a classic case. He kept a pet snake in a basket under his bed and early one morning

39:00 he was staggering back to his quarters after imbibing too much [drinking too much] and he tripped over his snake at the bottom of the stairs up to his elevated room and wrapped the snake around his neck, and staggered up to his room and pulled his basket out and was horrified to see his snake was still in the basket. So this was a wild one that he stumbled across

39:30 that he was blaming the so and so's for having let his snake out. His snake was safely ensconced in the, you can imagine that moment of drunken realisation when he saw this snake there and what's this one around his neck doing. But those were the only examples of eccentricity rather than going to bits.

40:00 **And do you feel, or do you think with hindsight that being a teetotaller in the air force in the war set you apart a little bit from others?**

Yeah, I'm conscious of the fact that I didn't sort of, I'd be more likely to want to go to bed earlier than they

40:30 were but I don't think anyone resented the fact but I'll admit that I didn't socialise to the same degree that I might have, had I not been a teetotaller.

Okay well our tape has run out again so we'll just stop and change it. You can stretch your legs.

Tape 9

00:31 **Okay Kim, let's talk about your transition from Milne Bay to Nowra. What happened for you to suddenly leave Milne Bay and then?**

Well I'd done virtually a year. The normal term, operational term I think is nine months and it was

01:00 twelve months from the time we went up to Darwin for the first time and when I left Milne Bay plus the, which two and a bit months had been doing the conversions from Hudsons to Beauforts and the torpedo training course, so I'd done my nine

01:30 full months of operations and then I was transferred down south to do the torpedo training unit. First as an instructor and subsequently when my predecessors had moved on, I ultimately became

02:00 chief flying instructor of that course and was in charge of the training at first Nowra then Jervis Bay. And then as the interest in active torpedo squadrons was terminated then I did this working up the Australian built

02:30 torpedo at Pittwater. So that although I was eighteen months I suppose between Milne Bay and going back to Darwin with Number 87 Squadron, I imagine because of my specialised role

03:00 in the torpedo training there wasn't a pool of other people similarly qualified to, so that I tended to be retained in that role for a longer period of time other than if I'd been strictly on operations. So then I did the last nine months of the war as a member of 87 Photo Reconnaissance Squadron. In fact I was

03:30 on leave following my nine months when the first atomic bomb was dropped and I never went back and I eventually was discharged, I don't know when. Probably about the end of August of forty five by which time the war had ended.

Just going back to Nowra, what personal challenges did you come across as chief

04:00 **flying instructor?**

Well I mean there were a lot of techniques in day and night flying. We did do a little bit of reconnaissance work when there was believed to be German submarines or whatever, we occasionally went out on reconnaissance duties from Nowra or Jervis Bay.

04:30 But it was a case of getting recently graduated rookie pilots and overseeing their transition to become adept in a certain style of air force operation, mainly the dropping

05:00 of torpedoes and the specialist requirements that were involved in that sort of attack, which were different from if you were just dropping bombs from a medium to high altitude.

And what aircraft were you training with?

Where?

At Nowra?

At Nowra? Oh the same Beaufort's that we'd been using up at Milne Bay.

05:30 As I said the one's we took to Milne Bay were amongst the lower serial numbers of Australian production, whereas by the time the courses had finished at Nowra and Jervis Bay they were up in the high hundreds. The majority in 100 Squadron were

06:00 up to maybe the first hundred aircraft but they built seven hundred plus of them so by the time I'd finished instructing on Beaufort's they were starting to climb in the numbers which indicated that they'd been producing them for some considerable time, by the time

06:30 I severed my particular association with that particular make of aeroplane.

And what advice did you give your pupils?

I don't know. Just be careful when you get close to the water that you don't fly into the water. We were so low that it required a bit of caution not to be

07:00 over enthusiastic and touch the water because the moment you touched it you'd be it. You'd then like my hydroplane, you'd disintegrate with contact with the water and there wouldn't be anything less than a fatality. So they had to be aware of the necessity to be low but the dangers of being too low.

07:30 So I mean the thing was if you were higher up above the water you were an easier target for any air gunner to hit you so you wanted to minimise the risks in that direction but not to the degree where you were going endanger the life of your crew by being too low.

Did you experience many fatalities with your rookies?

08:00 We did have a few. We had a serious of accidents at one stage where I think it was probably at the time where the two planes were performing for the newsreel cameras. That coincided with a couple of other accidents like the one that whereby navigator dived into the, as a passenger of course,

08:30 dived into the water for no explainable reason, as if something had broken at the controls and there was a string of serious fatalities over a two or three day period that was most unsettling. But it might have just

09:00 been a coincidence that they took place over a short period of time.

And did you write to any of the families?

No, the father of my navigator came up from Adelaide and insisted on, I didn't see the body, but he insisted on going to the morgue and double checking

09:30 that it was in fact his son that was dead. But no, I didn't and I think maybe the unit station commander may have been in personal touch with the relations but other than my navigator I didn't personally make contact with

10:00 any of the people who got killed accidentally.

So from Nowra you then joined the 87th Squadron, the Photo Reconnaissance?

Yeah, I did my conversion course at Williamtown. You've got the photo I think of the other members of, maybe a half or dozen or so pilots who did

10:30 the conversion course at Williamtown and on completion of that I was immediately sent up to 87 Squadron which was based at Coomalie Creek out of Darwin. One of my ambitions had been throughout the war to fly a Lockheed Lightning

11:00 and 87 Squadron had one but as luck had it one of my predecessors who was in 87 Squadron prior to my arrival crashed it and destroyed it only a week before I got there so I never did get to fly the Mosquito. But that was one of my disappointments.

11:30 I'd never hankered to fly a Spitfire or anything like that because I was virtually a twin engine pilot, not a single engine pilot but I must admit I was disappointed not to get to fly the Lightning because it was made by the same company as the Hudson, the Lockheed. And I had a high regard for that and I was looking forward to the experience of being able to fly the Lockheed Lightning,

12:00 but that was not to be.

So can you describe your reconnaissance work and how different it was from the other work, the other missions?

What with 87?

Yes.

Well as I say the majority of it involved fairly high level work. We'd be on oxygen bottles because of the altitude we were operating at. Whenever we were going

12:30 to Timor or Ambon or any of those islands due north of Darwin, we'd operate from there but if we were going further to the west, for instance Java or even Borneo we'd go to one of the West Australian airstrips like Broome or there was the Drysdale River Mission

13:00 and another place called Truscott, which were on, from memory were on Aboriginal mission stations in the north west part of Australia. Because it was a more, it was about a three hour flight from memory from Darwin to Broome and those, that was three hours you didn't have to fly in a north westerly direction.

13:30 You could continue to operate at the shortest distance which would be due north so if you operated from Broome you were closer to some of those more distant Japanese areas to the north and west of Australia where we were based in Darwin.

14:00 That's all I really have to say about that.

And how long were you flying for on the reconnaissance missions?

Well from memory the average flight would have been five or six hours but there were a couple of flights that I did, one of them from memory was the longest flight ever undertaken by the Squadron, which was to Borneo. It was about

14:30 eight hours I think and one of the draining aspects of this is was unlike the Hudson we didn't have an automatic pilot, so you had to manually fly the planes all the way. And I wouldn't like to be doing it today because if I sit down and watch television in the afternoon in ten minutes I'm asleep, so I think these days if I was flying a Mosquito manually

15:00 I'd probably nod off after I'd been air born for an hour or two but you couldn't afford to nod on those long cross water. There was little in the way of, particularly in the early stages of the war, of radar assistance. You more or less had to rely on navigation and that included an estimate of what the wind strength and

15:30 direction was because if you came back to Australia and you weren't really accurate it was pretty forbidding and uninhabited territory you'd suddenly find yourself in. If you were getting down in fuel the prospects of surviving an emergency landing in the middle of nowhere were

16:00 pretty remote. So that I was blessed with a very good navigator in a fellow called Keith Roget from Melbourne and we generally managed to get pretty close to where we aiming for on our return to Australia. There were a couple of occasions in the past when I'd been,

16:30 I went with an American Fortress crew as an observer to having served in Timor they wanted me to go with them and point out possible targets and they got hopelessly lost coming back and we'd been told to put on our parachutes and get ready to bail out because our tanks were all about showing empty and there was no

17:00 sign of where we were aiming for. Eventually out of the blue, thank God, Wyndham hove into view and we landed on a bomb damaged runway with all the tanks showing empty so the prospect of being successfully recovered from such an uninhabited part of the world was not terribly good. And

17:30 it was a case of what I always said, some of my closest escapes during the war were at the hands of friends not enemies. We had to, with the Mosquito there was no, there wasn't a dual control aircraft. Whenever a new pilot would arrive at Coomalie

18:00 Creek as flight commander it was my responsibility to check them out. And they'd finish their training and they'd been on leave and in many cases they'd come up from down south on the train, so it might have been weeks since they last flew a plane and it was my responsibility to check them out to see

18:30 if they remembered how to fly and there were a couple of occasions taking off from Coomalie Creek I suddenly saw tree branches going past the wing tips. And I realised that the pilot, who was a bit rusty, had after takeoff instead of easing throttles back, had pulled the wrong lever back. He'd

19:00 pulled the aircraft pitch, propeller pitch lever back and we were sinking towards to the ground and I suddenly when I saw these leaves going past the end, suddenly realised what he'd done so I slammed the levers forward and pulled up over the top of a hill that we were approaching so that was a pretty scary experience. And I still see the bloke today and remind

19:30 him how it nearly ended that day when I was checking him out at CoomalieCreek after he'd arrived in Darwin.

By this stage what rank were you?

I was squadron leader by then. That was how I ended the war.

And what challenges did that bring to your role in the air force?

Well I suppose a squadron

20:00 leader, as the name implies, if you were leader of the squadron you were a flight leader and I was a flight commander of one of the Mosquitoes flights of 87 Squadron and but I'm not sure when I became a squadron leader. I guess it was, must have been soon after I arrived in Darwin

20:30 at the end of forty four. That was the rank that I finished the war on.

And what memories do you have about your squadron?

Well it was an exhilarating to fly the most praised,

21:00 I mean it was like a Spitfire. The Mosquito was the plane to have flown and I think the Mosquito was originally modelled on the plane that won the England to Australia air race. What were there names? Scott and, I can't think.

21:30 But anyway I think the basis of the Mosquito was on this plane that set the record flying from England to Australia in the immediate pre-war years and it was a beautiful aircraft. I suspect that it was not quite suited to Australian tropical conditions as it had been to the more temperate English conditions.

22:00 The tropical rain was a bit inclined to tear the fabric. I mean they were a plywood plane covered in fabric and some of the severe tropical rain would on occasion cut the fabric and there were cases I'm aware of where the

22:30 fabric would peel off the wing shortly and in one or two cases followed by the wing itself, which was rather frightening because you don't get out alive from many planes when the wings fall off. So as I say I have a feeling that the tropics weren't as well suited to

23:00 Mosquito construction as Europe might have been but they were wonderful planes to fly. And I was only recalling the other day, somebody in England's writing a book about Mosquitoes and they asked me to send some photos of the Australian Mosquitoes in operation. And I remember whenever we took off in the pitch dark in Broome so that we'd be over the target

23:30 in broad daylight by the time we reached the end of our flight, I'd get the navigator to shine our Alder's light. I'd shut my eyes and he'd shine the Alder's light on the instrument panel which would make all the phosphorous numerals on the dashboard glow in the dark and then when he'd done that I'd open my eyes up and take off.

24:00 Whereas if you didn't do that the numbers weren't quite as prominent as they were if they'd been exposed to bright light and took a while for them to fade back to their normal lighter colour. The exposure to the spotlight made them all stand out more prominently.

Well let's talk now about

24:30 **the end of the war. Where were you when the war ended?**

I think I was on leave following my nine months as a pilot with 87 Squadron. I remember I was at a party at Springfield in Adelaide when news came of the atomic bomb being dropped in Japan

25:00 and we realised that this may well signal the end of the war as in fact it did. I was able to be discharged at that point before, the war was virtually over. It was only a matter of days before peace was declared but I'd finished my operational tour and

25:30 so I never went back in any capacity following that leave after my tour with 87 Squadron.

And what is your proudest moment from the war?

From the war? I don't know. I didn't even give it any thought.

26:00 I mean I wasn't, I was a reasonably good pilot I think, not a risky pilot. I like to think I did the job I was told to do, nothing more, nothing less. I wasn't a hero. I didn't kill anybody in any of my crashes and

26:30 I just think it was period of my life that worked out. Our side won the war and maybe in some tiny way I contributed but I never saw myself as a dashing war hero. I just did what I volunteered for and I didn't volunteer.

27:00 If I was ordered to do something I did it and I was happy to do as I was told and no more.

And why did you want to talk to us today?

Well because I was asked mainly but I was under the impression I must admit that there was, because they had sent me a video of

27:30 Peter Sculthorpe [Australian composer] I was told that they did such a program four or five times a year and I thought for some unknown reason that this was to be one such occasion. That it was going to be made into a presumably half hour, forty five minutes video,

28:00 whereas in actual fact it's more like the interviews that I've done over the years with people like Hazel De Berg [historian] and James Murdoch, an oral history rather than a pictorial history, but anyway it's. I don't know, I've given all my memorabilia of my twenty years association with Roly Park Speedway

28:30 to the State Library rather than gathering dust in some cupboard if anyone wants to look in the papers and the programmes and things of the speedway, it's there available for people to check it out. But I can't imagine anyone being that interested in my wartime contribution,

29:00 but anyway they're there should anyone want to look at in years to come. Maybe one of my great grandchildren might be interested to read about it but I'm not holding my breath.

And how would you like your war experiences to be remembered?

Well no more than I did what I was told and

29:30 nobody got hurt in the process, well nobody on our side got hurt in the process. I don't like to think of some of the bombs I've dropped on Dili and places like that where innocent bystanders may have been the victims of those bombs. I don't particularly want to find that out because that would be a

30:00 burden for the rest of my life if I found that instead of hitting Japanese, I hit innocent civilians. But as I say I would just like to be remembered as someone who volunteered early in the war to help defend the country that I'm most proud to

30:30 be a member of and that when posterity or when history called I at least offered my services to do what I could to maintain that end of a way of life that we perhaps all take too easily for granted.

Can I just ask how the transition, how you adjusted from coming out of the army back into civilian life?

31:00 Yeah, well as I say by the time I'd finished my five and a half years in the air force I no longer thought in terms of being an accountant and I found in my life if you keep busy that the main thing. You don't want to be sitting around thinking "What am I going to do next?" I've always managed

31:30 to be involved in several things at once. In several cases one has helped in the pursuit of another. I mean I used to say I'm not a Beatles fan but I was part of a syndicate that bought the Beatles to Australia in the mid Sixties and because of the success of that tour that enabled me to bring Duke Ellington

32:00 and Count Basie [jazz musicians] to Australia, so one thing supported the other. Similarly my involvement in Roly Park was such that when I hadn't been selling many pictures at my art gallery the activities at Roly Park would subsidise the desire to show what I believed in of art. So one activity has over the years made some of the other activities possible.

32:30 And I like to think that the things that I have done since the war have not only been satisfactory to me personally but have in a degree raised the standards of what has been achieved in the national sense. I mean my days as

33:00 a Jersey farmer at Mount Pleasant were things that filled me with a lot of satisfaction that I did something worth doing and did it well and I'd like to feel that in most cases the things that I've turned my hand too have benefited by me giving it my best shot to make them

33:30 happen.

So what was life like when you came out of the air force?

I mean it was wonderful to have the, back to the carefree days of living in a home without having to shoot off to some remote place like Coomalie Creek

34:00 or something like that. It was five and a half years and it was a long time to be away from your family and all that and it was wonderful for it to have, I mean it mightn't have been so good if we'd been the

losers instead of the victors in World War 11 but that's an aspect I've never contemplated. I never thought we'd be anything but

34:30 ultimately the winners. So it was gratifying that it turned out the way it did and I feel privileged that I was in some tiny way able to make that happen.

And what advice would you give to future generations?

What ever you want to do, do it as well as you can and

35:00 try and add something to the present situation by what you personally have done, make it a bit better. Do what you can but do it as well as you can.

Okay. Thank you for speaking with us today.