Australians at War Film Archive

Jack Larcombe (Sporty) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 **Just starting Jack, with a life overview, tell us when and where you were born from there.**

I was born on the 7th of February 1925, in Kalgoorlie. We were living at the time just out of Coolgardie but my

01:00 aunty and my mother flagged down the Kalgoorlie express and they stopped it and got aboard and went into Kalgoorlie and I was born in the Kalgoorlie Hospital. I was the first of the family born in hospital and I was the fifth in the family of eight. That was in 7th of February, 1925. And I don't remember a great deal as a

01:30 little one. My father worked – my father used to deliver camels throughout the northern part of Kalgoorlie up to Meekatharra, places like that, and later on he was with the water supply and he worked on the pipeline, Kalgoorlie to Perth. Or Perth to Kalgoorlie. We came to Perth in about 1929,

02:00 I was four or five years of age, and went and lived in Leederville. My father worked for the water supply, he'd been transferred down in the water supply, and we lived in Leederville, almost opposite where the water supply was. I went to school, my primary school, in Leederville and I

02:30 from there I went to Perth Boys' School. And I left school at 14 and I'd done my Junior Certificate. I was a bit young and a bit ahead of guys so I left school at 14 and started work as an office boy in Perth and then managed to get an apprenticeship with the water supply and sewerage department, which was carrying on in the family tradition.

03:00 And so I was in that and had a pretty interesting experiences there, particularly as it was the war time and they were re-erecting or resurrecting some of the water supplies in Perth in case of air raids and whatever, and I was involved in some of that work which was reorganising old steam

03:30 engines and getting those running, and that was quite an experience. And when I was 17, I tried to join the navy but I was Manpowered out because I was an apprentice and so then I tried to join the army, this was still when I was 17, and somehow or other the employers heard about it and I didn't even get to the… I got to the

04:00 stage of getting my uniform issued and they had me pulled out because I was in a – in what they called an essential services occupation. However, I had a couple of mates and I went and applied to join the air force, and did the medical examination and the selection examination and was told that I was passed and possibly would

04:30 be selected. And a friend told me to go along one Saturday and the next Saturday morning and there'd be sure to be a no-show and I'd probably fit into the no-show. And that's what happened. And there was several no-shows and so I was – and I was in the air force and – just after my 18th birthday, it was. And it was too late then, by then the – my employers gave up the chase to keep me out of the services.

05:00 Because of that I picked up about two months in time in my training period, although I had to undergo more of my medical and rookie training well after everybody else and I was doing that at the same time as I was doing my course. I went to Clontarf Initial Training School and

05:30 then went to and was selected as a pilot, and then went to Cunderdin as the Elementary Flight Training School, on Tiger Moths [biplane trainers], that's – Cunderdin's also in Western Australia – and from Cunderdin I went to Geraldton flying Avro Ansons [bomber/trainers]. And I got my wings in about nine months, which was pretty much a record because I was still only 18 at the time. Then

06:00 I – we travelled – I travelled to Melbourne to the embarkation depot and was camped in the Melbourne Cricket Ground, waiting embarkation. And I was camped up in the grandstand there for three or four weeks and eventually left Melbourne by a wonderful big steamship, the New Amsterdam. This troopship, there are only about 3000

06:30 air force people aboard it, but we went via South Africa and there we picked up a lot of UK [United Kingdom] servicemen and also some Polish WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] who'd – who were going to England and they were coming back to Africa. And by the time we got to Scotland the population of the ship was about 12,000.

07:00 I was in England, I went from – landed in Glasgow or just out of Glasgow and went by troop train down to Brighton in the UK. Was there for several weeks and they called for volunteers to go on to a – out on to a new twin engine aircraft that was in the Middle East. And I applied and was selected but we

07:30 got aboard the – there were 26 Australians selected, pilots – and we got out and we went via, we passed through the Middle East and didn't get off. 26 other RAF [Royal Air Force] – by this time I was attached to the RAF, I was an honorary Pom [Englishman]. And we as Australians went on to India and went down – went to – did a

08:00 a survival training and jungle training there and then went down to Coolah goldfields in southern India to a heavy conversion unit and became – to become second pilots on Liberators, which was far call from the twin engine, hot aircraft that we were going to be flying when we were going to the Middle East. The heavy conversion unit folded up and became

08:30 358 Squadron, an RAF Squadron, and we shifted from Coolah goldfields up into Bengal and commenced operations in Bengal in January 1945. It was a special duty squadron and up until 1970, in the '70s, I was prohibited by oaths of secrecy to talk at all about what we did. But our major activity was

09:00 to fly in on the full moon and drop in people behind the lines or drop in urgent supplies or medical equipment or whatever it was. And our trips took us variously, my longest time was 23 hours 50 in the air in one trip, and we travelled down to about 25 north of Singapore and at low level all the time. Was pretty hazardous

09:30 flying because when you got to the dropping zone you had to drop from 300 foot and it was at night-time and the moon and particularly in some of the rugged weather and certainly was always into some rugged country because the people down on the ground had to be hidden, and so we dropped our whatever we did down there. I – initially the operational tour

10:00 was to be 200 hours an operation of ours, but whilst I was – before I'd reached 200 hours they'd extended that to 300 hours. And by the time I finished my tour and at the end of the war I'd done something like 370-odd hours of training and something like 33 different operations varying from French Indochina, which is now

10:30 Vietnam, across to Malaysia. And the trips mainly if they were into Vietnam and over in French Indochina they were probably 16, 17 hours. If they were into Burma they were only about 8 hours and if they were into Malaysia they were above 20 hours. And I completed my tour of operations and I was awarded the

11:00 French decoration of Croix de Guerre and Silver Star, but strangely enough I was – went home by troop – the troopship we went out to India in was a ship called the El Qantara and the troopship we came home in from India to Fremantle was the Athlone Castle.

11:30 Lost the thread. Anyway when we got home I got married to my wife, who had been my friend and we used to communicate, and I got married and I was in and back and just discharged just not long after my 21st birthday. So I'd had a pretty very interesting experience. And that's a very potted version of what

12:00 it was all about. And then I found out that on the day I discharged, that I'd been commissioned and I was now flying officer. And I'd been commissioned back from May, the previous year, so they lost me somewhere along the cards and I was actually discharged a warrant officer uniform and I was in fact a flying officer. Even now, some of my records that I've got from

12:30 the Defence Department don't show all those details. When I put them all together they do. And I then went back to work in my apprenticeship before and I was awarded time in lieu and granted my trades and right, but I then joined the Commonwealth Public Service and in

13:00 the Department of Labor and National Service and went to Bunbury in WA and I was the District Employment Officer in Bunbury for about three years, and then was offered the transfer to Darwin, which I accepted, and we came to Darwin in 1957. Whilst in Darwin we went through tropical Cyclone Tracy and I lost all my war memorabilia, including my log book and

13:30 photographs and quite a lot of personal diary stuff, so a lot of it that I have is only what I have in my memory and that's disappearing pretty rapidly now. And I do – I have picked up a few photographs of – from mutual people who were with me out in any of it. We only had a few people in – from Australia and there were

14:00 only four from WA [Western Australia] in the group that I was with. One of those is still alive, a very good friend, he lives in Albany and in WA. And so we came to Darwin. And in the meantime I'd played Australian Rules football and when I came back to Perth I played for West Perth Football Club and

played in seven grand finals for them,

14:30 and three of which we won. And then, when I came to Darwin I was asked to coach a team of Aboriginal people who'd – were last on the list and we went premiers in that year and that was a pretty wonderful experience. I've still got some very good friends and I've been on and off

15:00 interested in football since I was a kid, even before I went into the services, and I've had a pretty good life in football. I played in Western Australian Stateside, I was in two state sides, it's a bit different to what the AFL [Australian Football League] is about now, but I think we'd have handled ourselves quite okay at the present time. And then I came back and I was

15:30 working again with the Department of Labor and National Service, but I was told I was only to be here for three years and was transferred to Melbourne, but immediately got an invitation to come back into the Northern Territory part of the government. And later on that was self government and I was a foundation member of the Northern Territory Public Service and I was one of the first CEOs [Chief Executive Officers] appointed in the

16:00 first three CEOs appointed in the Northern Territory Public Service when it happened. I had a varied experience. I was in Fisheries Wildlife, National Parks, Business Management, Industrial Affairs, Correctional Services. The first time I ever went into

16:30 a jail was as Director of Correctional Services. And I had a very good experience with the governor and I've got a very huge number of friends up here, but I'm getting pretty ancient. In 1995 I contracted prostate cancer and was advised by the

17:00 specialist to have a operation, have my prostate and testicles out and I declined that and I'd been doing a bit of reading on alternate therapies and so I decided on an alternate therapy which included herbs and vitamins and you know what, and within a couple of years they couldn't find the cancer and that doctor, he's even been in touch with me

17:30 as late as this year again, and he refers people to me that he can't – that are in terminal engagement, and to the extent that one group wants me to go and talk to them some time this month. Or next month. So that – and that's become quite an interest in me. But I had to have a knee replacement in 1995 too.

18:00 And I've had further back and knee problems and as recently as this year I was in the Hollywood Hospital in Perth to get a job done on my back and I asked them to look at my knee and in so doing I finished up with [Golden] staph infection in the knee and flat on me back for three months. And anyway I'm recovering slowly from that. And I have my 79th birthday in – on the 7th of February

18:30 and so I've had a fair bit of interest in life. And we've married – got four daughters and 11 grandchildren and eight of those grandchildren are adults, but three of them are from my fourth daughter who came along about 19 years after the third one – they're under six and they're very interesting.

19:00 And they've all lived in Darwin up until now, but in the last six months the two eldest daughters and their husbands, one's moved to northern New South Wales and the other one's moved to Queensland. The third one'd be also moving to Queensland this year so we'll have to see what we're going to do from then on. After the war I was also involved with the Air Training Corps –

19:30 that's changing the subject. And I was an instructor with the Air Training Corps in Fremantle in WA and helped to set it up and start if off in Darwin when I come back up to Darwin., but unfortunately none of that appears on the records that I've got from the Defence Department and unfortunately all my own personal records

20:00 on that were lost in the cyclone. That's about the stage, that's where we are at the present time, is that potted?

Tell us about growing up in your family.

In our family, yes well

20:30 I commenced life in Coolgardie and Currawong, and as a young bloke I can't remember a great deal about that. What I can remember, my father was the captain of the Coolgardie fire brigade and we were living at that time in the fire brigade building which had a big tower on it. And there

21:00 was a cyclone came through Coolgardie, it must have been – oh I must have been, you know, only very young at the time because me memories of there, a couple of things I can remember, I – that about this, about the steps in the buildings that had fallen down, so that's probably my first memory is a cyclone and I still haven't – I haven't bothered to go back to find out what exact year that was so that I could put

21:30 a time on it. Perhaps if I get time, I'll get to Coolgardie. I'll do that some day. And then we came to Perth and my eldest, as I say I was the fifth, my eldest sister was about 15 years, 16 years older than me and the next one was about 13 years older and so it was. And

22:00 but we came to Perth and we lived in Leederville and that's really where my memories start to take

effect. We lived in Leederville and there's a lake in Leederville called Mungas Lake which now has a freeway running right across it, but this lake was an extremely integral part of my growing up – I learnt to swim in it

22:30 and we used to catch freshwater carp and we'd – freshwater carp and take them to the Chinese. Had Chinese gardens there and we'd give them the carp and they'd give us fresh vegetables and fresh fruit. So that was just a smattering of a memory. But as a kid we had a pretty good life. My – the brother that was older than me, he was always a little bit sick

23:00 and he was sent off back up to Kalgoorlie for a while because of his asthmatic complaints. He was in the air force as an observer and he was killed in action over Sardinia he was – again he was an honorary Pom – he was attached to the RAF – and he was flying in Wellingtons out of North Africa and

23:30 he was brought down over Sardinia. And so we lost him, and that he was first reported missing at the time that I was going through my initial training. And it quite upset the family. They were sort of distraught with the thought of him being there. And my eldest brother was away in the navy and he'd been in the navy all over the in the Middle East

24:00 and the Mediterranean, and then there was me going in, and then I had a younger brother, Stephen, who was too young to join the services. And my parents were quite distraught because of the loss of my brother, and they were a bit reluctant then and a bit concerned that I'd join the air force and that they'd give permission for me finally to join when they could have, well have encouraged my employers to keep me out.

24:30 However so, but as kids at the primary school we played football. It was right next to Leederville oval where West Perth trained and as a kid I was over there at practice nights and I was a part of a club from the time that I was seven or eight. For a short period I had bronchial pneumonia and I was shot off

25:00 up to go and stay with me uncle and cousins up in Coolgardie, and I went up there and so… Shortly after, while I was up there, my cousin found then and I think it still is the biggest gold nugget ever found in West Australia called the 'Golden Eagle'. And that put them on easy street. They bought hotels and they got out of their work, but I was living with them up until six months

25:30 before they found that. And we're so poorly off that I used to wait for them to come home on their pushbikes and my uncle and my cousin, who was much older than me, and grab what crumbs they had left from their crib bags, you know, bread and jam sandwich or something like that., but that's a memory that sticks in my mind. Anyway I went to school at Leederville

26:00 and then to Perth Boys' School, where I studied and got my Junior Certificate. And left school, as I said, when I was 14 years of age. As a youngster we lived quite an adventurous life because being near Mungas Lake and these swamps as kids we probably got into some fairly

26:30 dangerous spots, but never really understood it at the time. And we were given fairly free rein because we didn't get into any trouble. There was no way we were going to be in trouble with police or with any of the things that kids can get into trouble with. We were purely out there with nature. My younger brother was too

27:00 young to join the services and he became a plumber. He was an apprentice plumber and during his apprenticeship he worked at Hollywood Military Hospital. And while he was there he did a lot of work in the vents and the ducts that were lined with asbestos and I put it down, to this day, to asbestos being the cause of his death. He died fairly young, in his 50s.

27:30 But he worked at Hollywood Hospital and while he was there he invented a few little things that helped. One he invented was a thing which has now been modernised and it's a pick up stick that you could just use with a trigger and pick things up from the ground. And another thing that he invented was a chair that could be raised and lowered and I've even got one from the repatriation department – Veterans' Affairs Department – myself, now.

28:00 And he invented the original ones of those. And then there was the youngest sister and she married also. She married an ex pilot out of the… But they lived in Adelaide and in Sydney and they live back in Adelaide now. And their son's a specialist doctor who was in the Gulf War and since then he was involved in several wars, and he's had dengue fever and

28:30 he's a specialist anaesthetist at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, and he's going along fairy well now. And apart from my eldest brother, who was in the navy, and my younger sister, the rest of them are deceased, my family. My father died when he was about 58 and my mother lived till she was about 80. We got married and I've had

29:00 four wonderful children and they've had a good life in Darwin and to the extent that they've been able to sell out and go and purchase pretty good homes in other places and retiring fairly comfortably and without too many worries. We have only two great grandchildren, two little girls and they're

29:30 quite wonderful. The oldest one of those is five now. We're very fortunate that we've had a very close family life all our lives and, up until recently, every Christmas the whole family was together. There might have been one or two that were absent, but generally they've all been together. And although we

don’t live in each others’ pockets we would

30:00 see each other once a week or once a fortnight.

Can I talk to you about growing up in Kalgoorlie, any memories of Kalgoorlie?

No. No the memories of growing up in Kalgoorlie are gone, there’s… I was interviewed, I’ve got an article in the paper there which gives a pretty good run through on that.

30:30 The next time I saw Kalgoorlie after I’d been up there, up at Coolgardie, when I was a little one, was when I went across in a troop train and that was in 1943, and so that was the next time I saw it. And the next time I saw it, I went up there to broadcast a football match

31:00 between the Southwest League and the Kalgoorlie Football League. And that was in 19.. That was just prior to coming to Darwin in 1957. So I don’t have any great memories, but I do have a lot of mutual friends who come from Kalgoorlie. And, because of my cousins, I have a pretty close relationship with me cousins. I’ve always had a pretty good contact

31:30 with Kalgoorlie.

What kind of work did your father do?

He was – well he was a camel driver, that was at one stage. He also worked on the water pipeline, the main pipeline from Perth to Kalgoorlie. And later on he became a welder and he did welding work on that pipeline and he did welding work when he came to Perth in the water supply. He was

32:00 sort of upgraded a bit from a labourer, but he was just working on the labouring level. And to bring up eight kids during the Depression was a pretty masterful operation. And he was a pretty wonderful bloke and he was a keen sport in his time. And a keen footballer. And, as I say, he was very involved with the volunteer fire brigades

32:30 and he was an officer in the central area of the fire brigades when he died. So he lived there for a long time; he was in that for a long time. And strangely enough, my eldest brother, who was in the navy, he became the fire brigade and he retired out of the fire brigades. But he’s 85 now so he’s a bit long in the tooth, but he was in the navy for six years.

33:00 **How did your family cope with the Depression?**

Wonderfully well. I know that one day I went to the unemployed soup kitchen to have some soup and I know that I got the lathering of a hiding from my father when I got home. But he was just above the basic wage, but we existed. It was a hard life, a very hard life, and as a family

33:30 that’s the way we grew up. And I never in my life opened my own pay packet, now even at 80 years of age. When I was a kid I used to take it straight home to Mum and then I went in the air force and of course the pay went into the… They could have drawn pay, but I used to –what do they call it? – sent home allotments, so that all went into the family.

34:00 And all the money that came into the house went into the family. When my brother… And that’s the way that we coped with it and it’s a pretty wonderful way to do it. And even then after I got married I was so used to not having pay that when I’d get paid, I’d got my pay envelope, I’d come home and give it to my wife. And that carried on and as I say, I’ve never had a pay packet to meself.

34:30 You’d think that’s a bit odd, but it’s a fact. And never thought anything about it – it’s only in recent years when I hear this – some of the things going on about money and payment doing this and doing the other. But all we ever got was pocket money and if I was… I remember I bought a bike. Or my bike was bought for me, but that was bought out of my pocket money.

35:00 And I used to do other things – I used to sell football programs. I’d go and pick up bottles and sell bottles and… But we lived a good healthy family life and it was a wonderful way to be brought up because it’s given me a philosophy that not many people have got at the present time. And what else did I do as a kid? I

35:30 used to get into a bit of strife. Hopping over the fence to the footy without paying and a few things like that, but never did anything that you could say was criminal or wrong. We didn’t seem to have the sort of, the problems that there are at the present time, with

36:00 people. I knew very few kids who got into trouble. It was rare. And I know if the old policeman saw me, I… The policeman saw me walking down the street, when he thought I shouldn’t have been there. Now the policeman, he’d come and give me a kick up the backside and say, “You’d better go home.” You know, but he’d know I wasn’t there, but just let me know that I had responsibility otherwise.

36:30 I don’t know, but we used to get around, not in gangs, but we played in junior football teams and cricket teams and we used to do an awful lot of bushwalking and exploring and bit of horse riding and that sort of thing. We used to walk to City Beach in Perth

37:00 from Leederville and think nothing of it, because there was only buses some Sundays. And you could go

out, but if you wanted to go out any other time you either had to ride the bike or if you didn't have a bike you walked. And we did that quite often. I don't know where to…

What about schooling?

Oh, schooling was a public school. I went to Leederville State School and

37:30 I was out of there by the time… I must have been very, very young because I'd finished what was normally the full school course before I was 14. And to go on from there would have been to go to the upper school, to do matriculation and that sort of thing. So I

38:00 was… And I know I was the youngest in the class at school, but again, I enjoyed that. I didn't have much trouble in handling things at school. I don't remember wearing shoes to school and I didn't start wearing shoes to school until I went to high school, which was Perth Boys', and that was about – it was a ride in the tram, a penny ride in the tram, but – or about a

38:30 three and a half mile walk if I had to walk. And that was a very interesting endeavour because I suddenly found as a little bloke, I was in the high school with all the big fellas and… But met some wonderful people and some wonderful teachers that some of whom I had as friends right up until they passed away. But schooling was…

39:00 We were very keen on schooling, you know, it was no chore. It was something you wanted to do and something you strived to be successful at. And I was pleased. I was a reasonable scholar and always passed my examinations, I would have loved to have gone to university, but we could never have afforded that. And I could never have afforded to go to one of the public, one of the

39:30 private schools to do my matriculation. I had to go to work. Even my elder brother had to. He was a brilliant scholar, but he had to leave school at 14 and go on a milk round purely to bring money into the house. And so, you know, he suffered because of that. And the only one that really got any education right the way through was my younger sister and she was, this was sort of

40:00 during the war, and it was after we'd all sort of moved out of the place.

Tape 2

00:31 **So we were talking about your schooling. What were your plans after leaving school?**

My plans after leaving school? Well what I wanted to… What my parents wanted me to get was to get an apprenticeship to get into a good trade because there was no way that I could go on to higher

01:00 education into university. And so I started work, mainly to bring in income, as a office boy. And actually I worked where 6AS music studio was, radio studio was, but I was only there for about six months and I managed to get an apprenticeship appointment which I was after. So as an apprentice fitter.

01:30 And it was very interesting at the… It was a very interesting time of the century really, because it was at that time that the water supply and sewerage areas of Perth were rehashed or re-looked at because of the war situation and because of the potential

02:00 for air raids in the area. And so it was extremely important and I was really encouraged because I did work on steam engines which – coal steam engines which had gone out of date and where the pumps are driven by electricity – and we bought these old steam engines back into being and converted them from coal

02:30 burning to oil burning. And that was for a young bloke, for an apprentice, it was quite an experience and I don't suppose any other apprentices or many other apprentices got that sort of training. So I was there for a couple of years until I was 18, until I turned 18. It was shortly after I was 18 that I was in the air force.

Well tell me about some of the work

03:00 **that you were doing on the conversion of these steam…?**

Oh well, I worked with the old, the engineer that was redesigning the engines so they could be fed by oil burners rather than by coal. And he did the designing right from grassroots. And in the meantime was also

03:30 had to replace the water tubes and replace the whole of the heating system because it was a different style altogether and the boilers had been out of action for probably for 20 or 30 years. And there was a fair bit of danger in it, initially, bringing them

04:00 back on stream, but eventually, it became… But I learnt so much and I learnt initially to do some welding, which I'd never planned to and never thought I would be doing. I learned to design water flow situations and to design them and put them…put

04:30 drawings and do drawings of various things. I learned to manufacture from the very grassroots, from basics – some tools and things that had to be used. And it was a tremendous experience for me, something that an apprentice in his normal situation wouldn't have got. But I was only there for, I can't even remember exactly how long, but I was only probably there for

05:00 three years. It wouldn't have been much longer than that before I went into the air force.

Well, describe what these boilers looked like.

The boilers. No, I can't. Well they were a fairly huge steel

05:30 tanks that were fed by a series of tubes, and the tubes run from one boiler down to another, and as the water'd get heated the steam'd get heated. It'd go up and then it'd be picked up by there on to a steam engine and that was, I'd like to be able to explain that, but I can't. But the steam would then go into the steam engine and it worked on the same principle as the steam engines that drove the locomotives, but on a much bigger scale and

06:00 working at a much slower rate. And it's difficult to… It's too difficult for me to explain it in words, I don't know how to pick up the words, I'm not that good and –

What sort of an environment were you working in? Where were these boilers located?

The main boilers were where I was at the water supply office. That's where the big the major bores were that used to

06:30 feed the water supply for Perth. And they were brought back into operation, the bores. They closed the bores down when they built Canning Dam and built a couple of the dams up in the hills, but the bores were brought back into operation. So the whole water system of Perth was affected because we changed from stream water to bore water and that

07:00 it had a double effect having to bring them back into action. It meant that, you know, in bombing raids no pipelines…pipelines wouldn't get blown out and later on, or simultaneously to that, I worked on a new pipeline connecting Mundaring Weir, which is one of the weirs in Perth, to Canning Dam

07:30 as an emergency operation. And we built this through the hills and put in small pumping stations, and that was another experience that was quite unique. And even apprentices before me or apprentices after me wouldn't have got that experience because it didn't happen and it didn't happen again.

And how does bore water have to be treated …?

08:00 It really only had to be aerated. Yeah, it was put up into a huge tank and with sort of like a sprinkler system and they'd aerate it and that's how the bore water was, but it had a different taste entirely it was quite noticeable. And it wasn't very popular, but it was not particularly after people who'd had stream water, but it was accepted, and it had to be.

08:30 **And when you had to work on putting in this waterline between the dam and the…**

Well, mainly had to work on putting in the pumping stations and connecting up pumps – putting in pumps, connecting up pumps doing the electrical work for the wiring of them and yeah, that's what it was. And they I think there were about four pumps that had to be put in because of the difference in gradients that there were for the water.

09:00 But again, I'd moved out of it by the time… Before it was even completed I was out of it and in the air force.

And what sort of people were in charge of you? Who was teaching you?

In the water supply? Tradesmen, people who had served their apprenticeship and who were tradesmen. And they might have been tradesmen electrical

09:30 fitters, they might have been tradesmen fitters, or they might have been tradesmen boilermakers, but there were tradesmen of some sort. And each had his specialty, but in addition to having their specialties they were all fairly capable of working well beyond their own specific little area of expertise.

And tell me about when you heard the news that war had been declared.

10:00 When war had been declared? It was quite a shock as an apprentice and I can remember [Australian Prime Minister Robert] Menzies saying that something's happened in Europe and as a result of this Great Britain are at war and

10:30 as a result of that Australia is also at war. So that happened, then later on I can remember the attack on Pearl Harbor. I was working out at…putting in a pump out at the Wellful munition works, which was being set up for the war effort. And while I was there I first heard of the Pearl Harbor

11:00 bombing by the Japanese, and it was probably then that we really realised that the war was close to home. And we in the community, ourselves, we… You drove around with the headlights of your car – I didn't have a car – but headlights of the car were hooded and it was only a little thin… And you kept

your blinds down in your house.

11:30 You darkened your windows. At night-time there wasn't a glimmer of light. Whereas nowadays you see neon signs and that, they ceased to exist. And after nightfall it was dark. And even if you took a torch out, you had to have your torch shaded so that it'd only shine on the ground.

12:00 It was a part of the civil defence in the event of air raids. It was probably a bit overdone in the early stages, but it was better to be overdone than underdone in a case like that. And fortunately the… I mean they did get bombing raids down as far as Broome and even further south than that in the west coast. So it could well have been down into Perth.

12:30 But there… And also, petrol was in short supply and a lot of vehicles were changed over to gas with gas producers. They burnt charcoal and produced a gas and the cars operated off those. That was these big gas tanks on the side of the…on the running board of the…cause in those days cars used to have running boards.

13:00 You'd put your foot on the board to get in and not like the present time where you… So normally the gas producer tank was put on just ahead of the front door on the running board, and from that... And because petrol was rationed, food was rationed, butter was rationed, tea was rationed. And it was even more so when I got to England.

13:30 I found that they suffered it much more than we did, but you knew there was a war on because of the blackouts. You had blackouts all the time, even when you went into somebody's house, the light behind the door, when you opened the door, would be shaded. So that you couldn't see out.

14:00 This is a fact and this is your Australia and mine. I'm talking about Perth because that's the place I knew. And because then I saw it in the real when I got to England and there I saw the real blackouts and I saw the what the people in London had to put up with on the air raids there – most amazing people.

14:30 But particularly down the East End [of London] where the bombing hit, the place was just in ruins and people'd be living in the ruins and people'd be living down

15:00 underground in the railway stations. But there the blackout was on all the time. And then you'd hear the whistle of the bombs and I was in London at the time when the first – what did they call them? The buzz bombs, the first of those came and saw some other, I went to Coventry to see where the way that had been absolutely flattened and

15:30 but what amazed me was the people. Anyway.

Did you see much troop movement in Perth when the war started?

In Perth? Oh yes. Yes there was, oh gosh, yeah there was you know, because there were quite a few contingents of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] had gone away and

16:00 they'd come through Fremantle in troopships and they'd gone from there up until… Up into the Middle East. And the navy ships were in and out all the time and then… But the only operational aircraft we had operating from there were the Catalinas, flying boats, were doing – and other

16:30 sea patrols were working out of there. But the Catalina flying boats used to fly as far away as Christmas Island and Cocos Island and they were operating off the Swan River. So that's how near we were to the... I almost flew back to Perth from India at one stage when we were doing some operations down in Malaya.

17:00 And you knew the war was on and with the... even beer was rationed. You know, I know my mother and my father used to go down and she used to line up to get a bottle of beer for me father.

And would you watch the Catalinas?

Oh we watched, oh yeah. I used to go and watch them, but they were mainly Americans

17:30 they were flying in the Catalinas because, strangely enough, later on when I went into operations I went in on Liberators [bombers], and Liberators and Catalinas were built by the same people and there were many of their features, although one was a flying boat and one was a four engine bomber, many of the features were the same or similar.

18:00 **In what sort of way are they similar?**

Not to look at, their engines and their controls and their automatic pilot and their gun turrets and their armament, but in no way were they similar to... well the gun turrets were similar to look at, but they were different sort of aeroplane altogether.

18:30 And at that stage there was only one, I think there was only one Australian Catalina squadron operating, but this was an American squadron operating, or Americans operating out of Crawley Bay.

And what were the Catalinas like to watch when they...?

Oh beautiful, they're a very slow, graceful plane and I said, I was in the air for 23 hours, 40 minutes

19:00 but they would stay longer and they'd stay up for 30 hours, the Catalina, they'd just plug away. They weren't high performance engines and they weren't high performance engines on the Liberator. They were exactly the same engine, they'd just keep... used to keep turning. And yes and there were a few fighter airplanes. There was a fighter airplane training base at Dunreath,

19:30 it's actually it's where Perth Airport is at the moment. I landed an aircraft there, brought down from Geraldton and just prior, shortly before I got my wings and they were flying little Boomerangs [Australian built fighters] were... single engine Boomerangs were being doing flying training out of Dunreath as it was called. And that's now Perth Airport.

20:00 So I landed at Perth Airport before it was, but that was with an old Avro Anson. Changed the subject a bit, didn't it?

When you used to watch the Catalinas, did you have any interest in flying at the time?

Yeah. I don't suppose it was ever further from my mind because when I joined the services I wanted to join the navy, and in fact I did join the

20:30 navy but was Manpowered out. I was in essential services and employers pulled me out. So I'd even got my uniform. And I was also, you could join the navy at 17. You couldn't join the air force at 17. So then I tried to do the same with the army and the same thing happened, but and then I... the air force I just... Soon as I turned 18 I passed the examination, the selection test, and I went along

21:00 to a pick up where they used to start a new course every month and people that had... would have done their preliminary training and all that and probably been in the air force for six months or so, they'd all turn up. And I was told that there always was one or two no-shows, and if I got along there and because I'd passed I could well get in, and that's happened.

21:30 And that's how I jumped the gun. And I was a pilot within nine months and the youngest on the course because you just couldn't get there any quicker than that. I went from militia training straight to elementary training on Tiger Moths straight to flying on the... without a break between the courses, and I was lucky to get a break. Yeah, so, but

22:00 when I started, when I got an interest, I never even dreamed that I'd be selected, you know, be able to be selected to be a pilot. Nothing was further from my mind that I was to be a pilot. It didn't... it just didn't gel; it wasn't possible. Even though my brother was a bomb aimer I probably thought, "If he couldn't be a pilot, well nobody could be." And he was pretty good,

22:30 but anyway.

What was your interest in the navy?

I don't know. Well I think it was probably because my elder brother was in it, but he'd been in it since the start of the war. And I was more familiar with it, probably. Because on occasions that he'd come in or he was on the Adelaide or a few other boats that called into Fremantle I fortunately was able to go up and go aboard

23:00 one of the ships, and that was one of the interests. But I think the main interest was to get into the services, you know, and I thought that because the navy took people at 17 years of age it was easy to get there than wait for 18 to be in the army or the air force.

How did you feel when you discovered that you were Manpowered out? [exempted from military service for essential work reasons]

I knew I was. I knew I was

23:30 before I put... My father worked at the water supply and he went to work and he was talking to some other blokes and say, "Jack's gone down and join the navy." And one of them's talked to someone who's talked to one of the bosses and then they said, "Well that's no good, we haven't got any apprentice fitters, we've got nobody coming on. We've got to have these people." And so they

24:00 put the stopper on and that's how. So when I went in the air force I told them I was a labourer and I didn't tell them what I was. So an unemployed labourer I said I was, yeah. And you shouldn't be because you shouldn't have even been unemployed in those days.

Were you disappointed to not be in the navy?

Yeah I was, because… But in the long term I was happy in what did happen, but at the time it was a

24:30 bit of a kick in the tail.

Tell me in a bit more detail about this examination that you did for the air force.

Well it was fairly... Well, first of all there was a physical examination and I was pretty physically fit. And one of the things you had to do was to blow up a height of mercury and hold it... hold your breath and

hold that at a certain height for a certain period. I couldn't tell you how long. That was

25:00 one of the... But that was the one that most failed. Actually that's the one my older brother who joined the navy failed on – that's why he didn't get in the air force. And that's where quite a number of people didn't pass that. It's only a physical one. And then there are a series of written questions, something about meteorology and engines,

25:30 but nothing very highly technical. But it was just to see whether your brain coped with those sorts of things. And they were the tests and once you were accepted as fit for the service, well then you went in the ring to see if you got selected. And as I say, it could be selected the way I did was to be along to fill in the spot of a bloke that didn't turn up who

26:00 must have been sick or something, you know, the reason they didn't turn up to start the course was because they... Something happened. They might have had an accident or sick or something like that and they...

Who told you about this?

The chappie that told me about it was a fellow who was in the air force who worked in the recruitment area who was one of our members of our football club, and that's how he

26:30 he put it to me. So it was him that told me and because it was only on about the Thursday that I did my exam that he told me and the intake took place on the Saturday morning and I was in the air force on the Saturday morning. And I was the only one in civilians going on the course. Everybody was already in the air force and they'd been accepted and done their rookie training. And I was

27:00 the only one in civilian clothes and issued with my uniform then when I went into the air force. It made it a bit tough the early parts to try and do my rookie training at the same time as I was doing the other course because they'd also had all my medical things... like all my (UNCLEAR – kneels?) and the things that associated that, but the others had all gone through even the dental

27:30 training. They give you a thorough dental check – it was a pretty good check too. And fortunately I knew the dentist – he was a bloke who was an old chap from... a friend of an old friend of mine. So that's how I knew.

We were talking about

28:00 **you having to do your rookie training on top of your other training, what sort of things had you missed in rookie training?**

Discipline. For instance the first day I got there and was... we're put on parade and I pulled out me tobacco and rolled a cigarette. The result was that the next day I ran with the rifle at the high port from Clontarf over to

28:30 Canning Bridge. I don't know whether you know where that is, but it's a long, long way. And the chappie who was in charge of the drill part of our rookie training was a wrestler, a Canadian wrestler, and he paid tote [came down hard] on me, first of all for smoking, but secondly for thinking I could do that on parade. I didn't ever do it again, you know. And so

29:00 but there were things like that I... you know, all the elementary things that you learn when you go in, even where you put your knife and fork in the... when you go for a meal and how to make your, we used to have straw palliasses to make your bed up. How to make a bed – I couldn't make a bed. Things that you wouldn't think would be... But things I just didn't have any idea and

29:30 I failed every at all the way along the line, but I learnt quickly and I was as good as the next after a fortnight, but also my arms were shot full of needles and vaccinations and those sorts of things, which sometimes didn't help me when I was trying to do some of the theory studies and, but it

30:00 didn't do me any harm so I passed through there all right and I was successfully selected as a pilot. Because the thing that I feared most is that I might have been selected as an air gunner. They have a selection panel there and everybody's preference always is a pilot and then a navigator, and probably last one down the list is an air gunner. And I was a bit

30:30 concerned, but... and I was concerned because I had this relatively short built-in period that I wouldn't be selected as a pilot, but I was, and that was quite refreshing because actually it taught me quite a lot, the fact that I went through that situation and none of the others had to – they'd all done it in the normal course of events.

31:00 And it just made me one out, a bit different from the rest of them.

Did other people help you with...?

Oh yes, oh yeah, I... everybody... of course they helped themselves – they had to get their own thing out of the way – but they didn't mind helping me. It was a... The course was

31:30 the maths and physics and things like that were directed at about the level that I'd reached at school

too. They were third year high school and I wouldn't have liked to have been in it with much lesser education – it would have been really tough. Although there were people that did that and there were some, one or two blokes that were in their 30s that did it, you know, they were quite

32:00 amazing. And I had a very good friend who was in his 30s that did his training and did that and did it quite well. But there was a lot of study – you worked into the night as well as in the day. You had a... It was an awful lot of physical exercises and there was marching. I was the only one there that could march in step

32:30 because everybody else was out of step with me, but that's... That was a time, you know, a simple thing like that, learning to march and I was just one right out of the rest of the... I had two left feet and used to lead off with the wrong foot and... But it was all a part of the learning process and

33:00 you learned to pick things up very, very quickly. And it came in, in good stead later on, in other parts of the training. Because it was a fair step to go from being a little larrikin in the street, to go to be flying an aeroplane within three months and to get wings within six months and suddenly to find you've got to take responsibilities that you probably never dreamed you'd ever have to do. And

33:30 it was invaluable. And it was invaluable also that when I went to the squadron I was able to, even at 19 years of age, able to kick in around there with the people much older than me. There were a few others that were in their 20s and 21. As a matter of fact the first bloke that I flew as a second pilot to was only 22,

34:00 but most of them were later on in their life. And all those valuable experiences and I think I got a lot of that from the family from the fact that we were all... my mother used to encourage our education and our study and insist that we always did homework and that even if we didn't have it

34:30 anybody and she'd even go and inquire at the school to see how you were going to know what you needed to do. And that was pretty valuable. And the whole of the family life was valuable because we even enjoy it now, but as I say everything belonged to the family.

35:00 Even the bike that I bought that had to be shared with me younger brother or me younger sister and they were entitled to use it and it was a pretty good philosophy.

Did you find the discipline in the air force hard to get used to?

Not hard to get used to, well I did. Well I

35:30 went straight into this discipline and I'd never... I'd been used to being disciplined at home and disciplined in the workplace, but that was a laissez-faire sort of a discipline, but in the air force where it was, "Stand to attention," "Salute," and, "Make your bed this way," and, "Put your knife and fork that way," and, "Have a shave every day," "Have your..." I learned how to iron. You know, we had to iron our own shirts. And

36:00 cause the air force we wore a shirt and a tie. And had to keep your uniform trousers pressed and... So yes, that was difficult, but you learnt. And you learnt quickly because the alternative was that, you know, a mile or two with the rifle at the high port, wasn't all that much fun. Yeah, and

36:30 but I... it's wonderful, really is, the difference that it made in me. I would never have ever imagined that from the snotty-nosed kid I was at 17 that I could have been what I was at 19. You know, the acceptance of responsibility.

37:00 I often wonder now, when we talk about what a lot of teenagers and adolescents do, and I don't remember, I never was one. I never was a late teenager, anyway, I was... But I don't regret one iota of it.

Do you think that's the same for a lot of young men of your generation that they missed...?

I would think so, yeah. As certainly it was with the people that I know. And... there's one chap that I see sometimes now, he didn't go to India with us, he stayed in

37:30 England, but he... I see him now and you know, he's quite amazing, he finds... We talk about this and it's... It makes us sometimes a little critical, probably too critical of some of the younger people of today. Because, you know, it's all right saying, "Well

38:00 we would never have done that," but we probably would have done it if we'd have been in the same situation and hadn't had the bringing up. But to have to comply with the... it's not only the discipline in the services, it's the discipline of yourself and the character building part of it, you know, you had a

38:30 great regard for other people and you... And cause if you're flying an aeroplane everyone in the airplane's got a job to do, and if everybody doesn't do it, if one bloke somewhere, the engineer forgets to turn a petrol tank across or the tail gunner hasn't bothered to load his guns and you get into trouble, you

39:00 could be in strife. So everybody had to do things and you had to trust everybody to do it. And you didn't have to need to go along and check out these people, whether they'd see what they'd done. And this brought back all the things about, you know, keeping your shoes polished and all those little things like

that brought that into perspective. It was a

39:30 tremendous character building thing and you'd... you know, your mates were your mates, they just weren't friends, they... What everything they did was something that you were interested in as well.

40:00 And we had a lot of fun.

Tape 3

00:37 **You were about to talk about some of the fun you had in the initial training.**

Yeah, well we tried to make everything fun and

01:00 you worked probably a ten or twelve hour day in study and so you didn't get great deal of relief. But when you did, we had a lot of fun – we used to play sport and we'd... at Leederville we... when I was at Clontarf at initial training we had an athletics competition and

01:30 one of the chaps on 36 Course, that was the... I was on 38 Course... and one of the chaps on 36 Course was a fella named John Winter, who later won an Olympic gold medal as a high jumper for Australia at the London games. And I jumped second to him in the athletic championships that we had there. So

02:00 that's just a side point that, but you never knew who you were going to run up against. One of the blokes that was our drill instructor, was a fella named Bob Marshall who was the Australian snooker champion, and he taught us a little bit about snooker in the off period. And another fella that was on the ground staff there was a fella named Paddy Vauxhall

02:30 who was the lightweight champion of WA, boxer, Paddy. And so you ran into all sorts of people and you got to meet them and you realised that everybody's people. That it doesn't matter whether they wear a beard or don't wear a beard or what the score is or whether they're 18 or whether they're 80, they're all people and even the top-line champions

03:00 are people and they only think as people and they act as people. And again, it's a great path for your character building too, to realise this. And so at initial training, we worked very, very hard, but we also we enjoyed ourselves. And another fella and myself went and rebuilt a diesel motor in a boat that

03:30 belonged to the place on the river, and we rebuilt that and got that going for them because I had fitting experience and the other bloke was a motor mechanic experience. So those sorts of things were pretty good. But then once the initial training was over and once I'd been selected as a pilot it was a new ballgame. It was all going to be up to me to do

04:00 what I had to do. So we went to Cunderdin in WA, which was the elementary 9EFTS, the Elementary Flying Training School, on Tiger Moths. And it was there that we had to learn to fly. So you were up in the daylight, at daybreak every morning, and daybreak was pretty early sometimes in the morning. And

04:30 a part of your exercise was, if you weren't flying, you'd have to run out and get onto the wing tips of the aeroplanes so they could be taxied in and out because a Tiger Moth hasn't got any steering gear, it had a tray... a plate at the back that could give it rough steering, but you'd need to... And has no brakes, they don't have brakes, so on windy days, particularly, once a plane's landed and the

05:00 pilot's been able to bring it back to somewhere, a couple of the trainees'd be out on either wing span and they'd walk the plane into where it had to be. So that was a very telling experience and you learned to be a lot of teamwork there because you might be the pilot this day and you might be on the wing on the wingtips the next day. And you... and also the instructors were as varied in their

05:30 behaviour and their attitudes as you could possibly wish. Some were soft and gentle and some were pretty rough and tough and asked no quarter and gave no quarter, but between the lot of them it was a good experience because you had to deal with this. And I remember that the first time that I took off

06:00 solo. I'd done about six hours' flying and normally people started to solo from about four and a half hours up to ten, and I'd done about six and a half hours. And a pilot that I was with had a pretty thin bloomin' skin and the instructor and he landed near the... when we got over near the flights to take off and he hopped out,

06:30 he said, "Well I'm getting out of this bloody thing. You can go and kill yourself now." And, "Off you go." That's how he sent me off solo, but it was his method of geeing you up a bit, you know. He said, "You're not going to kill me any more. You go and kill yourself. Off you go." And so you get up there and to fly that first trip up on your own, it's

07:00 so exhilarating, you know. But it doesn't take long before you've mastered and once you've done one landing solo, there's no problem any more, you just go along with it. And you learn to fly very quickly after you go solo. And so then we went up and we had to learn aerobatics and slow rolls and spins and

stalls and those… Well spin you learnt as part of your

07:30 training before you went solo, but you learned aerobatics. I wasn't a polished aerobatic flier, I was able… I got around and to state a fact, it fitted in with all the landmarks, but it wasn't I wasn't as smooth as some pilots were. So that was our fighting, then we had long cross countries

08:00 to do and we flew the heads under the hood, and just flew on the instruments and learnt to fly that way. And then we had long cross countries and I flew quite a… two or three of these and that taught you a lot more. And the pilot that took me on the first cross country was a fellow that I later flew with on elementary... on service flying when we flew on

08:30 [Avro] Ansons. And so that was a very interesting and rugged couple of months, the elementary flying. Some people were scrubbed and didn't get through there. There were people scrubbed all the way through that didn't, some didn't get through initial training. Some didn't get through elementary flying training and they went back and either a ground crew duties or somewhere back in... train as air gunners.

09:00 Then we… Our next course that we went to Geraldton, for four months did our service flying training and there on Avro Ansons, and that was quite a unique experience. Once you learned to fly with two engines now instead of one, and flew an aeroplane that had brakes and… But it didn't have automatic lowering of the landing gear – you had to wind the landing gear down and it took about 200 turns to wind

09:30 your landing gear down. But they were a good aircraft to fly and you learnt night flying. Oh, we did night flying on Tiger Moths too, and that was another quite an experience because it didn't have lights and you flew by the lights on the runway and it was quite an experience. And then with the Ansons, we did

10:00 a lot of night flying with the Ansons, a lot of cross country work with the Ansons, teaching you to, you know, for the time when you weren't getting on the bigger fellas. And you learnt to fly very quickly. An Avro Anson was a pretty old plane, but it was probably one of the best. The Tiger Moths and the Avro Anson were probably two of the best aeroplanes that were ever built. And they trained thousands and thousands of people.

10:30 The Tiger Moths are still flying, people are still flying them. I don't know whether... Probably are some Ansons, I don't know. Anyway we did our first two months of service flying training and Avro Ansons and then after two months we went to the advance training, where you didn't have an instructor any more. You'd said goodbye to your instructor. But occasionally you'd get a staff pilot'd come up and accompany you, but mainly you did all the flying

11:00 on your own. And that was just prior to passing your wings. And you get pretty stiff examination then for your wings. And you got your wings and you graduated as a sergeant pilot. There were only four people got commissions off our course who graduated as pilot officers, the rest of us graduated as sergeants. And so

11:30 that all happened with me by November and I'd gone in at the very end of February, early March and so I was then a great big… At 18 years of age I was a sergeant pilot. And then we were told that we were going to Melbourne to embarkation depot and from where we would pick up a troopship and go somewhere.

12:00 **Tell us about the very first time you went up in a plane with an instructor.**

Yeah, oh it was a great experience… There was fear and trepidation, let me say that. Even to get into the seat and sit down and get hold of the controls and… But we did that before we went up the first time, but to go up and for the instructor to say, "Right." The first time you went up with an instructor, he taxied it away.

12:30 And then he'd say, "Right, you taxi it." So you'd taxi it. And you'd be rough as can be. And then he'd take you round and he'd have you taxi around the field and then he'd do a take off. He says, " Do a take off." And he said… He'd talk you through it whilst you were doing it and he'd say, "Put your hand on the control and put your other hand on your throttle and just don't hold them, but

13:00 just follow me through the exercise." So we did that and then come back. He brought me back and then put me through the same thing to bring me back to land. And then he did that twice probably and then he said, "Right now, you try it. You see how you go with a take off." He says, "I'll have my hands on the controls if necessary, but you take off." So I did the first take off and that was

13:30 quite an experience. And I didn't know how much the instructor helped me or if he helped me at all. All I knew is I got in the air and went up and flew around and did the circuits and did the things that I had to do. Went up did a couple of spins and come back and then he said, "Well, we'll try it landing." And so he did the same with landing with me as he did with take off. And well it was… In six hours

14:00 I'd learnt to take the aeroplane myself. Take off and I was a bit slower than some of the others, but some took up to ten hours and some just didn't qualify at all to solo. And those poor chaps, their hearts were broken. Some of them were strapping fellows that were you know, macho... really masculine

blokes and

14:30 then they couldn't fly. They just… their judgement, their eyesight judgement on landing just wasn't good. Because as you come into land you've got to get your eyesight focusing so that it sort of, it tells you how near you're coming and they can't handle it. And that's pretty sad. And one bloke almost committed suicide because he didn't do it, because he was going to be a

15:00 big gung-ho pilot. He was one of those really tough guys, you know, and he could do anything that… But he couldn't fly and it hurt him. But once you became able to fly yourself, the freedom and the power you had, being up there was quite something. It's indescribable.

15:30 It's a feeling of elation that it doesn't send you on a high, but it just… It's something, well it keeps you on a bit of a high all the time. And the first time you land one on your own, without the instructor in there, is quite remarkable. Even if you do make a bit of a bounce, you're not too worried about it. As long as it's not a controlled crash, it was quite good. No those sorts of feelings are

16:00 some things that I could have described then and I probably I should have and I should have written them down. If I had have, I would have lost them. So it didn't help. But it was a great feeling and it was a great feeling to do a long cross country. To leave the vicinity of the air field and go and find your way couple of hundred miles away and fly back again. And that was quite an experience, to be able to

16:30 navigate – cause we used to wear a sort of a map on our knee and we'd navigate on that. And fortunately though, where we were flying there were railway lines and roads and some of those you'd recognise and that helped you. But it was all part of navigation. And then when you had to do the navigation in the blind, they

17:00 pulled a hood over you in the cockpit and you had to fly by compass bearings and you still had the map and you had to fly. And the instructor was in the front and he'd tell you a few things and away you'd go. And that again, was quite an experience.

Describe that for us, you got a hood over your… How's the hood?

Oh, the hood. The hood was fitted

17:30 in the aircraft, in the cockpit and you just pulled it right over your head and you couldn't see out at all. And because the trainees flew in the back cockpit – that's in the main cockpit – the instructors flew in the forward cockpit which is actually the passenger's cockpit, but the trainees flew in the cockpit with all of the gear. The instructors didn't have all of the equipment in the front cockpit, but

18:00 they were so experienced they could have flown it anyway. But that was something that used to be recorded in your logbook: so much under the hood, so much out, flying. And of course, after you'd, some of our… Do you know much about Western Australia? Well one of the runs we used to do we used to go from

18:30 Cunderdin up to Quarading and down to Quarading and up to Wyalkatchem, and that was a triangular course and that was quite a substantial course. And then another one, we flew to Narrogin which was a long way, away, where we landed. You landed at this other 'drome and then took off and flew back. And that was the ultimate in your cross

19:00 country flying. But by the time you got to that you were ready to move onto the next one and that's when we went from there we went onto twin engine aircraft. We went from there we went to Geraldton on the twin engine aircraft. On the twin engine aircraft, everything moved a bit quicker because you'd already had your basic navigation and that sort of thing behind you, and your flying skills. But learning to fly with two engines and

19:30 a few other things you had to learn more. But you're more quickly on your own and you more quickly doing, and you didn't do so much aerobatic work with a… we didn't do any with the… except a few stall turns. You did nearly all cross country work, or navigation exercises and flying exercises. And they were, some of them were quite substantial you travelled, you know, well away from Geraldton to areas

20:00 that, you know, to take a while to get by car. But it was a part of the whole deal. But it was quite amazing how you came from flying a Tiger Moth in June, say, and be ready to fly big aircraft in November – it's a quick move. But well everybody does it so. It must be the way of doing it.

Tell us about learning, so

20:30 **your learning of some of the manoeuvres, like stall turns and loops and…?**

Well stall turn, you did a stall turn, you'd be flying in the Tiger Moth and you'd put your nose down to get a bit of speed and then you'd pull the thing up on its tail and not to vertical. But nearly to a vertical position and you'd wait there and just hang on the prop until your airspeed dropped off and just before

21:00 it reached the stall point, you give it hard left rudder and you'd flick it over and do a turn and you'd come down. Now, before you did that you had to learn to do spins. And to do a spin, you did exactly the same thing and you went up and you go hard left rudder and you held your left rudder on. And the plane

went around in a spin – quite eerie the first time that you ever did it. And

21:30 so. But once you learned and mastered the spin and to get out of it you levelled your rudders out and pushed the control column forward to get sufficient flying speed to fly again, and you'd come down and come out of your spin and fly out of it with the engine going. Now, with a stall turn, you did almost the same thing. You'd go up and you'd stall turn. But once you got down you'd straighten out straight away. A stall

22:00 turn meant you could do a 180 degree turn and be back flying. So that was… Now a spin. The loop. Loops were lovely to do. You'd fly along, increase your airspeed a bit, put your nose down – I can't recall the speeds now – but when you got to a certain speed you'd pull back and you'd force the control column right back into your stomach and you'd go up and over.

22:30 Sometimes you'd hang up top, and if you hung up there if you didn't have the stick back properly, because the Tiger Moth was gravity fed, the engine would cut out. The engine would stop turning and you'd come over and you'd have to go into a dive again to get the engine turning again and starting again. But that was quite good. A slow roll was different altogether, you'd fly and have your nose on the horizon, and just above the horizon

23:00 and then you would just roll the engine. Try and keep your nose up with your... Everything worked back to front – you worked your elevation with your... what you do on the otherwise, you do with your ailerons and your wings. When you do a roll you control with your rudders and you control your up and down with your overons, you know. So it's just different

23:30 because the things are in a different plane. Your aeroplane's in a different plane. But they were good. But there were some people that just couldn't handle the slow rolls. I only know of two blokes who got scrubbed from their wings because they couldn't do the aerobatics. But there were some that had found it very hard.

24:00 I had a mate who used to get extremely airsick every time he went up from the very first time that he went up and it took him about nine hours to solo. He used to have to come down and wash the aeroplane out every time that he'd been up and he still did it. And he went away and he was flying Lancasters at the finish. Yeah, he's a brave little bloke.

24:30 **How scary was it, doing some of these manoeuvres the first time?**

Oh, they were scary. But there was nothing as scary as some of the things that I struck later on. These were scary things that you knew what was at the other end and you knew that people got out of it and you'd... But it's a lot different to when you'd… Some of the things that we… The weather and the things that we went through when

25:00 you just didn't know. You didn't know whether you were going to come out of this bit or the next bit or get back. And even when you took off you'd... because you knew, your mates didn't come back and you just didn't know. They were, I think everybody was concerned. I mean it didn't stop you going and. But there was a fair bit of terror there and

25:30 if you'd just hold it together and say, "Well the longer I stay here the longer we're going to live." And that's the way you'd do it. But when you first did it, it scared you. But you knew that you'd be able to do it. But it was a bit different to that... The other was almost a terror. And some of the worst

26:00 parts of it were when you got into violent thunderstorms and violent cumulonimbus clouds and the airplane did all sorts of manoeuvres that you couldn't measure. You didn't know what it was doing, the dials would fall off... not the dials, the arrows'd all fall off your instruments, you didn't know whether you were doing sky rolls or what you were doing or what your airspeed was and sometimes your airspeed'd disappear off the

26:30 clock. And that was a… There were real worries then. Yeah.

So tell us about some of the instructors you had. What was their experience and what were they like?

Well, the first instructor I had was a... I was his first pupil, that was on Tiger Moths. And I later ran into him, again in Albany in WA. He was very nervous

27:00 himself, having me as a pupil, and he didn't, he wasn't authorised to send me off solo. He had to get one of the more credited instructors to do that. So when he thought I was ready to go solo he handed me over to this other bloke, who said to me, "All right go and kill yourself." Yeah and so that... There is a difference in the two blokes. But there were others that were quite

27:30 school teacherish, you know, that were very calm collected and explained everything as it went on. And I found it was the same with the Avro Ansons, too. I had a very good instructor. But he was a very hard instructor and he was quite critical of anything. He'd call me all of the names under the sun. But he certainly got me flying well. and others were very

28:00 very gentle. And it's the same as people are in the normal place in the world. I don't know what I would have been like as an instructor. I didn't ever want to be one. If I'd been told to be one, I'd have been

upset. And cause that was one of the things I could have been sent to after finishing training, would have been sent to be an instructor and I was glad I wasn't.

28:30 But some of them must put up with a lot. I mean I don't know how awkward I was as a pilot. But there were people that were worse than I was. And to be set up with them and, you know, you call them, you'd call them as dumb, pretty dumb. But they just couldn't understand.

29:00 However, most people got through their training.

Tell us about finishing up training yourself.

Finishing up the training. Yeah, well then we... One of the... A trip I had to do at the end of my training – I'd completed it – was to take somebody down to Pearce airstrip down out north of Perth. And fly them down there and then I

29:30 had to go into Dunreath airport, which is now Perth airport, and I took this bloke down to Pearce... Pearce was a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]... It was both a training school and a operational school. And then I dropped off the person I had to drop off there and then I had to take this other one over to Dunreath. And I took him over there and dropped him off and then flew back, and that was my last trip. But that was the first trip that I really

30:00 did that wasn't done as a part of my training. It was a sort of a regular exercise. I was very proud, pleased that I was selected to do that trip because most blokes'd liked to have been picked. And why I was picked, I don't know, to this day.

Tell us about that final test and then getting your wings.

Well the final test,

30:30 again, the fella that put me through my final test was my instructor at that stage and later on he was a pilot with MacRobertson-Miller Airlines. And he wanted me to join them. But he put me through the final test. But he pushed me so hard that there was no way in the world that I would ever fail that examination. If I was flying along and I dropped that wing and didn't correct it and bring it up straight away,

31:00 straight away he'd have me, you know. And he was very, very strict and very hard. If I was two or three revs low in my prop settings or something wrong in my engine settings, he'd have me. Or if I was flying at 6100 feet instead of 6000 feet, he'd have a piece of me. And when I took off, if I veered left or right he'd have a piece of me.

31:30 So I passed me final examination pretty well because he was sitting in the seat next to me and he was a very good instructor. And the point about it is that I was confident and I could do anything with that aircraft, and that wasn't bad, particularly in the fairly short time that I'd been a pilot. And fitted me well, he fitted me well when I went out to be

32:00 second pilot first of all on Liberators. Because see, we didn't do an operational training unit, we went straight onto the operational plane, which was also unusual.

So tell us how did you feel when you received your wings?

Oh, nine foot tall. Yeah, it's a..., you know, something that... Once I'd

32:30 been an aircrew it was a dream to get the wings, and to come out there and to get those pinned on was something right out of this world. And also because I was so bloody young, you know I was still only 18 and that was... just seemed beyond anybody's imagination that I could have got to this stage. But we did and as I... and actually, the crash mate that I had, we worked

33:00 in pairs and my instructor had two, one was me and one was the other. The other bloke was 35 years of age, my crash mate. He was an ex-aircraft fitter who'd remustered. And so it must have drove the instructor mad to have him on the one hand and me on the other hand. But we were very good mates, that bloke and I. And he looked after me, in other areas that..., you know, he was

33:30 17 years... nearly twice my age. And that's another thing I learned there, that I had to compete and be able to be with these people and it was a remarkable experience too. But I put all that down to my instructor. And after the war, he chased me up a few times to try and get me to go and fly with

34:00 MacRobertson- Miller and then later with WA Airlines and later Ansett [now defunct domestic airline]. But I didn't... it would have meant I would have had to leave Perth, and I'd have had to go and do some flying up out of Broome and out there early on, and I didn't want to leave. We already had two kiddies and I didn't want to do it. But we remained very good friends. He's since died, but we remained very good friends

34:30 up till then. There's still one instructor that I knew that is still pretty good mates with me. And so, I don't know, I was also invited later on to fly with TAA [Trans Australian Airlines] when they first set up, by they didn't take any more.

Tell us... Did you have a girlfriend at this stage?

I met... I used to go to school with my wife's sister

35:00 and I'd been to my wife's and I knew her brother. I'd been to my wife's place many, many times. We were sort of practically going together virtually when I... she was younger than I was. But we were sort of going together when I went away. We used to write and... yes we... I've known her since she was in primary school, you know, very junior primary school and knew her sister and her brother and

35:30 yes, so... and we only lived 200 yards away from one another so we... it was very easy. As I said, when I got back we decided we'd get married and even though I hadn't turned 21 and she was only 18, 19. But the parents, I knew her parents and she knew my parents and so it was a very easy convenient

36:00 and to me it was security. You know. No more sort of, flying around and keeping my head up in the air, getting my feet back on the ground. And so then I was back and started back, restarted me apprenticeship again until I gave that away.

So was she someone you thought about through your training?

36:30 Oh, yeah, we used to write. Oh, gosh, yeah. And I used to write to her from England and from India. And whilst I was in training, any time I was on leave, I'd get to see her. Actually there were three or four young fellas and three or four lasses and there were three of us married the girls that we went around with then. That was quite strange. Unfortunately the other two, the other four are dead.

37:00 But, so I don't suppose I give any thought to anything else. Any other means of doing it. And I think my wife probably thinks she should have. But then we had three kids fairly quickly and then we went 18 years before we had our

37:30 fourth girl and so there's quite a long spread. And as I say, next month we will have been married 58 years, so it's a fair whack of time. And it's no regrets. I mean, we've had plenty of hard times. Hasn't always been easy.

38:00 But I think that my service life equipped me well for getting married too. I'd learnt to accept responsibility. I'd learnt that, you know, that you just didn't keep going round sowing wild oats, that every... and I was ready

38:30 for it and even then, although I was only just 21.

Was it important to you, through training and later, to have a sweetheart back home?

I think so. Yeah. You always looked forward to getting mail. That was... and always the mail you got from there was... Tell you something different that you didn't hear from anybody else and yeah, it was pretty, and it was important to tell them to write and

39:00 tell them what you were doing, you know. Yeah, that was a... And, strangely, a mate of mine and his wife, just...who was with me, he lives in Albany... and only about ten months ago I was down there with him and we talked about this very thing. Yeah. And certainly it was good training in

39:30 that it taught you to be responsible and to accept responsibility and not run away from problems. You know, to face up to problems, that was wonderful. And that's been a part of my life ever since, and everything I've tackled I've been able to tackle with that viewpoint, and my life has been fairly... I had a very successful

40:00 employment in the Commonwealth Public Service, then later on in the Northern Territory Public Service. And I put most of that down to the fact that, well, my own family life and the... and to the service life.

Tape 4

00:36 **So you've just finished training, can you take me through what happened after you'd gotten your wings?**

Yes. We were mustered together in Perth at

01:00 5 Embarkation Depot and told that we'd be going across to the eastern states to pick up a... well some of the... a couple of the chappies off course, didn't go with us. Two of them went out as staff pilots, straight away; they didn't get appointed to overseas service. And we were told we'd be going across to the eastern states

01:30 to pick up a troopship. Which we did. We travelled across in cattle trucks, across the Nullarbor to Melbourne. And we were stationed at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and we were living up in the grandstands of the Melbourne Cricket Ground for about three weeks whilst we were there, and so I later

02:00 on played football on this ground.

What was that trip like across the Nullarbor?

Tremendously interesting. But being young we were able to take it, I mean we were just sleeping on straw mattresses in cattle trucks and we stopped... And on a few occasions, aboriginals that stayed where the engine, where the train stopped, aboriginals called in to get some tea

02:30 and sugar. And it was very interesting to talk to those. Particularly my later experience with aboriginals. It was a real eye opener for me then.

What sort of things would you talk to them about?

Talked about how they lived, about the weather, about the loneliness of the Nullarbor Plain, the fact that they were sparsely spread across the Nullarbor Plain

03:00 and... I was also a bit interested because my old father had taken camels across there on the Nullarbor Plain and I was interested to find out whether they'd ever seen any camels come across then. They had, some of them. Yeah, so although they mightn't have been, probably weren't the same ones. But that interested me because it gave me another insight into my father being able to... camels into that...

03:30 because it's quite desert country, the Nullarbor and it was... the summer time it was December that... December, January that this occurred and so it was pretty hot. So that was an experience. And we also used to, when we'd get out, we'd have a play with a

04:00 football or do something that would keep us occupied because you didn't get much exercise in a cattle truck. And of course, some of the officers they had carriages – there was one passenger carriage on the train and they had that. But it was quite comf... And then when we got across to South

04:30 Australia we were shipped down to Wayville Showgrounds, and we were put off there for about I suppose a week, we were on the Wayville Showgrounds, until finally we'd gone back on another troop train through to Melbourne. But that one we had set up seats through to Melbourne and we were quite posh.

And how were you feeling about where you were going, what you were

05:00 **heading into?**

Well the thing that we were elated with was that we were going to be involved in the war, you know that we... that we did... we were appointed to go overseas, and that was what we were looking for most of all. We weren't really sure where we were going. There was talk even of going up to...

05:30 of there being another attack on New Guinea... on Singapore, and us going in as a wave in to attack Singapore. That was one of the stories that was going round. So we really didn't know until we went from Melbourne up to... Melbourne to the... the New Amsterdam came in and we went on that. That was about a 30,000 ton – it was a real luxury liner. And there were only three or four thousand of us on it

06:00 and this was quite fantastic. And we were served our meals in the dining room by the chefs on the... Yeah it was real top line service. This is until we got to South Africa.

Tell me what life was like living in the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Oh, it was as tremendously interesting, historically to me it was... it meant a lot. And particularly because I was also was a keen

06:30 follower of football and cricket. And I was able to go and visit the Melbourne Cricket Club's rooms and see the photos of the Test teams and other things. And I was able to go into the Melbourne Football Club rooms, and these are kept locked normally... and to see the photographs and the things in there, so that was very interesting. And also, we went out into... we didn't kick any footballs around there,

07:00 but we went and we trained on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Little did I know that I'd ever be playing football there in later in the piece. But we were up in the high stands, up in the concrete stands. And I remember, four of us broke camp one night, we went back... and over the end of the camp on ropes to get out. This was about two days before we were to go away. And we wanted to go and have a bit of a look around Melbourne. But we didn't

07:30 get much time in Melbourne itself. They kept us fairly close. However, we got out and enjoyed ourselves for a couple of days, or a day, and then came back and reported to the front counter and got a kick in the tail for being away. But nothing, no charges were ever laid. And so then we went back there... I can't remember exactly how long we were there, that's where all my information's gone.

08:00 But from there we... the New Amsterdam was out in Port Melbourne, out in the harbour, and we went out onto that and left from Port Melbourne harbour.

Tell me a little bit more about where you slept in the cricket ground.

Up in the grandstands. If you look at the Test matches, and you look at the stands, well the seats were taken out and the long concrete rows, we just had our

08:30 straw palliasse and we slept on the concrete up there. And it was quite, I suppose it was quite comfortable because we weren't used to anything much better than that. Coming across in the cattle trucks hadn't been any joy so it was... And it was wonderful to wake up there in the morning and look down across the ground. And then you could see out through the back of the stand, you could see out over

09:00 various parts of Melbourne. I tried to think back, I know that we knew where we would... which part of the stand we were in. But I had it written down. But it's all gone, unfortunately, otherwise I'd have been able to go back and find it. But nevertheless.

How did they feed you?

Oh, the air force are pretty good in their catering area. They had

09:30 mobile kitchens. And we didn't sit down around the table there, you'd go and get your meal and go and sit on the concrete and have it. But that's how they'd feed you. But I tell you what, the food was always good, it was always of high standard and if possible, blokes didn't stay there for... if they could get out for any reason, they'd go out into town and…

10:00 But they were always there at breakfast time. And nearly always at the evening meal time. Yeah.

And how did they keep you busy during each day?

Oh, mainly with athletics and sport and marching and... Oh, you marched till it ran out of your ears really, it was just a part of the discipline. And you got used to it – you didn't worry – and we'd march across the ground, Melbourne Cricket Ground and do all

10:30 sorts of exercises. Oh, yeah, we were kept physically busy and physically doing gymnastic work and that sort of thing.

Tell me a bit more about how you broke your camp and ducked out.

Oh, well, we'd had a bit of leave earlier in the piece. But this was getting towards the end. And I think we wanted to see somebody, I don't know whether it was girls or what it was. But we wanted to get out

11:00 and do... I can't remember there was three, four, five or how many there were. But we'd worked out that if we went over to a certain part of the stand and got right down to the basics at the back we could get over. If we got a rope over, we could drop to the ground. We could get out. And we didn't care about coming back. We knew that they wouldn't kick us out. But they'd have us back, even if it did cost us, you know, some disciplinary... But that's how we did it. But

11:30 we weren't the first. Somebody else had tried it out. And we got out. You gathered up all the information as you went along and you got to understand more about it. And that's how it was. But then it was a fair walk from there into Melbourne, or you'd catch the tram, because the trams are pretty wonderful there. But nobody was keen on breaking away.

12:00 We were all pretty keen to get on that boat and so you didn't want to get ourselves into too much trouble. And not enough trouble anyhow to stop us from going on board the boat. So we didn't. I know there are other things there, but I can't recall them.

When you got onto the boat, who else was on the boat with you?

12:30 Well, there were only the embarkation crew from the air force and with supervisors and the crew of the boat. And us... all us... you know, the officers and... we had some fairly senior officers going on board and I think there was a wing commander and a few squadron leaders and people like that, because they were

13:00 in charge of the operation. And they sort of set things up for us early in the piece. And there was a group captain, I think, who was in charge of the whole troopship altogether and he was in charge. I've got a book in there, (UNCLEAR) Ferry Cruisers, which is written, issued whilst

13:30 we were on the boat. But...

What was the book about?

The book was just a book about the boat. The things that happened with the... It was put together by people who were travelling. I'll get it in the next break. And most of the discipline and that was conducted within our own ranks, you know, we had

14:00 lots of officers and people that set the disciplinary rules and called raids and did those sorts of things and run any courses that had to be run. We had to do a few little education courses. I can't to this day tell you what they were about.

Whereabouts were you sleeping on the boat?

In hammocks. We slept in hammocks. Although some

14:30 some people... No, initially we didn't sleep in hammocks, initially we slept in a cabin. But in a hammock in the cabin. There were two or three were able to get bunks and then two or three had to sling in a hammock. Then later on, at the end rush of the British servicemen in Africa, and the Polish people,

15:00 then the people were just strung from hammocks and on the boat deck, you know, and they slept where and how they could. But that was a very... actually it was pretty good because we were treated as... for the first part of the trip from Melbourne to Africa as being passengers on a cruise liner. And the crew

15:30 of the New Amsterdam were people who were used to dealing with tourist passengers and they weren't used to dealing with... This is only the second trip of it, as a troopship. And the way we were dished up meals there was quite out of this world. The cooking was done by these people. It changed when we got to Africa.

16:00 **What sort of food did they give you?**

Oh, the best. The best, I can only say, the best. It was all top shelf stuff, you know. But I couldn't say. I tell you what, it satisfied me and I was a pretty hungry man at the time. Yes. No that was excellent, I found it was good.

16:30 **How did you feel to be leaving Australia?**

Oh, that was a wrench. You know, we... because we saw... got a couple more views of Australia as we went around through the Bay of... the Gulf. What do you call the gulf? Bass Strait... not Bass Strait, the Great Australian Bight. You know.

17:00 And we saw occasional bits of land. But it was, when we saw Cape Leeuwin , the lighthouse at Leeuwin, that was the last we saw of it and that was quite a touch, and then we saw nothing then until we got to Africa.

And what was it like being at sea?

It was pretty wonderful. I was a bit concerned that I'd get seasick. But even this little mate of mine who used to get airsick, didn't get seasick

17:30 on these boats. But later on up in the Atlantic in the big seas that they have up there, quite a few people got seasick. But it was wonderful at sea and to look out every day and all through the day and not see anything but the sea on the horizon for as far away as you looked. And we were travelling at a good 30 knots. We didn't travel in convoy. We were travelling too fast to travel in convoy,

18:00 and that was a worry because although we were travelling too fast, they said, for submarines to be able to pick us up because there was a worry. We were picked up by a couple of warships just out of Africa and escorted into there. But they had to slow down. And we were shadow boxed [escorted] from those again when we came out of Africa.

And you mentioned that there were a few classes and things that you would do on the ship,

18:30 **but what else would you do on a typical day on the boat?**

Oh, I learnt to play bridge. Yeah bridge was quite a common thing and you played bridge competitions, so that kept us going. And other players played 500 and all sorts of card games. We played deck quoits and a few other deck games

19:00 that they play on ship. I did an awful lot of walking. I used to do laps and laps of the ship to keep fit. And what else? I guess that's all. There'd be talks'd go on.

19:30 Somebody'd give a talk about something and it would be interesting – it might be about fishing; it might be about cattle raising. But it was always an interesting topic.

Was there any celebration when you crossed the equator?

Oh, there, that was later, yes, Oh, yes. Yeah the celebration when

20:00 we crossed the equator, that was going up the Atlantic. See we went across south and we didn't cross the equator until after we left Africa, yes, and that was quite a celebration. We were up actually just east of... west of Freetown in Africa and, oh, virtually east of Panama, when we crossed the equator

20:30 in... I think the equator runs just south of Panama and... near Panama, in... North and South America, yeah. And it certainly runs somewhere near Freetown in South Africa. But yeah, there was quite a celebration there and they had old King Neptune there and quite a few people sitting up on greasy poles and pushing other people into the water and yeah,

21:00 that was quite an experience and something that I hadn't experienced before. I experienced again twice, though, with... again with...

Tell me about coming into Africa, the places that you went.

Well we came into Durban in Africa and that was quite interesting because we had no idea we were going. We thought we were going to go to America when we left

21:30 Melbourne. But we didn't know until we found we'd been heading west for two days that we weren't going to America. So when we went into Durban, we were fortunate when we went into Durban, there was an Australian warship in there, and I can't think of the name of it. But I had a mate on it, who I later on saw in Durban. And we were taken off the boat there for a fortnight and set out to

22:00 a camp out in the outskirts of Durban whilst they got the ship ready to take on this big contingent of people that were going to rehash everything for the trip up the Atlantic. And I guess the first thing I noticed in Durban was the apartheid [white supremacist racial policy], was the quite clear

22:30 race discrimination. You know, blacks only and it... To come from Australia it was a really strange feeling, because, to see this. And even the toilets, you'd go to the toilets and... on the... in the port, they were "blacks only" and "whites only" and even places were you stand and wait

23:00 for the bus, they were... Yeah, it struck home to me then what apartheid... Well I hadn't heard of apartheid then. But what this racial discrimination was. I hadn't ever given it a thought in Australia.

How did you react to it?

Well I just couldn't understand it, you know, I just... I found it difficult not to talk to a dark person.

23:30 And so I did. But I was never pulled up for it. But...

Were you told not to talk..?

Yeah, we were told not to get involved with it, you know. But, you know, there's no way you can pass a person and so something, without just saying to him, "Excuse me," or, "Sorry," or, "What time is it?" Or, "Where's Woolworth's?" And, you know, you've got to ask

24:00 those sorts... But...

And what sort of a response would you get when you spoke to a black person?

Sometimes great surprise. Great surprise, yeah. And sometimes suspicion. And it's just that you had your uniform. But normally, see we only wore shirts and shorts and our uniform was... apart from our hat, our uniform was exactly the same as the navy's in there, with the navy had their hats and

24:30 we had our hats. But the rest of it was the same, except where you... I had my sergeant's stripes on. That's a little story I can tell that because I ran into my mate. Les Cole was my mate in the navy ship. I can't think of the name of it, I'm... Anyway, we were to be kept in camp for the last, again, for the last two nights that we were in Durban, we were supposed to stay in camp. And I thought, "Well I'd go and go..." I wanted

25:00 to go and see Les. So I went. We were together during the day and I said, "Well I don't want to be... they'll be starting to pick our blokes up off the street now, the red caps'll come around and..." The red caps were the military policemen picked air force blokes up and take them back to camp. So Les got me a cap, a navy cap, and I took my stripes off and I put my own air force forage cap in the shirt, and I was in the navy for... and walked around and the red caps'd go past

25:30 and I was with this naval cap on. And I don't know whether I'd have, what'd have happened if I'd have ever been picked up. But anyway I stayed like that until... and I stayed overnight... Les had me camped somewhere on the boat and stayed overnight and next day I caught a taxi back to the... and changed in the taxi and when I got in the taxi as sailor and

26:00 I got out as a... I gave Les the cap through the door of the taxi and I got out as a... Nobody knew I was gone. But it was interesting.

And what did you do with Les when you wandered around?

Oh, we just talked over old things. He's a chap I went to school with and I hadn't seen him for a long, long time. And to run into him in the middle of Durban was quite unusual. I just can't think of the name of the boat, it

26:30 it was a destroyer and I... Strangely enough, I didn't run into him again after the war. I looked around for him but I never saw him again. However, so that's... We got off at Durban.

Tell me a bit about where you were based at Durban.

I'm trying to think of the name of it, it's hard. Can't think of it. It was

27:00 like on a racecourse. But it was on the outskirts of Durban and it was set up as a transit camp. And I can't for the life of me think... I even had one of their race programs, from... that was lying around the place and I haven't even got that now.

With so many troops coming in and out of Durban, were there any

27:30 **things that you had to watch out for?**

Oh, you always had to watch out for, you know punch ups with the army and that, that was bound to be on. Even punch ups with the navy. You know, that... you seemed to... you know that was for ever likely to occur. Although I was never involved in any, but a few of our people were.

What sort of things would spark off a fight?

Nothing.

28:00 You know. Just... "Oh, you bloody, you blue orchid." You'd call the air force bloke a blue orchid and you'd call him a sailor – something that you shouldn't call him – or an army bloke something you shouldn't call him.

What would you call them?

All sorts of things. I don't know, it didn't happen with me. And particularly the main army and people that were around

28:30 Durban were real... There were British Army people, and didn't want to get into any punch ups with too many of them. But oh, actually it was reasonably quiet. There were just a few hassles. But then when we played a game of Australian Rules football there and we played the navy a game there, that was very interesting.

Who won?

Don't know. Don't know. I think we did, I think

29:00 the air force won. We should have because we would have had more experience with balls than they would have had. But...

Was there any problem with bars and girls in Durban?

Probably was. But then it didn't... they didn't concern me, fortunately, still being so young, they were the things that didn't worry me, you know. Oh, in the bar, I'd go in there. But I'd go in there to have a beer. And that was it, you know I didn't go in for girls or anything.

But did you see

29:30 **any evidence of..?**

No I didn't really because I was never in the places that that occurred. Actually I was never in places where that occurred any time during my career. I used to drink a lot of beer. But I'd go in the pub and I'd normally talk to the locals and... no that didn't occur. But I know it occurred

30:00 plenty of times and I know plenty of people who... that's the way they spent a lot of their time.

Did the air force warn you at all, about the dangers...?

Oh, yes, we were frequently got warned about how we should behave and where we should go and it didn't concern me a great deal because it didn't worry me and I didn't take all that much notice of it. But they were... I didn't worry and...

30:30 **What sort of things would they tell you about VD [venereal disease] for example?**

Oh, they told you everything about VD, yeah. Well that was the first thing that you got told plenty about that back in Australia before you ever left and, you know, even while we were in training and... Oh, yes, that was because VD was fairly rampant and

31:00 you know, there would be nobody wouldn't be aware of the problems and.... But and also you'd work that... you didn't see that many lasses around the place. You know. They... you'd have to go some place particularly to find them

31:30 and there was no need to do that. And...

What were the bars like that you went to?

Mainly the men's bars, you know, you know what the old men's bars used to be... Well they were like it in Australia, yeah, you just go in and... Bit like some of the Pommy [English] bars. You go in and stand at the bar and have a pint of bitter or a schooner [glass of beer] or whatever it is, stand up with your foot on the rail and tell the

32:00 tallest story in the place. And tell some more and... yeah. And mainly... Well because I only drank beer, I didn't drink any of the spirits whatsoever, it to me was not... it was taboo really, it was just something in my psyche that wasn't available.

Was there any problem in Durban that you heard about, or that you might have been warned about with crime or

32:30 **theft or...?**

Yeah. But it wasn't as bad there as it was in some of the other countries I went to. It wasn't as bad there as it was for instance in London. Yeah, but the black people were kept under the bloomin' thumb pretty much in Durban and there wasn't much room for... or much need for

33:00 the white people there to go out... to commit that sort of crime. I mean, there was a need, they committed crime all right, you know. But none of a petty theft, mugging sort of variety crime – that didn't exist.

Tell me about how your camp was set up at the racecourse?

We were set up in tents, we were camped in tents all around the course and the... even the

33:30 messing area, the eating area was... and the tents... and straw mattresses and you slept on a straw mattress and catered for fairly well. You were always catered for well. They looked after the inner person pretty well. And there was some good recreation – there was a recreation hall where you'd play billiards and pool and

34:00 table tennis and those sorts of things. And it was... As a transit camp as I nearly remembered, I said, I nearly remembered the name of the camp. But I didn't. So. And the food was always good, yeah.

34:30 And we were on the railway line from the... on the end of the end of the suburban railway line into Durban, so it was easy to get backwards and forwards.

Where did all of the British troops go?

I don't know where they were. But they weren't at our camp. They were at other camps. But there was a series of them around Durban and some of them were brought in by train from out at... directly to the ship,

35:00 and they were nearly all, they were all on board the ship when we went back again. So how they got there and got on board, I don't know.

Did they have the best places to sleep?

No they had... they were mainly in sharing the big areas. But then they had officers and people like that and various levels of their people got better treatment than others. But

35:30 we... I found they were quite interesting people to mix with on the boat. You just couldn't avoid running into people. And there must have been about five different lots and some had been in the Middle East and one lot was a team of people who'd been up in Crete and Greece, and

36:00 they were going back to England the long way round. And another lot was coming from India – they'd been in India and were coming back the long way round. And the others had been people who'd been up in the north of Africa and been training.

What sort of stories would they tell you?

Oh, stories about... mainly about the countries that

36:30 they'd been in, about the... Some of them that had been in action, about some of the stories that they'd been concerned with. Some of them were fighting up in the Middle East and whether they'd been on tanks or, you know, fighting in some other way. The ones that were coming back from India hadn't done much fighting at all. They'd been mainly up in Afghanistan and

37:00 up through India and up through there and they were virtually going home after serving six years life in India and been replaced and were on their way home. So there were very few out that way that had been in action. And all the people that had been taken in from south-east Asia after the Japs got there, they'd already gone and they were already home and in England.

37:30 So yeah, they came from various countries. You know, there were... I know there was a Yorkshire crowd amongst them and there was a Scottish crowd amongst them. But in addition to that on the boat, there were some Polish WAAFs who'd escaped through eastern Poland

38:00 and escaped down through south of Russia and got through to the Middle East and been picked up there and got moved onto South Africa, and they were going home. They were actually taboo on the ship. No, we played cards with them from time to time. But their living quarters and their…

38:30 They were out of bounds and we were out of bounds to them. And they were pretty strictly policed. They were some pretty fine women there.

Were they popular amongst the men?

Oh, yeah, they were... yeah. But very few of them could speak English and I learnt to say, "Dubranook." Was, 'goodnight'. And a couple of other things. But that was about all. But they'd been through some pretty tough times

39:00 those people. It was quite amazing that they were able to keep their pecker [spirits] up the way they did. And we got to know them much better by the time we got to England. And they'd be out on deck in the same deck that we were on. Yeah, that troopship was quite magnificent. And when we got up into the

39:30 Atlantic, the seas there were mountainous – they would break up over the prow of this, you just couldn't go out on deck without fear of being washed away and we went... We were chased by submarines at one stage and went almost over to New York. We were so close to New York that the crew reckoned that they could see the American mainland

40:00 from where we were. And then from there we went right up north, almost up to Iceland and Greenland, right up the north, and came into Scotland, almost due south into Scotland. And that was very interesting. And we landed at Greenwich which is one of the ports in Glasgow Harbour.

Tape 5

00:35 **You were telling us about coming into Scotland.**

Yeah, we came into Scotland into Greenwich, where we disembarked and we disembarked there onto a train which took us straight through to Brighton, from Scotland right down to the south of England

01:00 into Brighton, where we were billeted in two hotels, The Grand and one other – I'm not sure what the other one was. And we were billeted in these hotels and it was pretty good accommodation and it was in a pretty good spot on the Brighton seafront. But it was right in line of where the German bombers used to come over

01:30 and right in line where the Allied bombers used to go back over the other way sometimes. But it was a good spot to go. It was a good place to break in and whilst we were there, we were approached on a number of (siggut?) [?] to see where we were best suited and what we wanted to do. Anyway, I

02:00 volunteered to go out on a new twin engine aircraft out at the Middle East and was one of 26 Australians that were selected – there were other RAF people selected. And so we remained in Brighton then for about three weeks and did mainly spent our time marching round

02:30 Brighton and learned how to march again and again and again, and then we were shot off to do some refresher flying training on Tiger Moths. And we went to a place called, Elmdon which is just outside Birmingham. They'd never had any trainee pilots there before. But we were stationed on Tiger Moths and we were

03:00 given all sorts of cross country and navigational exercises and short landing exercises, low level flying. It was a pretty wonderful course because it's not often that you've been training that you could fly low level, normally you weren't allowed to. And low level flying gives you the great thrill because you're... So we did this and

03:30 we... I know that one day I went out in the Tiger Moth and I wanted to do a short land... We used to go and do pretended landings and then take off. Well one day, I thought, "Well I'd like to do a real landing and see what it's like." So I side slipped into this big paddock which was marked as an alternate landing field. But it was actually some farmer's paddock.

04:00 They don't call them paddocks in England – field. And I side slipped in and by the time I straightened up me feet were on the ground, so whether I liked it or not I'd done a landing in this field. Couple of Land Army ladies come chasing over to see whether I was alright and to help me. So they towed the aeroplane backwards right back to the

04:30 end of the field so I could get the longest run up to take off that I could. And they held on to the plane for as long as they could while I put the throttle onto maximum throttle and then let go and I was able...and I eventually got off. I never did run into those two lasses. I'd have liked to have seen them. And I never did do that sort of landing again either. But nobody knew about it back at the ranch so I got away with it quite well. But what it

05:00 proved to me was you could land these aircraft in a very short distance and you could take off in a very short distance. But then we did a lot of low level flying and one occasion I had a Focke-Wulf one night he came down alongside me. I thought, "This is a German plane here. But it's got British roundels on it." And I found out later that we were right next to another 'drome where they used to

05:30 use captured aeroplanes and learn all about them, flying them. And this Focke-Wulf was one of them. Really, it started to chase me at one stage. I was doing this low level flying and this was right behind me and I had a bit of a panic and all I saw was the silhouette and I thought, "This'd be ugly if somebody like that chasing up a Tiger Moth." But I realised after a while what it was and that it wasn't a German chasing me.

06:00 But from then on we saw several of various... saw a couple of Heinkels and a couple of Dorniers

[German bombers] and they were flying from this station just near us. And I eventually ran into one of the RAF pilots that did the... that used to do the flying of these aircraft when they come across and

06:30 he told me what it was all about, so that was very interesting. Well we finished that and then spent a fortnight in Blackpool before we went off back up to Glasgow and Greenwich and left from almost the exact spot that we'd arrived there on the New Amsterdam. We left on the Ochantara , which was a vessel that did most of its work on the African run.

07:00 It was about 27,000 and it was a pretty good ship. And we went from there and went out through down the Bay of Biscay down to Gibraltar, and from Gibraltar through the Mediterranean. Were

07:30 shadowed from time to time by various RAF aircraft looking after the ship and then shadowed for a while by the navy. But in all, we finish up going into Cairo. And we went in there and it was there that we were told that

08:00 it was there that they took off the other pilots to go on this aircraft. And that's when we learnt our fate that we were going out to India. We weren't very pleased about this, that we were going out to India on to a four engine plane. But however that happened and... no it wasn't Cairo, it was Port Said. And it was there that we went out to... from there we went

08:30 out to India and we landed at Bombay.

A couple of questions first about the United Kingdom. Tell us about your time there. Did you have any leave time?

Yeah, I had quite a bit of leave and had some leave in London. And I was there in London through a number of the air raids and they were quite shattering. How the people put up with it, I don't know. Particularly out in the East End.

09:00 But the people of London just used to take it in their stride. Some of them camped down in their underground, the railway stations, and just on bunk beds, and they lived there through the day. And others camped in amongst the ruins of where they were. But they all smiled and laughed and carried on and

09:30 I found that very difficult to come to grips with. They never knew whether they were going to be bombed out tonight or the next day or whether they'd see their kids or their relations or what would happen and they just...

10:00 They were amazing. I might say that if ever I hear criticism of Poms,

10:30 I get very angry. Move on... No, they're amazing people. What they went through is just hard to believe. And they treated it just as though it was an ordinary day of the week. Bloody women and kids and old people and

11:00 Dad's Army [Home Guard]. You know, how they lived and how they put up with that and we hear what the bloody Yanks did in the war and those people held out against the whole of Hitler's forces and they just whistled on, you know. It was quite amazing.

11:30 Anyway I spent a lot of time there, I also had a game of football at Dulwich Park and a game of cricket at Lords, so I was very fortunate there. And every night that I was in London, there was an air raid. And only once was there one near to where I was. But

12:00 every night there was an air raid and then in the morning you'd see the Allied bombers going back across to Germany and then even further south into France and Italy. But I just... I found the English people were amazing.

12:30 And some of the pubs used to sometimes open, and sometimes you could go and get a beer in a pub and that was always a good... something worthwhile. I didn't ever get to... Oh, yes we did. I had a fortnight up in the Lakes District while I was there and that was a magnificent experience, particularly as we weren't far from where there was an experimental test pilot operation going on and we saw some aircraft there that I hadn't seen

13:00 before and I haven't seen since. Some experimental planes. And that was a really wonderful experience. We stayed at Keswick in the Lakes District. But I didn't spend much time in England most of the blokes I went away with stayed there and they went onto Lancasters and Halifaxes [bombers] and those sorts of thing. But we were only in England for such a short while

13:30 that we had to leave it behind. I always hoped I'd get back there during the war, but I didn't – I got back after the war. But I got back during the war. But I didn't. And so we went on the troopship and we got into Bombay and from Bombay we went down to Poona. And out of Poona was a jungle training school

14:00 and we went out on this jungle training school where we had to learn to live off the land. And the instructors or the people performing them there were Karens and people from the hills in Burma and northern Thailand and those places. So we lived with those for about a fortnight and learned to live off the land and that was a good course. Then we went down and then I

14:30 fortunately there whilst I was at Poona, I was in the bar in the mess one night and a Pommy sergeant pilot was in there and he was telling me how good it was flying multi-engined aircraft. And I listened to him... very happy to listen to him. We had a few beers and he says, “What about coming out tomorrow morning and having a look at one?” I said, “All right, I will. How do I get there?” And he told me how to get to the place where these aircraft were and

15:00 so I got out there the next day and he said, “Would you like to come up for a trip in one?” I said, “Well, yeah, love to.” I got in one seat and he got in the other and he started her up and after messing around for a while he said, “Would you like to try the taxi controls?” And I said, “ Yeah, I’ll try ’em.” So alright, he said, “All right, you taxi out.” So we taxied out and he said, “Well look, put your hands and come through it with me we’ll do a take off together.” And I said, “Righto.”

15:30 Off we went and took off. Went up in the air and round about he went up and did some dive bombing, put the dive brakes on and broke it and coming back and he said, “Oh, we’ll take it in there, I’ve got to take it into land. It might be a bit bumpy. Be careful.” So we came in and came into land and it was a controlled crash. It wasn’t a bit bumpy. It was a controlled crash and when I taxied it back to the

16:00 hangar he said, “That wasn’t bad for the first time I’ve been up in one, was it?” You wouldn’t believe it yeah. It’s the first time he’d been up in one. And that... because when we got back he taxied up to a strange dispersal way, right away from where we had to get out and go like buggery to get back out of the way, yes. So I’ve got that in me logbook though, I had it in my logbook. But my logbook’s lost. But

16:30 yeah, he’d never flown one before. He was there to fly them and he knew about them and he’d done a lot of work on them. But he was as.... But that was... he was typical Pom, you know. He was so casual about it.

Did you in yourself have a strong sense of empire?

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And I got it. I mean when we first got to England, when we first got to England they used to

17:00 talk about the boys from the Empire and we used to jack up about, “We’re not British subjects,” and, “We’re not this, that and the other.” “We’re not colonials.” And oh, we took that as a major objection. But the longer I went on, the more Pommy I became and well it... When you see what they did during the Battle of Britain,

17:30 you know, they should have been run over the top of in the Battle of Britain with the Germans the way they were. But they weren’t and that’s the way they behaved and I might be one out in this business. But to me, it’s... I always remember Empire Day at school and God save the Queen or King and those sorts of things,

18:00 but never gave it one iota of thought. And the fact that Menzies said, “Because Britain are at war, we were at war,” I didn’t believe that was to be the case. But I... the more I was there and... because the blokes that I were with, you know, some of them were some of the higher public school and private school people and others were

18:30 Cockneys from the East End of London and they were all just bloody wonderful people. And so I.... But I did have a strong sense of Empire and when I... I even have now, when I hear the way... when I see what bloody [US President George W.] Bush has done, and the fact that the British prime minister’s [Tony Blair] pulled in with him, it’s made me awfully upset. I would have thought that they could have told him to go on his own.

19:00 But he’s as much involved... with them as Bush is. So I’m out of date. And.... But that was a fact. I grew to be more Empire attached, to the extent that I was probably more Pommy than Pommy in the finish.

What did you think of their sense of humour,

19:30 **specially during war time?**

Oh, bloody amazing. Amazing. You know. They’d... even these people in London, the sense of humour, these Cockneys in London and there’s bloody, air raids going on. It’s dry, though, it’s not flamboyant it’s just a wonderful sense of humour. I

20:00 yeah, I... as I say, I... from a bloke that’s... my great great grandfather migrated from England back in 1836 so it’s a long way back for me to be toeing in roots. But and I... when somebody’d say, “You’re a British subject.” I’d say, “I’m bloody Australian mate and don’t tell them anything else.” But in the...

20:30 One of the things that upset me later in life after the war, when I got to London, and I got off the airplane and had to walk off, and I had to go in with the bloody foreigners. That to me that was the greatest insult that they could have given me. Yeah and my... I wasn’t a British subject then. Yet, I always

21:00 wrote that I’m an Australian citizen and yet a British subject. But anyway, that’s an ordinary old bloke.

And how did you feel about being assigned to the Middle East?

I was quite happy about that, mainly because I thought we were going to go on to a new sort of

21:30 Beaufighter. That was the aeroplane they'd brought out – a new, silent, fairly silent Beaufighter – and that was the airplane that we were going to go out on. And my brother had recently been killed up in Italy and there was still fighting going on from the airstrips in the Middle East and I'd hoped that that's where I'd finish up. But it didn't occur and that's the reason... If I'd have been asked to

22:00 volunteer to do what, to go where I did go, initially, I'd have not volunteered. I'd have probably been back in... I might have got into action on a Lancaster. I think the war probably would have been over before I would have finished my training or nearly over. But I wanted to go to the Middle East for two reasons: one to fly the Beaufighter, and the other was because that's where my brother had been...

How did you receive the news that your brother had...?

22:30 Not very well, I was in... Actually I was at Clontarf in initial training and it was a bit of a shock because he'd only been with us about six months, seven months before. He'd come through Fremantle on a troopship, he went to England via South Africa the same as I did too. But when he got to England he went straight to operation training onto Wellingtons and straight into the

23:00 RAF. And he was flying with a sergeant, Pommy sergeant pilot, when he got killed and yeah, that was a kick in the tail because we were pretty good mates. He was three years older than me. But we were still pretty good mates. Yeah, I.... But I did, and I wanted to go there for several purposes, but wanted to report back home to the family. If I could find out anything, you know. And if I could ever get to the

23:30 airstrip that he was flying off, I thought, well, "Perhaps there's something there that I can check up on." It didn't happen and now as it all turns out I'm sorry what happened, happened the way it did. I was lucky, I came out of it all right. But we lost about 50% of our blokes got killed. And we lost three aircraft on our first trip, the first night the

24:00 squadron operated. And I bet every one of them was through weather or hitting mountains. I bet there was none that were brought down by enemy aircraft. But yeah, three of them and we continued to lose aircraft all the way through. As a matter of fact, I'm the only one who started

24:30 when the squadron started... Our squadron was formed from the heavy conversion unit and has ceased to exist after the war, but it went through the war. I'm the only one that was flying with them when we started and still flying... The only one of the Australians that went there. The others had all completed their course and finished flying when the war finished. But so that was something that was

25:00 interesting.

Tell us about the boat ride and coming into Bombay for the first time.

Oh, that was magnificent, yeah, yeah. Actually Bombay's a beautiful place to see. But it's not until you come in close that you see the squalor and the poverty and I guess if anything upset me in my lifetime it was the poverty that I struck in India. And you saw it as the

25:30 boat gradually got in towards the port, you gradually saw things that sort of showed up where the poverty was. And then once you got off the boat, and you start to travel on land in Bombay, it was quite horrendous. And I didn't believe people could live in those situations. I didn't believe they could live and laugh. They'd laugh and joke and goodness gracious me it was a…

26:00 Oh, they're an amazing people, Indians. Because those days, Indians and Pakistanis were all one as far as I was concerned because whether they Hindu or Muslim they all operated together, they all ate and drank together. The only thing they didn't do together was go to their religious services together. But, you know, we had Muslims and Hindus

26:30 on all the stations we were, most of the ground staff were either Sikhs or... There was no real sign of the racial problem there is, not until towards the end of my stay there when the Quit India campaign started when they wanted British to get out. But then it was both the Hindus and the Muslims that wanted Britain to quit India and

27:00 it was.... But coming into Bombay was quite fantastic, even the little ships in the harbour. But bearing in mind this was war time, it was fairly gay arrival for us into the harbour. We left from the same place and when I come into Fremantle we left from the same place. But coming into

27:30 Bombay, we were camped at Bombay at a place called Whirly, which is in Bombay –it's a camp on the harbourside – and we were camped there for about ten days. And that was interesting. But there again, the poverty was… it was absolutely, to me it was unbelievable. I didn't believe people could live like they lived. And some of the deformed people that were there, people without legs and arms and

28:00 just crawling along on their backsides and on... pulling themselves along just by their arms, just from the waist upwards. How they lived, I don't know. But they lived and they ate, it was probably worse later on when I got over to Calcutta. But it was bad enough in Bombay.

And were you harassed a bit?

28:30 Oh, yeah, you were always harassed. But... yeah they always want baksheesh [money]. But I didn't... they were only little fellas. But it wasn't only little fellas it was... and women and old men and some hoods [criminals], real hoods, and the hoods I didn't give any time to at all. But I was able to... I couldn't give to everyone and I didn't. But I was able to deal with them and talk with them. But it's horrific the

29:00 with this poverty, there's always somebody asking... It was the same when we came through the Middle East at Port Said.

Just take it up from some of your impressions of Bombay and the people there, what were you noticing about the culture?

Ah, the culture. I guess I was

29:30 impressed with the politeness and the placidness of the people, there were no angry people round. Even the very poor people. No street fights, the kids weren't fighting in the streets. It was quiet and peace and calm and contentment and happiness that

30:00 was quite out of place in what I saw of the... It proved that the dollar is not everything, you know, that you didn't have to have dollars to be.... But and I guess I... As with the Poms, I've got a great respect for the Indians, whether, be they on either side of the... whatever side. Well there's hundreds, bloomin' of religions in India and various

30:30 castes. But I found that... And I never saw a street fight, yet I heard of riots and I never... The only riots I ever saw were when they had the "Quit India" [anti-British] campaign on and then there were some pretty fierce ones. I was on a train that was held up when that was on and that was pretty fierce. But it was only then, you didn't see it in the normal course of events. And

31:00 but poverty is... it was almost an unbelievable level of poverty that those people... and as I say, when I got over to Calcutta it was even worse and you'd go onto the Calcutta railway station and the whole station was merely a complete lawn of people lying there sleeping and resting – that's the way they lived out their days and their nights. And even to get to the train was

31:30 almost an impossible thing to do without walking on somebody. But I've always said that I was going to go back again and have a look. But I've never gone and I shan't now. I couldn't tackle it any more.

Tell us about going from Bombay to Poona and what you were doing there?

Oh, right, that was very interesting when we got to Poona because the

32:00 Poona there was an airstrip. But we went from further out to this jungle training school in Mabaleshwah [?] which was out in the western ghats, the hills out there, and we lived off the land for a fortnight and that was quite magnificent. There were probably... apart from the pilots that were in there we also had an Australian

32:30 wireless operators with us there, so there were probably about 20-odd of us out there in the school. And we were shown means of survival: we were shown how to survive on what to eat in the jungle, how to eat bamboos and all sorts of other foodstuffs. How to make cooking dishes out of bamboo, some of the languages that they

33:00 had in Burma and French Indochina. Mainly, it was a survival course. And to come out of that was quite good and the last exercise in the course, we were dropped off, taken out by truck and dropped off, and told to get back to a certain place and,

33:30 you know, the best way you could. Well were able to do that. But it was a really a survival to get there. I mean the first ones got there within probably seven hours and the last ones got there within about two days, you know, it was that sort of a trip.

Survival course for what?

Well in case you got brought down in Asia, it was to enable you to be able to live and

34:00 get back to some sort of base. And that was the whole reason for it. We even learnt a couple of the... a few words in some of the native languages for out that way. But I don't remember them now, I remember... I could at that stage identify myself. But I'd have to identify myself as a Pom, "choke ingalake lean pianta and pita." "I'm a British airman."

34:30 But...

What language was that?

It's one of the... It's Kuching, the Kuching up northern Burma. Yeah. And that was very interesting.

What kind of foodstuffs were they teaching you to eat out there?

Oh, it was amazing the stuff that you could eat that was available in the jungle that you'd... you know that you and I'd walk by. It'd be like going out our back garden and they'd get themselves a sumptuous

feed out of it.

35:00 And it was good. And little birds, they have ways of catching little birds and they... that was a fair bit of the diet.

How were you taught to navigate?

We learned that navigation with our own navigators and from maps and then

35:30 and then it was shown things on the ground of gullies, how you know this was going to be a fast river and that's going to be a slow river and how this is... you know the various faults and you learned a lot of that practically and... But we had a map to tell us of the district so that we had some idea of where we were when we were dropped off and then we had to find our way back. And they

36:00 had these people out all the time, scouts out all the time, making sure that none of us got lost too badly. That was very interesting.

Did you have to contend with any wild animals while you were out there?

No, actually there are no tigers up in this area. I was worried about those. I thought they had tigers and leopards and things of that nature. But they assured me and we never saw any and there were no tigers or leopards up

36:30 in that area, or lions. So. But there were plenty of tigers up in Bengal where I used to fly from and there were tigers there. What...

Shall we move on from the jungle course, where you went to next?

Well we came back from the jungle course and from there we went straight

37:00 down to Coolah goldfields where we were to go immediately onto Liberators and from there we were allocated into crews. And I was allocated two wireless operators, and then the three of us were allocated to this Canadian bloke who was a pilot, and so him as a pilot and then we had two RAF fellas, the navigator and the bomb aimer who were just allocated from elsewhere, and that made up the...

37:30 Oh, and also some gunners, there was Jimmy Peters and four gunners. And so we made... The crew varied from eight up to about 12 and we got together and we soon became, you know, pretty good mates, everybody became pretty good mates. We were all NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] except the captain

38:00 and the navigator and the bomb aimer – they were all commissioned officers. But I was a sergeant and... or flight sergeant then, no a sergeant... yeah a flight sergeant. And then the wireless... Australian wireless operators were flight sergeants and the gunners were all sergeants gunners, they were...

38:30 We had one Welsh bloke and one Cockney... the engineer... The engineer was a Cockney. Yeah so that's. But the crew got together pretty well and we worked very well together and the old Scotsman who was our bomb aimer, he was in his 40s and he was an ex YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] bloke and he was in charge of sort of

39:00 how you look after people on the squadron. Anyway, he was in charge and he made sure that we always got dealt with if there were any rations of beer or cigarettes or whatever. Because by that time I was smoking very heavily. We used to smoke a tin of 50 Players cigarettes on a trip, the other pilot and myself we'd have... leave it there to start with and there'd be none left when we got home.

39:30 And as a matter of fact Jack wrote me this and I tried to find his letter and he said, "Just imagine how young we were and how silly we were those days.". But he's the fella who got sick on the plane. And yeah, so and they also the old Tom, the bomb aimer bloke, he sort of looked after me as if... I was only half his bloomin' age, just, you know, less than half his age,

40:00 but he looked after me pretty well and...

Tape 6

00:32 **We just finished talking about the people that were in the crew of your plane, and you were talking about how people would look after you.**

Yeah, as I say, the... one of them, the bomb aimer, was a man in his 40s and he

01:00 I think he was with the... something like the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] in Scotland and he looked after the recreation, that sort of thing, he was probably more set up to be canteen manager than the bomb aimer... Well as a bomb aimer his job was to sight our... when we came down his job was to sight us so that the people could be dropped on the spot because it was a fairly precise sort of business, and it was

01:30 it was one where accuracy was indeed paramount because the lives of... not only the lives of the people that were being dropped were at stake, but the lives of the people down below with the enemy around, if we didn't get them down in the right place. And he also virtually took command of the aircraft when you're going in to do the drop... He'd say, "Left, left, back a bit, sideways." You know,

02:00 and bring you on target and then say, "Right, release." And he had a very important job. But he was the... as I say, in civilian life he was a recreation officer.

Tell me, from your point of view, what was it like flying the Liberators, how do they fly? How do they handle?

Oh, I thought they were pretty wonderful. But they were a big heavy aircraft, they didn't have the high performance that the British bombers had.

02:30 But they had a bigger range and they were slower. But you could get over long distances, you wouldn't been able to fly Halifaxes or Lancasters on these exercises because they wouldn't have had the range to get there. And to be over 20 hours in the air is quite... to be 17

03:00 hours in the air which is at least half our trips would have been more than 17 hours in the air, you needed an aircraft that was very reliable. And the other thing is, that if you lost an engine on... had engine failure on one of the engines, provided you jettisoned a fair bit of stuff, you could get back over a long distance with just three engines and they were fairly safe in that regard. And they were easy enough to land with three engines. I don't think they'd be much fun trying to

03:30 take off with three engines. But to land they were pretty easy. So they were good, reliable aircraft in that regard. Although they were designed as bombers, by the Americans, and they were used in the big bombing raids that were done over Europe, they were with the Flying Fortresses, the Liberators were used there. But

04:00 they were ideal for our sort of work. And because the other aircraft that was used in our operations was the old Dakota. With no armament at all. But they were only used to do the six and seven hour trips and so it didn't have to have the range. But they're very similar reliability.

04:30 **And during the heavy conversion training, how long did it take you to get used to flying the Liberator?**

Oh, probably a month. But we did all sorts of, there were all sorts of new tricks we had to play with them and try to learn all the time, because they were in an experimental stage, flying this sort of operation. And quite

05:00 often it wasn't so much the flying of the aeroplane that was our reason for one of our training trips, it was the experimentation with some sort of tactic that we wanted to use, or people were going to use. And so that was another good reason to have a good, reliable airplane like the Liberator. They were very uncomfortable aircraft to

05:30 take off, we lost... we don't know how many. But I saw a chappie blow up in the... two aircraft taking off one after the other, blew up on the strip in their takeoff in front of me. In the one night. We had problems with the propellers, they used to... What we used to call the runaway propeller, because our control of our propellers was done

06:00 by electronics in the Liberator, it was far ahead of any of the other planes at the time, they had a lot of problems with them. And it took two pilots to quite often to get them in the air. And besides that, in the long trip, we were flying sometimes 100% overloaded. Double the permitted load. Because you need to do that to take the amount of fuel you'd

06:30 require to go and do the trip and come back. And we'd taken off with four Bombays... that's the total capacity of the aircraft in the Bombays, filled with fuel tanks, extra fuel tanks, because you needed that to take off and quite frequently, not frequently. But often, I suppose, we went over to a Yankee airstrip where they

07:00 were flying the B-29s, the big B-29s, and had these long two-mile airstrips, where ours were normally about a mile long, and we'd fill up there with fuel and then we'd take off on those strips. They used to take off from those strips to go to Japan, with the Super Fortress so they were... they could... they took

07:30 pretty big aircraft. So we were pretty accustomed to doing that sort of thing.

You mentioned that during training, you lost some planes.

Oh, yes, we lost some planes during training. Well that chap I was talking to... Jack White, they just took an aircraft up... well it wasn't during... yeah, it was during training. But they just took an aircraft up to do some night tests on it

08:00 to get it ready for operation and it just... All we heard was this 'bang!' and we've got no idea what happened, because the weather wasn't sufficiently bad... it wasn't good.... But it wasn't sufficiently bad for them to have got into trouble with the... So we don't to this day know why that happened. And another fella, the... He lived, fortunately. But he did the same

08:30 and they just crashed and he for the life of him, can't tell why, how it happened and they ran into some problems and they couldn't recover from them, so... and he finished up... He crashed and the whole of his insides were pushed to one side so his heart was on the opposite... and it moved right across his body it was the impact that he made. He was a Tasmanian that bloke.

How did the

09:00 **squadron deal with losing people?**

How did they deal with them? Well, we had medical people there. But as quick as anybody was injured, they were transferred to some place where there was better medical facilities. We didn't have the medical facilities on the squadron to look after

09:30 cases like that. They had to be taken to a proper hospital.

What was the impact on the morale?

Well continually we were under this sort of pressure all the time that you didn't know if the bloke you were having a cup of coffee with, whether you'd be able to have a cup of coffee with him the next day, because he mightn't be there. And life was a bit cheap in that regard, you

10:00 didn't plan too much ahead of what you might do. And our first night out, the first time the squadron ever operated, we lost three aircraft. And three aircraft and there was probably 33, 34 people. Of those, six of them were Australian. But the rest were not Australian. But it was something you just had to accept.

10:30 I was asked earlier on about being frightened and terrorised, well you naturally you were frightened and that was going to happen. But it didn't stop you doing what you were going to do. But certainly, you know, certainly every time you took off, until you got 500 feet in the air, you had your fingers crossed because you didn't know... it didn't mean you stop and go back and not take off. But

11:00 it was a pressure that was on you all the time. But once you got this aircraft up in the air and got above 10,000 feet, providing you didn't run into any mountains or anything, it was a wonderful aircraft to fly that way and you could be very nearly sure that you'd get back home all right if you didn't have problems with the weather.

How much had you been briefed by this stage on what sort of missions you were going to be flying?

11:30 The only one that was ever briefed was the number one pilot and the navigator sometimes. But the only one... because the missions were so secret that you just weren't allowed... we didn't know... quite often we'd have people aboard the aircraft who we'd talk to. But we had no idea what they were going

12:00 to do and they wouldn't tell us what they were going to do. And all we knew is that we had to get them and land them in a particular place or for certain things to be happening at that particular place, with the proper signals and that sort of thing, to know that we were dropping them in the right place. But... and we were concerned with the French quite a lot because a lot of our flying was what was, they were French... formerly French Indochina, which is now Vietnam,

12:30 and we dropped some of those people into the suburbs of Saigon, you know, like as close into Saigon as we would be out at Palmerston to Darwin, you know. And they were going down there and the Japanese were down there, there was fairly big Japanese [presence]. But

13:00 they could not have known what was in store for them. And they had to rely entirely on the people on the ground to be able to signal and get them down and pick them up and get them away in time. There were occasions, three or four occasions, where we flew as a decoy and we went in and did bombing runs over Saigon and Hanoi to take the

13:30 pressure off others that were going in and putting these people in. So we had... I did about five trips where we dropped bombs. We went out with a bomb load and dropped them and we acted as decoys. It was... and you frequently didn't know what you were going to do until you were... you got out to the aircraft you didn't even know that the aircraft had been bombed up and fitted up with bombs until you got into it.

14:00 It was done quite secretly on the aerodrome. They were.... But the book... that book of O'Brien's [The Moonlight War]is a classic book because he was a fella who was involved in the administration of this as well as in the action on it. He flew both Liberators and

14:30 Dakotas at different times and he was in charge of 357 Squadron, and we were 358 Squadron on the same station. Strangely enough I never heard of him, never heard mention of him whilst I was flying. But I have since, when I've talked to blokes that were on 357 Squadron. Well we didn't see them and we... and we didn't... I didn't know

15:00 that... what exercise my next, my best mate was going on. Didn't know where he was going or when he was likely to be back. And you knew that you're both flying that night, well he might have gone down to Malaya and you went across to French Indochina. So... and we didn't talk about it. We didn't talk about

the operations when we came back and

15:30 there was a lot of cloak and dagger [secrecy,drama]. I think it was impressed on us, overly impressed on us I think, the need for this secrecy. And there was certainly a need for secrecy and confidentiality over the radios. Our radio operators had to be very cautious and rarely did they communicate anywhere... apart from in morse code, and rarely did they communicate

16:00 otherwise. But it was only in the ’70s that that secrecy ban was lifted. And so, you know that was a good 30 years after the event. I guess at the time it was pretty important because the Japanese had occupied

16:30 the whole of South-East Asia and if they had forecast to them what was... how we were operating and how the people were coming into the place it could have ruined the lives of a lot of people on the ground, a lot of the fifth column people [spies] that were on the ground and were trying to keep this hush-hush and still be flying. There was always a difficulty in communication back from

17:00 the strip after you dropped them, and till you get the information. Sometimes you wouldn’t get information back for three or four days. And sometimes being the plane that took them out, that might even get six days before it got to you. To know whether you... you believed you’re successful and you believed everything went off right. But you didn’t know until you get a feedback from the people on the field. There were some pretty brave people. There were women, French women, went out and they

17:30 dropped in... we dropped... One night we dropped four French women in over Saigon and they were... I don’t know whether they were medical people or radio people or what they were. But they were pretty important people.

What kind of women were they?

French women. They seemed to be just... they were just all seemed to be pretty fine ladies.

18:00 They didn’t talk much on the plane because they didn’t talk about what they were doing. And we didn’t necessarily know what they were doing and sometimes we didn’t even know their... have a name for them. They’d have a given name to use and we’d use that. But...

What were the French women wearing?

Oh, they were generally in sort of the boiler jacket and slacks and that. Yeah, they... whether

18:30 they took out some women’s wear or not I don’t know. But we didn’t ever search their underwear. So...

What other types of people did you drop?

Oh, we dropped an awful lot of Burmese and Cambodian men and women and... into Malaya... we dropped Malayan

19:00 people. We dropped one lot at 25 mile north of Singapore, that was a hell of a long trip from north of Calcutta down to 25 mile north of Singapore. And we dropped... And some of the people we dropped in were military people, who dropped in in uniform, in full uniform, and that had a reason for it also. And

19:30 certainly quite a few of the people we dropped in were medical people. And I think that some of these women that we dropped in were mainly medical people. Cause there was a very big need on the ground for them – they didn’t have access to medical

20:00 facilities where they were because the Japanese were in charge of the place, and frequently, well... yeah frequently... we dropped in some fairly heavy doses of medical supplies and what was in the medical supplies, I don’t know. Quite... on several occasions, the people that we were dropping in got

20:30 a bit of a shock and refused to go down the chute, so they got pushed off, you know. And they knew that would happen, that they were a bit scared to jump out from 300 feet in the dark and hoped that they were going to land in the right place and... yeah so that happened on several occasions.

Can you take me through, step

21:00 **by step, what your job was, when you’d go on a...?**

What my job was? Well I was flying as the second pilot. So I was with the pilot all the time in getting the aircraft off the ground. It took two pilots to work, it took two pilots to get it in the air. Then occasionally... No, often, once it got in the air and we’ve got it on automatic pilot if you had a clear run, one pilot, the first pilot, would go down and

21:30 walk around the aircraft and talk to the members of the crew, have a look at the people that we were dropping and then he’d come back and then I’d go down and do the same thing and we had a mirror image one another and we’d try... and any signs of any, you know, any problems of people getting nervous or things or we’d rapidly have to look into that.

22:00 We’d check with all the gunners that their turrets were operating and that their guns were operating. The only place I have that we didn’t ever go to was right up into the nose where the bomb aimer was, because he could just get into this place on his own and... with his sight. But we’d go down and have a

talk with the navigator. Because they couldn't leave their place. And one of us had to be flying

22:30 all the time. And so we operated as such and it was... it had been an impossible job to do if both weren't pilots. Say if one was a pilot and the other engineer, it... and that's how they fly in some similar airlines, well we couldn't have done that because there had to be a pilot there continuously flying the plane.

23:00 And mind you that was... and just to look after the welfare of the crew and to see that there was no problems and to correct any problems if they occurred. Some of them... I can't think offhand, what it is. But some of them might have seemed a bit mundane from time to time. But they were necessary to handle them because they caused worry to the people who were there. And if you had somebody break down, if your

23:30 wireless operator broke down for instance or your bomb aimer broke down or your navigator, you had fairly difficult task. But that's another thing that we used to do. We used to have to fill in for sometimes... temporarily, say a... well say a wireless operator wanted to go to the toilet, and you'd have to allow him to have a break, so you'd just take over although

24:00 you didn't have the qualifications of a wireless operator, you could monitor most of the things that they were doing and that sort of thing was essential. But the main part was to keep the crew communicated with and for them to be communicating back and so that you really knew what you were about. So... and you were... from the time you got out to the airstrip till the time you

24:30 got back to the... back into debriefing you were fully occupied all the time. No time to sit up. Yet, as I say, we're sitting there flying, we'd have a smoke because that was something... I've since given up smoking long, long time ago. We were encouraged to do it really, we were given, the cigarettes were all free and the advertisements were all encouraged smoking. But

25:00 we..., you know, I gave it up, so did Jack Murray, the chappie I flew with. And I had no problems giving it up, yet I was a very heavy smoker at the time. And of course, some of those aircraft now, there'd be non-smoking anyway. But the other thing is, all our

25:30 fuel was petrol. It's not like the fuels of today which are designed for turbines and jet propulsion, they're a different. They're a lower octane than the high octane fuel that we use, petrols we do. What else. Yeah, well that answers your question about what did we do as...

What did you wear?

Normally, normally long brown...

26:00 long khaki slacks and shirt with a long sleeve, long sleeves and boots in the case you got brought down. We wore our parachute harness on all the time so that if we had to bail out, well you'd pick up the parachute and hook it on and go out and in... Sewn into

26:30 our uniform in various ways we had buttons sewn in that acted as compasses. You'd take one off and put it on another and twist it and the compass would tell you north and south. We had a few things like that in case we were brought down, and of course we were instructed that we weren't to talk. If we were to be interviewed, we weren't to talk. Just to identify ourselves by our name and number. And that was all and

27:00 we were in no way to discuss what we were doing. And what our operations were, just the... our number, name and rank. And also we had some rations, food rations that we could take with us, they were Yankee K-rations they called them and they were pretty good standard of food and they were rations we'd take if we were brought down anywhere.

27:30 What else.

Did you have any, like a silk map or any maps?

Yeah we had maps. We even had maps sewn into our clothes, too. But also… all the maps were made of cloth and yeah they were, yeah we had maps and we all wore revolvers – we wore side-arms. They were the Smith and Wesson revolver. And in holster.

28:00 And we all carried knives – a fairly big sheath knife. No, I thought in one of these photos there might have been one... with us with the side-arm with the revolver.

28:30 **So you were telling me about what you would wear in case you were...?**

Yeah, and we'd also have a hat... we'd take a slouch hat with us, and we wouldn't wear one of those banger hats that they've got there. We... a slouch hat. But there were some other uniform parts we'd have, where there were pencils and

29:00 pens and papers and things sewn into the clothing so you could have those with you. And sometimes there'd be a little rolled up raincoat of some sort so that you could at least keep a bit drier than you normally would. But in the monsoon season it made no difference – it's a bit like this. It was

29:30 it was terrifically hot and steamy all the time and nearly always raining somewhere all the time. But the

reason we wore that was because if we were brought down, the idea was to get away from, as quickly as you could from anywhere where you were likely to be picked up by the Japanese and so that you wouldn't undergo interrogation. And you head into the jungle, no matter how

30:00 forbidding that was. It was better to head in there than to be picked up by the people on the ground. And of course it was also designed so that you didn't get picked and in so doing put the people on the ground in jeopardy because they'd know you were feeding them somehow or other. So that was a

30:30 pretty critical part of it. We had constant rehashes of escape procedures so that that was always on top of the mind. I had a mate who bailed out over northern Burma, the plane fell apart and he walked back to India, without...

31:00 The only contact he had all the time was some of the native people and he walked back and he was brought to our squadron by somebody else – he'd walked into some other airfield. And so it was possible and of course, the lines were so long, that you'd have been extremely unlucky to walk into a nest of Japanese, just the same as they'd have been extremely lucky to have picked you up.

31:30 But because you were so widespread – Asia's a pretty big piece of country – and they couldn't be everywhere. And certainly the smartest people couldn't be everywhere and so if they were, you were picked up it'd probably be by some just an ordinary

32:00 soldier group which you'd have to see if you could do over with your mind and if necessary, physically. But...

Can you describe for me, the first mission that you went out on? What you were feeling, what it was like.

Horrific, I can tell you it was... Well I went over in the second night after... I didn't go over in the first night our squadron

32:30 operated. But I went over the second time and we'd lost already three crews the first time round and where we were going, wasn't far from where those people had been and it was only over in northern Burma. But we weren't going far from them so it wasn't without some great fear and trepidation that... Well we didn't look forward to it like Cinderella going to the ball. We didn't have that sort of expectation.

33:00 We just didn't know what to expect. And also, we did run into engine trouble, taking off on that trip. And so that kept us pretty busy, kept us busy flying. But it... I mentioned it previously somewhere that you were frightened, you had to be frightened. But you weren't

33:30 scared to the extent that you weren't going to do your job. You went out and you did your job and you knew from the time you were briefed that you were going on a... You knew that you were going to be in problems and you didn't know whether your aeroplane was going to last it out. And some of the problems were as a result of aircraft failure itself. And there was no way of pre-empting that. The ground crews did what they could do and

34:00 they were pretty expert on it and they worked pretty hard. But they couldn't foresee problems that sometimes arose.

And what happened to your engines on the first night out?

It was just problem, they were just engine problem, both cylinder problems and we still had one engine playing up all the way round, it was overheating and it was doing

34:30 all sorts of things it shouldn't be doing. But it was able to keep turning round. When we got nearly... about halfway back, we turned it off for a while. And we didn't put her on again until we got right back to the... until we got right back to the strip and then only... it was only used as a bit of a booster support. But you could never forecast, we had... It

35:00 was not unusual to come home only on three engines. And it's not unusual to only have two or three engines to have to land in... Occasionally we landed on an American base and if you landed in on an American base coming in, they'd change your engine, put a new engine in. That's how they were rigged up. If you landed back at an RAF base, they'd change the cylinder head and, you know, or spark plugs or something of that nature. So it was

35:30 quite a difference. Quite often you'd come back with a... If you went where the Americans were, you'd come back with a better aeroplane than you started with because you had one new engine. And for them, economies of scale, economies didn't matter. For instance, just to change and engine and I don't know what happened with the one they took out. But I bet it wasn't repaired. But if it was an RAF engine,

36:00 it would have been taken away and repaired and put back into service. But that was just the way things were. But it wasn't unusual for us to get back with only three engines.

What were you doing on this first mission? What was the purpose of it?

I can't remember precisely what that was, that... it was certainly was... we'd be dropping some... either

bodies, or the people or

36:30 materials in... Unfortunately all that, the detail that I had on those things is not with me any more. And we weren't, as I told you, it was so hush-hush that you didn't really have full details of what you were doing anyway. But I don't know what it was. But it would have been fairly important because it was before the Japanese had come up through…

37:00 No, it was before. Wingate started his 14th Army down and to retake Burma. So, you know, it... Oh, I really don't know. I'd only be guessing and it'd be badly guessed.

And what was the procedure that you'd go through leading up to a mission?

37:30 Well there'd be the captain and he alone, sometimes with the navigator or sometimes with the bomb aimer, because depending on the awkwardness of the drop, terrain in which you were going to fly in to drop, the bomb aimer had to go in so that he could be told how to guide the airplane in to drop. And they would go. The rest of us would be taken to a

38:00 general briefing and told we were going to such and such a place and we're going to drop in such and such an area. But the intricacies of it and the details of what we were taking in there and dropping in and where... and the precise nature of where we were dropping, and what we were dropping, we wouldn't know. We would know what the call sign was, of the people on the ground, so that if one missed out somebody else might see it from the airplane,

38:30 but they were only the things that you really needed to know did you get informed about. And as I say, quite frequently, we really had no idea, even when we were carrying people, really no idea of what the purpose of the mission was. The purpose of the mission was to win the war. But we didn't know what that specific one was going to do about it. So…

39:00 And sometimes the despatcher, our engineer was our despatcher, he's the one that... We had chutes rigged up in the airplane where the people get on the chutes and the people and the packages'd be pushed out, and the despatcher would do that. Well our engineer became our despatcher because once we were airborne and he got everything going, he could go back down there until we were... and tell them if we ran into engine trouble. And so he

39:30 would sometimes have to know what the people were carrying; for instance, were they carrying firearms or explosives or those sorts of things, he'd need to know that. Because in the event that something went wrong during the despatch of the person, he'd know... he wouldn't push somebody out if they had explosives strapped to them, you know, and he would need to know and

40:00 so that was another thing. But and the thing about it is, we didn't talk about it when we came back. That was absolutely taboo.

Tape 7

00:32 **You were just telling us about when you'd come back and how you wouldn't talk.**

And well, and of course that stayed with us into the '70s and this was ever impressed upon us that the secrecy… And Terrance O'Brien, in his book

01:00 he brings this out quite specifically and explains the reasons for it. So we didn't know what our mates were doing. Even if they went on a similar... rarely did the two of us... two aircraft go to one spot. They went sometimes in the same area; for instance, we might go in and do a bombing run as a sort

01:30 of diversion run for somebody to do a… But we wouldn't know what they were doing, they'd know that we were doing the bombing. But that would be all. And sometimes we'd even be flying almost in the same airspace. But wouldn't know the other aircraft was there. It was evidently important and it was evidently necessary to do that way. From what I read, it was and from what I read, it was successful because it was done this way.

02:00 So the happiest thing I can say is that I managed to complete tour and I didn't get killed. Whereas a lot of our people, of the 26 pilots that went out to India in that first lot, there were only five of them went on special duties. Only five

02:30 of us. One of those was killed in the operations and one of them didn't complete a tour – he was medically unfit for some other reasons – and so there were three of us, and because they got a bit of a dream run on, they completed their tours when the tour requirement was 200 hours.

03:00 At the time… the last one of those completed their tour, they just kicked the… take the tour up to 300 hours and I finished up doing about 360 hours by the time the war was over. And we did a couple of things directly after the war, where we still remained confidential because they weren't sure that the message about the peace had got out. And for instance, on VP [Victory in the Pacific] day, I was flying over Saigon and

03:30 but so we only... that's how many of those pilots... Other Australians that were involved in it were nearly all wireless operator air gunners and I didn't know of any navigators who were bomb aimers that were Australian, as I say. But the other Australians that went out in that 26, they went to other squadrons and they...

04:00 Bill Pearce, a mate of mine, he went to 159 Squadron and Roy Edwards went to, what did he go to? Roy lives in Perth now. He went to 159 Squadron too. So they went to an entirely different... They were straight-out bombing operations and so they operated differently to us. And we rarely saw them.

04:30 Even on leave, you might be on leave in Calcutta, you would rarely see any of these people from the other squadrons.

So you mentioned that you couldn't talk about what you were doing. Was this hard for you when you were on the ground?

It wasn't in the finish. It was initially. But once you'd accepted it, you not only didn't want to talk... nobody wanted to talk

05:00 with you about it. It was a common phenomena and it wasn't expected. It was expected you didn't talk about it. You know, blokes'd get back in... and we'd... I'd get back at the same time as another crew and we'd go into the mess, have our greasy duck eggs and baked beans for a meal and you wouldn't think of talking about where you were. When you would

05:30 find out sometimes, where somebody went, was when they were brought down, when they were killed or hadn't returned. But it wasn't hard in the finish. But it was... to me, it was pretty hard when I couldn't even speak to the pilot I was next door to, when I didn't really know, I'm flying out to do a mission and I don't know precisely what it's all about. And I know that I might be the one

06:00 that's got to go in and do it. And that happened on several occasions. But you didn't know why it was. But the... one bloke in your crew knew. But you just didn't discuss it. It was sort of like implanted in you.

So what do you do if you don't know where you're going? But the pilot knows and then suddenly you've got to fly?

Well we've got a direction, what we do know is that when

06:30 we get to the DZ, the dropping zone, that we've got to get this signal we're told that the DZ is in a valley, and at 5000 feet above sea level and we've got to come in over a ridge that's 10,000 feet above sea level. But what you've got on board you don't know. You know you've got packages. But whether the packages have got

07:00 jelly beans or dynamite you've got no idea. And there was a pretty good reason for that, you know, if we were brought down and we were interviewed by the Japs under fairly strong pressure, you'd be pretty strong not to squeal if you knew what it was about. But if you didn't know what it was about, you couldn't say. And so that was

07:30 the safe part about it. And that was more the case, I thought, was if you were taking people... if you were dropping people in, you didn't want to know who they were, whether they were French, Irish or Chinese or what they were. You didn't want to know what they were and you really didn't want to know whether they were male or female, whether they sang contralto or heavy bass, or what they did. Because the more you knew, the more pressure they were under, in the event that something went wrong with

08:00 the exercise. And because, you'd be pretty tough person, I'd reckon, I don't know how I ever would have gone, if I'd have been subjected to any... I'd have been able to stand a bit of torture. But how much of it is something that I don't think any of us would know, until we were put to the test. So it

08:30 it had its benefits that way. The less you know, the less you need to know and we... I didn't ever hear of anybody ever complain about it. And normally you've got one or two stickybeaks in your crowd. But I never got asked, you know, "Where did you go?" They knew that you'd been up about 16 hours, so they knew that it was

09:00 probably over into Cambodia or somewhere there. They knew that if you were up over 20 hours, you probably went down to Malaya, or you were over 17 hours, you'd gone into French Indochina. But they would know that by the fact of how long you were away. And besides that you didn't go into the mess and drink grog and then spill it all out, in the mess. As a matter of fact the

09:30 sergeants' mess on the ship, there was no grog in it. There was in the officers' mess, there was some grog. But in the sergeants' mess there wasn't. So, you know, we... you didn't have a... you didn't spill your guts [talk too much] because you were full of grog, it wasn't necessary.

What did you talk about?

Oh, we'd talk about lots and lots of things, you know. We'd talk about

10:00 the physical aspects of the trip, you know, how the engines displayed and how the weather was and how

the mountains were and also well you'd say whether you'd seen any Japs, whether you'd... You'd always discuss that, whether you'd been attacked. No, there was plenty to talk about. But not the specific. You'd talk about the general aspects of it and not the specifics. And

10:30 but it... You mainly were concerned that the other bloke got back all right, you know, that was your particular worry is whether your mates had got back or whether they'd been injured. And there was nothing worse than that long wait, if they weren't back, and nothing, you didn't know where they were, where they'd gone or what they'd

11:00 done and sometimes it was ten, twelve, fifteen hours after they were due back and hadn't returned that you'd have any idea that something had happened to them. Because sometimes it could have been that they'd had engine trouble and pulled in at... called in at one of the advanced aerodromes. So there

11:30 was tremendous comradeship in the show. And you sort of... everybody looked after anybody if anybody was not back, and they'd make sure that their gear was all safe. But if there was... But their... all their private things were in right and... were set up properly, those sorts of things, you'd be

12:00 extremely careful. And of course, if those that didn't return you'd make sure that you'd guard their precious things with your life. And that happened freely, you know, that happened frequently that you'd have to pack up people's gear. And because we had Indians working around in the barracks

12:30 areas and they did laundry and there was always a chai wallah there with a cup of tea, making a cup of tea. But they were poor people and you couldn't blame them if there's a five pound note on the place that you could be sure that it wouldn't be there the next day. So there were those sorts of aspects that... such good teamwork, you know.

Was there any occasions where you

13:00 **lost a really good mate, where they didn't come back?**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. As I say, I even lost one in the night training, you know, this bloke here. Bloke here, he just went up, we had tea and he had to go up and do a night test on his aeroplane and it was going to be three or four circuits – they were testing out some lights and things – and

13:30 hear a bang and he wasn't there any longer. Another time, there were two aircraft flew, took off in front of me and they both blew up in takeoff. And it was pretty hard, they were pretty hard to come to grips with. But you got immune to it. It's not something you look forward to. But it was an inevitable part of the game.

14:00 And next time it might be you and so you made sure that you'd... I wrote home on at least five occasions to parents of people that were lost, that didn't return. It was pretty hard writing those letters too. But you know that it's what'd be appreciated.

14:30 And yeah that fella there, his father used to be the secretary of South Melbourne Football Club and I went over there with a football team in 1946, just after the war, and I went over and saw the family. Yeah those... many memories that are... sometimes I...

15:00 even now, sometimes I wake up and I, you know, these things come back. I'm more concerned with normally with what's happening with other people and on occasions. I'm glad to get down, glad to land it. But it's a

15:30 legacy that I say we've got for the rest of life. But in all of it I think it makes you a better person, you know. You appreciate certain things that... And even although I'm a pretty intolerant sort of a bloke most of the time, makes you more tolerant to lots of things and gives you a bit of understanding of the,

16:00 you know, what tragedy can do to people. When you're young and 19 and 20, it's all about your there going. But at the same time, when you lose a friend, say one friend a week or two a months, it's sort of... and of course, quite a number of them who were friends were Poms. They, you know, a big

16:30 number of them were Poms or Canadians or one... there was one Kiwi bloke, there was a bloke from the West Indies, we had a few of them on board. So they weren't all Australians as matter of fact, apart from the fact that you identified as an Australian, you were all one big family, you know, one,

17:00 there's one of your mob here, this bloke here, a wild Irishman. A wonderful bloke.

What kind of things would you have to write in the letters to someone's parents?

Oh, that's hard, that's really hard. Because you don't know what the family situation... you know what it is from the, from what

17:30 perspective you've obtained from talking to this bloke. But you never talked all that intimately about it, they... You know, they talk about Mum and Dad and kid sister and the brother. But it's... And sometimes they've got photos of the family and you had to sort of count to ten with those. But it was awkward. It was not something you looked

18:00 forward to. But it was something you didn't walk away from either, because it was absolutely necessary that the... Well I know how my people were about my brother and how they just hungered for information, and so I made it my business that... as soon as it was possible, as soon as there was something I could say positively, you know, that even if he was missing I could say

18:30 he's positively missing, that we had no news that he was alive or dead, you know. But I'd write as soon as possible. And I'd get some wonderful letters back. But, oh well, I wouldn't want to do it all again and yet I'm glad I did it. But I don't know how I'd last if I had to try and do it

19:00 or if I had have had to try and do it again. Because everything's new and you take it as things come. But one of those books there, it gives a description of how the weather was and how the aircraft behaved. The aircraft used to have to get sometimes you would get into a storm in a cumulonimbus storm and your aircraft,

19:30 every dial on your clock'd go off and sometimes it'd indicate you were diving direct, other times it'd indicate you were in a vertical climb, other times you were in some sort of a roll and chaos. And it used to be like trying to hold a... he... picks the words right there, you're trying to hold like a wild bucking bloomin' monster. And one time we got into some storm over near Hanoi in

20:00 what's now Vietnam in French Indochina and both come out of it within probably less than a thousand feet from the ground, both pulling back and eventually just pulled the aircraft out of a dive directly into the ground. Had there been a high peak, sitting up somewhere around there instead of being where we were, we'd have been curtains. But you

20:30 just couldn't control the aeroplane. And it wasn't any fun, particularly then you had another eight hours to fly back or you might have had another hour to go and do your... do what you come to do and then fly back home. And there wasn't much fun in that sort of thing. But the weather I think accounted for a lot of our problems.

21:00 **Talk us through one of your most dangerous missions that you can remember.**

Well. I can't... some of them merge into one, you know, I don't have any details. But I'm aware of once when we took off and we had what they call a runaway prop and a runaway boost – that means our boost of our

21:30 engine went off the board – and our engines... the propeller manager went off the board. Eventually between the two of us we wiped the boost off and managed to wipe that engine back and eventually were able to, by using the feathering of the engine, bring back the propeller and that got us off. And we were an hour and a half into the trip by the time everything is really settled

22:00 down and we're sure where we're going. And then we get into a fairly violent storm and that same exercise and didn't see the ground or the sky for, I suppose, 30 minutes at times and didn't at any stage feel as though we were flying straight and level. And then had to drop into a very small valley in the dark and managed to do it and we did it. But

22:30 I almost swore off after that, it was... there was tension and hazard for every segment of the trip, from the time we took off, till the time, even till the time we got back home again. And I thought I'd never want to do another trip like that. And it was about a 14 hour trip and if you're 14 hours of that you're not in much... not in very good nick. It's the sort of one where you

23:00 think, "I want to go home and knock off a dozen bottles of beer," or something. But we didn't do that, you're just exhausted and couldn't do a... yeah, anyway.

What would you do when you'd go back after such an exhausting trip?

Well, have a shower. Have a shower and probably go up the mess and have a cup of tea. And just let down, you know, just get out in, just in shorts like

23:30 we... people with their shorts and sandals and because the weather there was in the monsoon season was much like this is here, and there was no air conditioning, no fans and so you didn't get very comfortable in the bed. So that's... yeah that's mainly what you'd do. Because you didn't talk much, you didn't go and talk about it to anybody

24:00 else. You sometimes went and talked with a couple of your team mates to see how they were, see how they'd recovered and because you weren't the only one on the airplane and you had another ten people there and you'd go and see how they were and it'd come out in the briefing when the captain was debriefed – there'd be a report of all this'd go into the squadron records.

24:30 And somebody else'd find out about it then in the squadron records and they'd see about it. But to answer your question, what would you do to come back? It's... nothing particular, you know, you'd want to keep life as normal as possible. And I guess

25:00 it was different for me at 20 years of age than for old Tom at 40 years of age. It'd be different entirely to the way we'd handle it mentally and physically. But I know you didn't look forward too much to the next one. Although sometimes you did, you thought, "Well the sooner I get up and

25:30 do another one, the better it'll be to get it out of the system." And so that's what would happen. We had an airplane – there's a mention of it in there – the bloke come back with only half a wing on one side, he's in some low flying, went down and tore the outer part of his wing off and yet he brought that aircraft back in again. We had

26:00 blokes... several blokes, come back who didn't fly again. They had reasons not to want to fly again. And it was all understandable. There was never any criticism of anybody who found the going a bit tough, because there wasn't anybody that didn't find the going a bit tough. As I said, I would never want to do it again. But I'm bloody glad I did it, now.

26:30 It's been remarkable for my lifetime.

There was never anyone which raised that bad label of lack of moral fibre [cowardice] for anyone who came back and..?

Never on that squadron. But that was a well-known bloomin' tag that was about in the air force, LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre], "Oh, he went LMF." Never did I

27:00 hear it raised, even, you know, sometimes because everybody understood and it's a cowardly appellation anyway, it's not because nobody could understand what anybody else went through. I'm sure nobody can understand, I know how frightened I was from time to time,

27:30 and I don't know what it would have... what I would have needed to say, "Well look that's it, finished." I didn't ever get to that. But, you know, in retrospect I can think of... there were plenty of times when that could have happened, and so you didn't... that didn't happen. You'd be more going out of your way to try and help the bloke and to put him back on the train.

28:00 And that was the general feeling. And again, the bloke mentions it in that book there, about anybody who said they weren't frightened at any time would have been a liar, it just... You couldn't have been and I don't know of any of our blokes who didn't say they were frightened at some stage of the business. Or they'd tell you

28:30 about the physical parts of a trip, they were in storms and that, but how horrific it was. But none of them said, "Well we're not going up next time." Because see, the people that we were carrying and dropping in, the people that we were dropping supplies into, they were face to face with this continuously, day in and day out, day

29:00 and night. And unless they got properly serviced, well the whole of that bloody war effort goes to jig. So it... there's no way you... well no way that I could see that you could contemplate on criticising anybody because they didn't feel up to at that point in time. That same person that mightn't feel up to it

29:30 at that point in time might be the bloke that the very next bloody time he's the one that walks out on the wing and saves you. So and I found that the blokes that took it the... that got it the toughest were the braggarts. You know, blokes that... "I'm this, that and the other." When the mud pie hit the fan, it was

30:00 quite frequently them that didn't measure up. But then they didn't accept... they quite often attempted to bluff their way out of the situation that they'd got themselves into. But it didn't come over too well, and they were patent, open as you could wish for, you could read them, read them like a book.

30:30 And quite often the timid and meekest bloke of the lot, well you'd find that when the pressure was on, he was the toughest of the lot. So there was no way of judging the book by its cover. The proof of the pudding was in the eating and that's the way we lived it. And I think that I saw the best

31:00 in humanity. And there were only two or three occasions when I was very critical of my own people, you know, and then again, I counted to ten and said, "Well maybe I've only seen just this part, I haven't seen it all." And that's the way it's got to be.

31:30 **Do you remember any occasions where you came under enemy fire?**

Under enemy fire? Yeah several times. We did a trip... one trip down to the Malaya... southern Malayan peninsula and we'd been under 1000 feet all the way down the flying down the Bay of Bengal and we came to Penang, and we came out of cloud over Penang, over Jap air force

32:00 and they had planes up in the air within seconds. How they... No, because they were so far behind the enemy lines, our lines, that you wouldn't have thought they'd needed to have anybody on guard. But they were up and yeah, they give us a bit of a fright and we headed straight back into cloud and stayed in cloud as long as we possibly could. Fortunately, those days, you didn't have radar – the radar and those sorts of

32:30 aids that would help them to fire. And then another occasion over on the main Bangkok railway line and going through that area, yeah, we were attacked by several Zeros there and several times and then we were certainly fired at by anti-aircraft fire from the airport, airstrip in Hanoi and also at very early in the piece from the airstrip in Mandalay in

33:00 Burma. Yeah. But not... they were so... Their lines were so far stretched that they could never have comprised a concerted attack. It wouldn't have been possible in concept for them for them to have been

able to do a concerted attack. And they'd have been just as bloomin' well not scared, as I say, but just as

33:30 amazed as we were for them to come across us, you know, because they would never have expected anybody to at nine o'clock in the morning to fly across the big Liberator way out across the top of Penang, you know, some 2000 kilometres from beyond the lines. And so that's it.

34:00 I always worked on the basis, if I was them, what would I do? Well, they just couldn't possibly have imagined that we would have been there. What would an airplane like ours be doing over Penang? There's no rhyme nor reason about it. Mind you there was plenty of reason for them to have light aircraft, these fighter planes down below. But there was no reason to have

34:30 one of our planes over Penang, not so far behind the lines. It'd be different matter if it was up further up in Borneo where… No, up in Burma where the 14th Army was fighting their way back into retaking Burma. No that.... But a few of our people brought back shrapnel holes in their plane, you know, and they struck it

35:00 at various places, we had anti-aircraft fire on us in Penang, in Hanoi when we went in on a scare bombing raid, or on a scatter bombing raid while somebody was dropping some people in and we had plenty of... Cause we went right up the strip and we got aircraft fire from the both ends of the strip as we went. Fortunately they were as surprised as...

35:30 more surprised than we were and they weren't on target by any means and we were probably as safe as we were ever been on that trip, in that situation, as if we were back home. Yes.

What's your feeling and reactions when you say, come over Hanoi or Penang and you see Japanese planes fire at you?

Well, your immediate reaction is, "God!

36:00 Let's get out of this." You know. But we'd had long enough to think, you say, "Well there's very little they can do for us and we can get out before they can get back." That's where you always were very happy with the bad weather. But I'd have hated to do it on a broad sunlit day with no clouds anywhere around. But rarely did I find that we were

36:30 ever in that situation. I can rarely remember flying in cloudless skies, although we must have at some time during the dry season. But I don't recall it. I don't really recall flying when there hasn't been a substantial amount of cloud around. There must have been, but it

37:00 wasn't significant enough to ring a bell.

What was it like flying through some of these tropical storms?

Oh, they were frightening. They were as frightening as any other part of the trip because if you know what the mechanics are in a cumulonimbus storm they... it's like a vertical vortex and you get currents going directly up and currents going directly down and you get

37:30 in one of these sheer currents and your plane gets flipped and you can just get broken up in them – even a big plane like the Liberator, just go into pulp wood. And when you're in them, as I say, that paper there tells you, when you're in the storm you just wonder how you can possibly get out of it. And that and the

38:00 fact that the height, mountain heights and that were not charted properly were two of the major hazards in all of it. To bring them both together at one stage, you were in a pretty horrible sort of a situation. You were very lucky not to come to pieces. And I'm sure that's how we lost some planes.

Tell us about how the mountains weren't properly charted. Like where?

38:30 Oh, this was virtually all over. Typically, I struck it initially in the mountains over what they call 'the hump' or the mountains in Burma. We had maps of that country which had been prepared when the British were in command there and they were supposed to be pretty hot. But as I say, I'd been flying over, I gave an example somewhere,

39:00 flying on our indicator's height of 14,000 feet and near a spot that the highest spot mark on it is 12,000 feet and the mountain's up above you. You know, there was that much difference that it was, you know, at least 3,000 feet quite often. Now, in the event that you couldn't see those, and you're flying through cloud, and you're flying solely on the information on the map, you'd think you'd be perfectly safe

39:30 to be flying at 14,000 feet and into there and you'd fly smack bang into it and hit it in the belly, not even hit it on the top. So I'm sure that happened and I'm sure that's happening even now. It's only because the maps that they were using in those days were maps that were probably done in the '30 s, and if they were done in the '30s they were probably done by surveyors out on

40:00 horseback or camel or... not camel, on elephant or something, and the accuracy of their instruments'd leave a heck of a lot to be, you know, to be considered. And there was no way in the world – I didn't find any of those maps – that I would rely on for map heights. And many of them I found even had rivers

40:30 marked in the wrong spot and even mountains marked in the wrongs spot.

Tape 8

00:41 **So tell me a bit more about the Americans that had a base nearby.**

Well, the Americans who had their base nearby in the

01:00 in northern India, in Calcutta, were the people who were flying the B-29s, the aircraft that were bombing Japan. I didn't get to meet any of them except at the airstrip where we refuelled, so I didn't really get to know them. But they operated there for nearly all the bombing runs that were done over Japan with the B-29s. But there were

01:30 other American bases that were forward bases in northern Burma and then there was another one down the Burmese coast at... there was... I think Cox's Bazaar was one place and I can't think of the other, and they had their own aircraft operating from there. But some of them were only operating a transport arrangement, flying stuff into China and into

02:00 Kuming And they were... so from where they were going to be ready to do another assault back on the Japanese from within China. From Kuming. And that was mainly a transport station. And then we... Several times I had to land there running short of fuel or running short of... having engine trouble on the way home. And the thing that I noticed, that whenever we

02:30 landed there we always got a good feed. Because the... it was a diff... Well let's say it was different. It was... the American style... it was all first-class food and they always treated us fairly well, as a matter of fact, once we landed there. And the CO [Commanding Officer], we went up into the mess and we were having a meal and I was looking at a... on the way up I looked at a little Piper Cub

03:00 aircraft that they used and they used that for frontline reconnaissance work, this Piper Cub, and I expressed some, you know, some liking for this, before I went away. He says, "You can have that." Anyway, what I did do? What I managed to arrange for them to do was to have them fly it back to our 'drome and we had it back there for a while.

What did you do with it?

03:30 Well we had a few little trips. But it was left there and I suppose it was used by anybody that wanted to use it and.... But I saw very little of it after it got taken back. But it showed... It was a classic example of how the Americans could and did operate against the way that we and our penny pinchers that we were in Australia and Britain,

04:00 we couldn't operate that way – we wouldn't be able to give away an aeroplane. Admittedly, it was only a small reconnaissance thing. But so that was one example I had. But apart from that, I personally didn't come in contact a great deal with Americans. But O'Brien, that writes that book, The Moonlight War, he's

04:30 very suspicious that several of our airplanes that were lost in our early part of our operations, in the squadron, were brought down by Americans flying out of China. And one thing that was been reported to me since the war – and I've run across a bloke who knew, who come from Hanoi – who knew of a Liberator brought down north of Hanoi, one of ours it would have been.

05:00 It'd been shot down by an American plane. Now, I don't know how much truth there is in it. But O'Brien in that book, he's quite adamant that they did it and... because there was an intense rivalry between France and America, particularly between the de Gaulle of France and America, and the Americans

05:30 were antagonistic to de Gaulle both in Europe and in South-East Asia. Whether there's anything in it, it could sheet home any problems, I don't know. But we did an awful lot of flying for the... not for the French, with the French. They were a part of the deal because they knew more about French Indochina than the British did.

06:00 And they were nearly all French agents that we dropped in French Indochina so... But there was a rivalry between... an intense rivalry between the Americans and the French. It was, I suppose the reason that O'Brien quite... he quite patently says that they were the result of a... I'd hate to think they were, because I

06:30 lost a couple of mates in those... a couple of aeroplane crashes, and I don't think it was Americans that did it. And I didn't mind so much if they got hit by lightning or storm or things of that nature, or even by the Japs. But I'd be pretty grim if it was the Yanks who did it. There's no way I'll ever know and so I'll just sit and cogitate.

07:00 **We've been talking about the many things that could cause problems on the flights. Did you, or anyone else around you, have any superstitions or lucky charms?**

No I didn't. But there were people that did carry lucky charms or there were people who got into the

aircraft, they'd come out and they'd approach it from the port side and not from the starboard side. And I know of

07:30 people that did carry their watch on their other hand. One bloke that carried his watch on his other hand. I know of another bloke who always carried a special fountain pen with him on the trip. And I heard of this – this is quite common really. But I didn't carry anything like that myself. But I'm sure that it was fairly widespread, from

08:00 just the few examples that I ran into. And some of them were quite strange, some of the superstitions they had. It was as though they... say about which way you approach the plane when you got out to it and which way you put your cap on, put your cap on backwards to... pass the plane a certain way. Yeah, there were those sorts of suspicions, yes.

How would you describe your relationship with the plane?

08:30 With the plane? I'd actually had to be a part of it really. Once, even if you'd never been in that particular aircraft before, it became a part of you because it was critical to everything you did, and you were critical to everything it did. So you couldn't

09:00 have any enmity between yourself and the plane or feel that it as being something lesser than what it was. No I had great respect for the aeroplane, irrespective that I'd never... even one that I'd never been in before. And that quite often happened, because getting towards the end of the war, we started to fly some newer models of the aeroplane and

09:30 we hadn't seen them before. Yep, it certainly is a fact that for me, that I was a part of it and it was a part of me. And my whole operation, you know, that's right. Don't ask me difficult questions like that.

I was wondering

10:00 **if you would be willing to tell me about the time when the pilot couldn't...?**

Yeah, I can tell you about it. But I'd... I would... No way in the world that he be identified. The man be identified and... We were flying out into an exercise was just at the time, it would have been about a 12 hour trip, it was

10:30 western Cambodia or eastern Burma. It was in the hills in that country there and it had been very rough weather all the way through and the DZ, the dropping zone, was one that was down in a valley. And it was a very steep valley and you had to come in over a ridge and drop down into this valley and go into the DZ and drop from 300 foot and then climb to get out of it. You had a very big

11:00 serious climb to get out of it. And we were just about down to the bottom and he just threw his hands and feet in the air and said, "I can't do it." And I grabbed the controls...well I was holding the controls with him anyway while we were doing it, and that's what happened. And so we finished that... just finished, dropped what we had

11:30 on that run and I pulled up out of it and we headed off back home. And the engineer came and got him and they took him back and settled him down and gave him some... probably coffee and, oh, a sedation or something of the sort, and then we flew back home. And as we got near to the... we were diverted from our own...

12:00 landing at our own aerodrome to go to another aerodrome because the weather, we couldn't dive in there, so we were diverted from Johor to Digri. And so we were coming into Digri and we were going to land in Digri. I'd never landed... I'd never taken off or landed a Liberator. I'd flown them all, but that wasn't... As a second pilot, I didn't do that. And anyway we just...

12:30 So we were coming in to land and I said, "How's Jack back there?" And the engineer said, "Oh, he's not too bad." I said, "Come and get him set up back in his seat." So I got him to set in the seat and between the two of us we came...

13:00 he was only a young man too, what, 22. And the CO called me up and had a talk to me and he said, "Will we make you a skipper?" And I said, "Well that's up to you, you know." He said, "Well you're really much too young." He said, "I would never have a pilot... make anybody a captain under 21." He said, "So you're

13:30 really much too young." But he said, "If you really wanted to, I'd agree." And I said, "I'll be guided by you. If you think I'm too young, well then I don't think I am. But if you think I am, then we'll take it from there." And at that time I was... my rank that I was flying with was a flight sergeant and I later on

14:00 found out, the day I got discharged, that my commission had come through, that I'd become... actually been appointed a pilot officer before that and I'd been promoted to flying officer. And I was actually a flying officer on the date of discharge and I'd been commissioned for something like eight or nine months. But nowhere in my records did that... I find it now in

14:30 some of the records that I've got from [Department of] Veterans' Affairs. But there's one sheet I've got in my records that doesn't show it at all, and on one of my discharge certificates, it shows me with my officer's number and the other shows me with my ordinary number I've had. So there's still some

problems in Veterans' Affairs with records. Again,

15:00 it doesn't show anywhere in my records that I served time when I came back both in Fremantle and in Darwin, setting up the air training corps and I served there at least for three years in Darwin, in Fremantle and at least for three years in Darwin. But nowhere do those records appear in my records. So there

15:30 are things that aren't right somewhere along the line. I've never bothered, if I get fit enough one day I'll go and I'll do a bit of delving into it. So… But that's what happened in that situation.

And just a few more questions about that. What sort of thoughts went through your mind immediately when he suddenly said that he wasn't…?

Oh, I just... well I was more worried about him,

16:00 but I was also worried about the fact that… and more worried about getting the drop completed, getting the crew back to and the aeroplane back. It was a pretty... we were in a dicey position where unfortunately if I hadn't have done something, we'd have just crashed and

16:30 but fortunately when we flew, we flew together, he relied on me quite a lot and I don't think he had any... I think if he had have had any fears about going to hurt the rest of the crew, I think he would have held himself together. But I think he was quite happy that I'd be able to do it.

Do you understand what he did?

17:00 I understand what he did and why and why he did it. It was the intense pressure – it was on all the time. And, as I say, eventually I found his address in Canada and I wrote to him and he wrote back to me and it was, you know, quite a wonderful letter. I've never written... I didn't respond again, I thought, "I'll just leave it go at that. I don't want him to think that I'm sort of

17:30 pushing anything along." And yeah, he was a nice bloke. But again, and he was an immaculate pilot, he was a... like in so far as precision and capability as a pilot himself, yeah. I was a bit rough on the engines. But he was... everything was right with him when he flew.

And you said that when you were coming into land, you got the engineer

18:00 **to bring him up to sit between you.**

Like they put him back in his... in the left hand... I stayed in the... No, it was the other way round. I stayed in the pilot's... in the left hand seat and he come and sat as my... virtually as my second pilot. But so...and he went down with me and he... I to this day, I reckon he did the landing.

And what happened to him?

I don't know, I

18:30 hadn't heard anything about him, there was no word from him in the squadron until I picked up a publication from the... put out by the 358 Squadron. Our squadron formed a group back in England and they listed his name and his address in the list of members of the 358 Squadron.

19:00 So I just wrote to him. He lived in London, Ontario. And after the war he tells me he was a tyre representative for one of the big tyre companies. I don't know, I forget which one it was, right throughout the... he used to travel right across Canada. And he was getting ready to retire at that stage when he wrote to me. And he... so

19:30 he was going to retire and he was going to live in London, Ontario. He was going to stay there.

And what happened as soon as the plane landed? Where did he go? What did you do with him?

I took him over to the debriefing room and he sat in the debriefing room and he told them what happened. And then we had another pilot come over from Johor and took the plane back and took us back to our own station.

20:00 **Did he go with you?**

No he… I didn't see him again, from the time we'd landed, no. Never. I had no idea what had happened to the man.

How did you feel about that?

How did I feel about it? Oh, I was most distraught because I at least wanted to see him and… if do nothing else, to hold his hand and. But I didn't get the opportunity and I was not told

20:30 where he'd gone. And then I had to… we… I cut our... I was off operations for about three weeks because I wasn't skipper myself. We got a new pilot out… proper… a Pom, a private school… one of the… and a real wonderful bloke.

21:00 I didn't think that I'd get emotional like this.

Why was he such a wonderful bloke?

Well, you know, they... Poms get criticised of being, you know, so hoity toity,

21:30 well he was hoity toity.[arrogant] But he was as good as the bloke you ran into down the pub or wherever you could. He fitted in anywhere and an extremely competent pilot. And we landed one time in heavy rain, the rain was so heavy the airfield was awash, the airstrip was awash, and we got

22:00 to the end of the run and he just about...you know, he put the brakes on and nothing happened, so he revved up an engine and we did a round loop on the... and went back down the strip and it was very quick thinking, you know. And he didn't sort of lose a hair. You know, it was just as though it was an automatic thing to do. Now, I'm sure I wouldn't have handled it that as effectively as he handled it. And we might have finished up getting wiped off. But...

And what was he like as a man?

22:30 Oh, great fella. A fairly young bloke – he was only about 23 or 24. But he was a university graduate. But oh, a bit reserved, he wasn't the sort of bloke to go down the pub with you. But he fitted in so well and he didn't

23:00 endeavour to make his trademark on the crew at all. He just went in there and he was accepted and they accepted him and he accepted them, and it was fairly good. So I did about half my tour with the first bloke and the other half with the second bloke. And he was all for me going and getting crew of my own and

23:30 getting off on and... But I at that stage, I'd got close to the finish of... Well I had over the 300 hours, which was more than I needed, and the war was getting close to the end and I said, "I'll finish up with whatever we finish now. I don't want to start another career at this stage of the business." And I was a bit anxious. I was pretty glad to finish too, because it had been a long time and I'd been through a fair bit. And

24:00 some of the other members of the crew, they were very happy to get finished. And two of my... the two wireless operators were both Sydney blokes and I've run into them a couple of times since the war. One of them was in his late 30s too, and he's dead now, unfortunately. But it's been very interesting.

24:30 Anyway that's what happened with that chap.

What was the longest distance that you ever flew?

I don't know about the longest distance in distance, but in time was 23 hours and 50 minutes in the air. We took off from north of... Well actually we took off from the Yankee strip because we were flying on this long and that was from north Calcutta and we flew down over the Bay of Bengal and then over

25:00 then over down the Malayan peninsula to within 25 mile north of Singapore. And we dropped in a couple of people there and some pretty important equipment that they needed and then we flew back. Most of the time we were flying fairly low and under cloud and over the sea and that was always a worry because there are islands poking up all over the place that aren't marked in the Bay of Bengal. But that was the

25:30 longest trip. I did another one too, about two hours less than that, to a bit further north, to about somewhere round about Penang in Malaysia. And I did, I think, another... a couple of 20 hours. I did quite a few 17 hour ones over into French Indochina.

26:00 And as you came back, there're 14 or 15 hours into Cambodia and back to about 8 hours in some parts of Burma. So they varied from wherever you went. And that was one reason you knew where your... sometimes where your mates had gone, because you knew how long they'd been in the air. And you knew where you'd go if they were, if you were up in the air that long. But that's

26:30 the only sort of indication you'd get from anyone.

And how would you stay awake and focused during this time?

You just had to. It became fairly easy. I don't recall ever nodding off to go to sleep on any trip, ever. There was too much responsibility. But sometimes, low flying and flying through cloud

27:00 is quite difficult and quite tiring, and particularly if your automatic pilot wasn't working properly and you had to sort of keep jigging that along. So it was necessary to stay awake. And I don't recall myself or either of the two pilots I flew... other two pilots I flew with, ever laying back to have a snooze.

27:30 The first one as I say, we used to smoke a lot of cigarettes together. But the second one, we didn't. He didn't smoke. He was the right sort of bloke to have. Yeah, what's next?

When you'd have to do drops, was there a different way of flying into position depending on what you were dropping?

Yeah, there was, yeah. Yes, you had to get down.

28:00 The one thing you had to be sure is to make as little… keep the noise down as little as you could, keep your presence down as little as you could because you had to be worried about the people on the ground, that if somebody knew what was happening they could be picked up on the ground. Fortunately this never happened in any of our situations. So you had to be unobtrusive and go in as quietly as possible. And you had to get down to about

28:30 particularly when you're going down into a valley you… to get to 300 feet. It was pretty difficult to keep it and take both pilots all their time to hold the aircraft at the level. And of course, the altimeter didn't tell you how high you were off the ground – it told you how high you were off sea level and how... But you didn't know how high you were off naturally off the ground so you had to judge that

29:00 by yourself and between the two of you. And the reason you'd drop from about 300 foot was because you could drop safely and be sure you'd get a direct drop. If you try to drop from higher up, the packages could get spread around and they could be picked up by someone else and the people on the ground could be picked up. But if you wanted to drop them right on the spot, you had to be… the bomb aimer had to be able to pick up the

29:30 thing and mark, and he had to be able to press the call, and then the despatcher had to push them. And so they were in dropped. And you didn't want to do more than one run. If you had to do more than one run, that brought back, you know, brought back the point that there was somebody in the area. Sometimes you had to do it. Sometimes. And you didn't want to miss out the first time round. Fortunately,

30:00 I can't recall any time when our operation wasn't successful. The only times the operation wasn't successful was when we didn't drop because we couldn't… we weren't sure… we weren't… we were in the right place and we weren't sure that we'd had the right signals. So they were unsuccessful when we did those sort of…

And tell me about the signals that you would get.

Oh, they'd just be from the Aldis lamp.

30:30 You might get an, da- da- dit, da-daa-daa… dit. Dot and dash and… or you might have a couple of numbers together and they'd be a signal. We all understood the morse code and particularly everybody in the crew understood it, and they all understood each time we went out as to what we'd be looking for from the ground, to signal

31:00 so that it might be the… We never had a bloke in the tail gunner passage while we did a low level drop, he came out and he worked with the dispatcher pushing the packages and the things off. But we… they would, we'd have all eyes in the plane looking for the signal to see where it was, and normally the signal would be first of all seen by the navigator or the bomb aimer, up front. And sometimes it'd be seen by the pilots

31:30 but that was important. It was critical that you got that signal and you recognised it. Then you had to quite often signal back that you had the whole tie up and it was an intriguing sort of a situation. But it was effective and it was quite successful.

And how about when you were going on bombing runs, rather than dropping?

32:00 Oh, on the bombing runs you'd make as much noise as you could and draw all the fire that you could and keep attention on you. But you would drop on a place which was say on a… if you were dropping on… at Hanoi Airport for instance, we dropped on the… where the planes were all stationed. And in Saigon, we dropped on the control tower and so you'd pick something like that. That was

32:30 one that needed to be looked after and go on from there.

And would you have to take a photo..?

No, no we didn't photos. As a matter of fact, the cameras weren't as effective those days. The photography of those days was very immature compared to what it is now. You know, and we didn't have computers.

33:00 Even our radio navigation was quite elementary. As a matter of fact we were the first ones… our plane was the first ones ever to take on board a new radio navigation aid – I'll think of it in a moment – mainly because our navigator had done a tour of operations in bombers over Europe and he was a very experienced navigator. And we

33:30 were the first to use this scheme in… It was a navigational aid, and where you might be down in Malaysia and you'd get a radio shot on something in India and somewhere else in Ceylon perhaps, and that helps you to locate your position. I can't think of the name of it. We were the first to use it and that was because he was so professional in what it was.

34:00 And it was quite successful and it was used then. But by that time the war had finished.

Did you ever do any drops to POW [Prisoner of War] camps in Malaya?

In the finish, yeah. As a matter of fact we were over... not in Malaya, no in Saigon, yeah we were over Saigon on VP Day and we flew right down over Saigon and flew right around the prisons and the hospitals where the

34:30 prisoners of war were, and they waved. And we were pretty low on the ground, yes, we.... But we didn't drop anything in them because we didn't have anything to drop. But we did several drops thereafter. To the prisoners of war camp, some on the railway line and some down there. Yeah. And as a matter of fact that's what the squadron continued to do. I'd finished flying just about altogether then

35:00 after the war and they did an awful lot of work of that nature until the squadron folded up late 1945... late 1946... late 1945.

Did you get any leave while you were with the squadron?

Once I got a fortnight's leave and went up into a place called Narni Tow [?], it's north of Delhi and it's in the Himalayas, magnificent

35:30 hill station. There's a big lake up there and we got a fortnight's break. This was after I'd done 200 hours of flying. I went up there and yeah, that was an extremely interesting thing. And it was a hill station and it had been used quite a lot by the British army and the British Raj in the days had gone by. And that was

36:00 pretty interesting.

What did you do for that fortnight?

I mainly did horse riding. You could hire a horse up there and drove through the Himalayas. Drove through some spots where... and ran across... bearers walking over the... with loads on their back over some of the very high mountain ranges. It was about 10,000 feet up in the air Narni Tow. Yeah, I'd have liked to have gone back and done some

36:30 further work there. But it was a good break because it was cool – the one time I felt cool. And we travelled by train from Calcutta to New Delhi and from New Delhi we travelled by bus up into the mountains. And up to the hill station.

37:00 **What made you decide to go there for leave?**

It was one of the places I'd read about. I could have gone to some of the other places that are more well known, you know. But this impressed me and I'm glad I went because it was... I got a good holiday, got a good break and I met some nice people there.

37:30 There was a couple of Anglo-Indian families on there... The father and the brothers had been with the railways there and they'd retired. Well, the father had retired but the brothers hadn't. And the girl in the family, she was school teacher up there and it had a... it was an education place for the... you know, the toffy people. Yeah, so that was... yeah that was something I

38:00 hadn't forgotten. But I... it had just slipped my mind.

And who did you go with?

I went with one of the other members of me crew, one of the wireless operators. He went with me. And we were pretty good cobbers and we got... Oh, and also the Cockney engineer and there was three of us that went. And we were all good mates and we enjoyed it. And

38:30 some of the roads up in those places are quite scary. Talk about flying in an aeroplane – you'd be looking down the side, it was almost out of sight, the bottom of the valley and just a road around the... just wide enough for the bus. And they were very old buses that and the road was just wide enough every now and again there'd be a pull away and you could go in and pull off if somebody was coming the other way.

39:00 Yeah that was, that was an interesting story.

And did you notice any differences in the culture in this part of India compared to other parts that you'd been in?

Yeah I guess I did. Actually there was more at this... Narni Tow there was more influence from the Anglo-Indian part of the community. There were more mixed people there and... Anglo-Indians... and they were a

39:30 they were sort of a culture on their own. And they had some pretty fine people amongst them. Yeah, no they were the progeny in the main of people who went out to India in the very... in the early days and yeah, they were... I noticed that difference and also there were a lot more Hindus in this area than

40:00 there were Muslims in where I was. Incidentally, if you got charged into court there in those days, and I nearly did, for reckless riding on a horse – I didn't get charged – you could elect to be heard before a Muslim magistrate or a Hindu magistrate. So I didn't have to make the choice. But I thought

40:30 that was rather strange.. But it helped out with the locals that they could be heard by people of their own ilk.

Tape 9

00:32 **Tell us about the squadron motto.**

Do you know that it's slipped my mind. I know it. But I haven't seen it for such a while and... no, I... it's gone

01:00 right out of my mind. Dear me.

Yes, I was just asking you about the squadron motto.

'To feed the flame'. Yes, I don't know where it emerged from, where it came in... You see the squadron itself was only invented in December 1944.

01:30 It didn't exist prior to December, 1944, and it was established solely to go into flying special duties with Liberators out of northern Bengal. It... our... the squadron itself, it emerged out of the... I think it was 16724, was the heavy conversion

02:00 unit that was where we did our flying. It was the aircraft there and all the paraphernalia from there which we took up to Bengal to start. And our squadron leader was Wing Commander Farr, and it was him, I know, he was the first one I ever heard, make an expression about the squadron motto.

02:30 But unfortunately we didn't carry it on our aircraft. It was never a symbol on the aircraft, one of the reasons for that was, I think, was that if the aircraft was brought down they just didn't want it to be identified as to where it came from. And I think that was what it was about because everything was so hush-hush. But the squadron was formed out of

03:00 the heavy conversion unit. 80% of the squadron unit travelled up to Bengal by train from Coolah goldfields which is just outside Bangalore, near Madras in southern India. But we flew an aircraft plus a considerable amount of gear up in an aircraft and we flew up and we were there

03:30 probably before quite a number of the people who came up by train. And so it began its first operation in January... in January 1945. And that's when we lost our first three... We lost our first three crews on our first night out. And that was when it was. And we... originally we were stationed... went to a place called Digri,

04:00 in Bengal. But then transferred over to be with 357 Squadron which was also Liberators. But also had Dakota aircraft flying with it. And they were flying out of a place called Johor, and we flew over and we became 2nd Squadron at Johor. Later on I landed at Digri a couple of times. But

04:30 our headquarters were at Johor and that's where Squadron Leader O'Brien was, who wrote the book, The Moonlight War. But apart from that, I didn't have any use for the squadron motto.

Talking about India, the jungle training that you talked about earlier. Who was teaching you all the skills that you were learning?

05:00 There were a couple of people from the 14th Army – that's Wingate's 14th Army. But there... the majority of the people that were instructors or people in it were nationals from behind the line from... people who may later on have been dropped back in over the edge. People from northern Burma and Cambodia and Hanoi and

05:30 we didn't have any Malaysians that I can remember. Because it was mainly directed towards the upper... the northern end of the mainland of South-East Asia.

What were they like?

Oh, well they were pretty impressive people. The fellas from the 14th Army, they were really pukkah instructors

06:00 and you learnt from them or you didn't learn from them. You found out about it. But the nationals from the other countries, they were quite terrific blokes, you know. But our major problem with them is that they all didn't speak English fluently enough. They spoke sufficient English to get you to know their courses, and of course there were some of the words that they used and some of the things that they identified in their own

06:30 language and they didn't come out in any translation anywhere. One thing I can remember is mythimbor was the northern Burmese for, 'train engine,' steam engine. And there's a couple of those things that stick in the memory from time to time. But we did go through a fairly hectic

07:00 language course, you know, a man to man course to get language appreciation. Fortunately I didn't ever have to use it. It was mainly based on the fact that if you were going to be brought down in that country, that you had to exist and you had to exist as competently as possible.

How did they communicate some of their ideas

07:30 **when they couldn't speak great English?**

Oh, well, they spoke sufficiently well enough and in it always they could by practice, they could show you how to do... For instance, they could show you how to light fires, they could show you which plants that you might use and they could show you how to use a knife to cut certain plants and so with the combination

08:00 of visual and their own display and their limited use of the language. Yeah, they were very good. And you could quite easily spend a day with them and not be handicapped by the fact that you were... that neither they... you didn't speak their language and they didn't speak yours. You could say, at the end of the day, that you both had pretty full communication. It was...

08:30 They were people who'd been trained pretty well with the British army and probably for a long time. And probably a lot of them have had contact with British from time to time. Although there weren't many British over in Cambodia or over in that end, they were mainly in Burma and places like that. But there weren't so many over in French Indochina. Most of them were more French speaking

09:00 if there was any language at all. No but, we'd... It was not a problem.

Were you learning things about cultural things and maybe hand... physical gestures that you should do?

Yeah, we were. But I'm afraid that they've all slipped by me now and also the... You learned some of the taboos about how you approached certain people at certain times. We learnt a bit about Buddhism,

09:30 because Buddhism is a fairly major religion through that area. But time's just gone by and I've had no cause to... No recall to have to use any of that. And in 1944, what's that now? It's a long time ago, that's 60 years ago, so it's a pretty long to try to recall.

On this

10:00 **you talked about this test where you had to go from one place to another on the jungle training. Did you run into any villagers or any locals when you went on this trip?**

On occasion. Yeah, yeah, at the time, I did two of these. I did one was a fairly short one and that was and there... I did run, go through a village to get there. But in the major one, the big one, only an odd person did I... But some of the country was quite... it was quite enormous and some of the valleys we had to cross were

10:30 gigantic some of the hills you had to go over and... But we'd had enough training and enough in within the training to learn how to do it. And then, of course, you had to sleep out and you had to carry the minimum amount of luggage that you'd want. You didn't worry about shaving every day, that was for sure. And no it

11:00 was a grand learning experience and it'd be a wonderful thing for some of these courses that are run for the some of the young adventurous now, to do a course like it. I think that I could have become addicted to being involved in that sort of thing, had I stayed there. And there was a challenge

11:30 every day. And there... I talked before about animals. There were snakes, there were some pretty venomous snakes around and there were jackal like animals, they weren't jackal. But there were things like that, that you wouldn't be safe sleeping out in the open.

What was the environment?

The environment was continuously raining,

12:00 nearly always, we... there was over... in old-fashioned numbers, there was over 200 inches of rain a year there. Now 200 inches is in... what's that? Not 200 inches of rain a year, there was 200... more than that, far more than that... 200 inches of rain. It's about three times as much as anything I'd ever heard of before, whatever it came out to be. And it was

12:30 wet. You slept in wet clothes all the time whilst you were out. And it was quite physically dangerous, some of the areas to move across. And the... some of the creeks, well they didn't call them creeks. But the rivers or whatever, some of the waterways were, they were flowing very fast. You wouldn't want to try and duck dive through some of them. But again, a wonderful experience.

13:00 Not enough of it. Enough of it to give you the basics that we needed to have. But not enough to satisfy your appetite.

And a couple of questions about some of your flying missions. I was interested to know why you did some of your drops on the full moon?

Mainly because the... to give the people on the ground the opportunity, without lighting fires,

13:30 and to keep lights and that, and to keep lights out of it. The idea of it was that you dropped always on the full moon. And it had to be a full, full moon, you know, it... there'd be a week or two in the month where you wouldn't drop at all in those places. But it was because of that, it was because of... and also for the safety of the people on the ground. They

14:00 didn't have to light fires, they didn't have to light beacons and they didn't have to show torches. And the only light that used to show was from a sort of an Aldis lamp, a torch from the ground, where the beam was well hidden. And it'd be directed towards where the plane was coming from and you'd be very fortunate to be able to see it if you weren't directly in line with it.

14:30 **And about navigation, how would you navigate sometimes. Say if you went through a cloud and got lost a bit, how would you navigate?**

Well we used...you use all sorts of... you use dead reckoning, you worked out that if you went from here to there you should be there at such and such a time. You did an awful lot of land recognition. And, amazingly, once you'd been over a certain area

15:00 once, you would remember a number of the things about it the next time you went over. I was fortunate enough to do a trip with a fellow called Wing Commander Broadstock, who'd done a lot of work over that area, and I went in over as his second pilot and we were flying along with him and he'd look at his watch and he'd say, "We're five minutes late." And he'd look over the ground, and we'd go along a bit further and he'd say, "Oh, we've

15:30 picked up that time. But we're a bit south of course." And he had that much knowledge of the country and what it looked like from the air that he was able to virtually navigate purely by sight. And that was all right whilst there was no cloud, or very little cloud. It was all right when you could get a periodic look at the ground, say every ten minutes at the ground.

16:00 But it was no good if there was... at other times.

And why would you have to fly low, apart from your drop zones..?

Well the major reason for flying low was to keep you presence unknown or limited. To drop... it was far easier to drop accurately. You could, with a good bloke in the

16:30 pushing the... telling them when to drop, you could almost land on a threepenny bit, you know, it was well done. But if you try to drop from... you're travelling along at about 180 knots, I don't know what that is in kilometres, it's probably 300 kilometres an hour, and when you drop from there, well the... as the things leave the aeroplane well they're travelling along at the same rate.

17:00 And it's quite easy to overshoot the mark or undershoot the mark and so it was very critical that you were able to drop by some sort of ground recognition, because that's where the people were that wanted it in... and you needed it... Normally they didn't have motorcars or anything to cart it away. It was normally they had to be able to cart these packages and things away on their backs, so it was critical that you got accuracy and... in your dropping.

17:30 **Tell us about finally receiving the news that your service time was up and you could go home.**

Oh, well, because the war was over, I think we had greater desires to get home, you know, "Well the war's over. There's no need for us to be here. Let's go." I think it would have been a lot different had the war continued and you'd done your service... you'd done your time. You mightn't

18:00 have been prepared to... wanting to go home so urgent. You'd want to go home to be... to go home. But if there's still a job to do you'd want to be doing that. But with the war over, you say, "Well, there's nothing for us to do there any more. Let's get home and get rid of this." And so when we were told.... But even then it took a while – I didn't get home till after Christmas. And the war was over in what? In September.

18:30 So that took a fair while to get home. But there was great excitement. But on the way home we went from Calcutta to Bombay by train, and we were in Bombay for a couple of weeks, probably, still waiting to get a troopship home. And that was quite difficult to handle.

19:00 And because there was no war on and you were still in this poverty-stricken place that you'd been in before. But once you were on the... And then the troopship got picked up to come home. I ran into a few of me mates coming back who'd got on in England, and that was a good show because it meant that the six or seven days... We weren't many days aboard the boat

19:30 coming home, but for those days that we were, we were able to renew acquaintance with and stuff. One of my mates that was on there, who was later the governor of Western Australia,a fella by the name of Frank Burt, Red Burt, he'd finished, he was on our course. But when we went away he finished up flying Sunderlands, short Sunderland Flying Boats and he'd flown those. And he came back and became a judge. And, anyway, and then he was appointed

20:00 the governor of Western Australia. But he was on the boat when we come home. He and I were pretty,

despite again, despite the fact that I was a young snotty-nosed little bloke, we'd played a couple of games of golf before we went away, on embarkation leave in Cottesloe in Perth. Yeah, that sounds like the machine's just about ready to go.

Tell us about when you first stepped onto Australian soil,

20:30 **what was the feeling like and what happened?**

Oh, it was quite wonderful. We were... we called into Fremantle and I could see from the gangway, I could see my old father and I could see my wife and I... it was the... the difficult part was to stay on board the boat while we were waiting for them to... they hardly got the gangplank down... I'd had my gear in a haversack – all I needed over my shoulder – and as soon

21:00 as I was able to get on that gangplank, I was down and kissed the jetty. Yeah, that was a magnificent feeling. And.... But and particularly as... because most people when they come home from... at the end of the war, they come home to bands and celebrations and that. We came home to none of that, you know, we were... nobody expected us home. There was a shipload of people that came from various places.

21:30 But there were no marches through the capital cities and there was no sort of flag waving except from your people down below. And, you know, we hear about the people saying, "Oh, well, the Vietnam War was the forgotten war and such was the forgotten war and so was the Korean War." Where I was, it was forgotten. the war had been over and nobody, only the people who knew that we were coming

22:00 home were down there. There were no crowds, the crowd at the wharf, only people who knew people who were on the boat. It wasn't the... There was no band out and no journalists, running around taking orders. It was fairly quiet homecoming. And we just got off the boat. And I caught the train home

22:30 from Fremantle to Leederville where we lived at the time. Because we didn't have... couldn't afford to have a car at those days. And caught the train home and I walked across from West Leederville station to home, which is probably two miles, and with me kitbag over me shoulder and that was the homecoming. There was no march through the street to welcome home. As a matter of fact

23:00 nobody... I don't think anybody ever knew that we... that we existed, that there were Australians in the situation that we were in.

What was it like to see your family and your wife?

Oh, that was indescribable. Yeah, indescribable. The first one I sighted was me old father. He was a pretty big man and from up on the jetty he was the first bloke that... first person that I recognised down on the wharf.

23:30 And then I saw my wife, it wasn't me wife then, and then I saw a couple of other people. But in all, I reckon I wouldn't have seen any more than ten, twelve people that I knew. But it was a wonderful feeling to be there. And of course, there's... A lot of the blokes stayed on board because they went on to the eastern states and some

24:00 stay... they went onto the eastern states, they got off in Adelaide and Melbourne and a few of the eastern staters got off in Perth. But they stayed in Perth and they flew across or went across by train, went across home. One of my mates did that. But all in all there wasn't a great... there was no hullabaloo. There was nothing in the paper about it. There was a, you know, it wasn't really a

24:30 homecoming. And as I say, I smile to myself from time to time when I hear these... the complaints about people not getting recognised well, you know, there... some of the blokes that came home with us had been... some of those fellas had been away five years. Some of them had been through the Battle of Britain and then come out to India and come home. And weren't recognised.

Tell us about your settling in.

25:00 **How did you settle back into civvy [civilian] life?**

Oh, I found it fairly interesting, because the first thing I wanted to do was get married. That was... and also then because I had my job to go to. And that was... and the people there... they welcomed me with open arms and there was me football club was a... they'd welcomed us back and I settled in very, very quickly and I didn't have any

25:30 difficulty whatsoever in settling in. And so then, yeah, and as I say, it was back to work and then they started football training and... Oh, and then we got married and then started football training and it was all... All this happened within two miles of where I lived. And we lived initially at, well, my parents' place, and then we lived at my wife's parents' place and so

26:00 you know, it was fairly easy to settle in. And also we were settling in amongst old friends. And we only lived a quarter of a mile from the football ground and as soon as football training started I was over there and ran in again to a lot of people. Coming back in a place where I'd been brought up and gone to school there were so many people that I knew it barely seemed that you'd been away for too long, you know, been away

26:30 for three years. But it didn't seem that long. And nothing seemed to have changed much. I think the thing I noticed most, I thought my father got very old in the... and he was only a fairly young man. I think he died not long after I got home. He was only 57. But he got... I thought he aged at least ten years and between the times that I saw him.

Well, tell us about the footy.

Well, I had played

27:00 with West Perth in the under age competition prior to joining the air force, and when I come back I resumed playing with them again and I played, I did fairly well, I was one of the top players in the side and I won quite a few trophies and I got selected in the state side in 1947 and 1949

27:30 and had a pretty good experience, I won a couple of major trophies whilst I played. I also did professional running and in 1951 I won the WA Professional Gift, the major running race, the major professional race in Perth, and that was big money – it was 75 quid. It was an awful lot of money to me then and... But it was well worthwhile having.

28:00 But football then became a part of my life as... and my job did. And I was eventually transferred from Perth down to Bunbury in Western Australia and from down there I continued effect with a football. And with a mate of mine we started broadcasting the football in country football. It was something of a big experience down there. And we did that and

28:30 I found out that I was more involved with football down in Bunbury than I'd ever been before. And when I was asked by my chief about this transfer to Darwin, I went and sort of talked to my wife and said, "Well one thing about it, we'll get away from football. We never have to worry about that any more and there'll be no more of it." And when I got off the plane in Darwin, hit by an entourage and I was more heavily involved in football than I ever

29:00 was before. And particularly there was a full-blood Aboriginal team and that was my first venture and knowledge of Aboriginal people. And it was quite an eye opener and with my... the experience I'd had in India with the poverty and that in India and I could see similarities between them and Aboriginal people. And I enjoyed that and we finished up and won a premiership the first year

29:30 and.... But it wore me out. I was absolutely jiggered in the finish. But it also it set me up doing a bit of broadcast... I broadcast the Darwin Cup with the races. I'd never seen the... never done the races before. And another thing I broadcast was the... the French come across here and played Rugby League, and I broadcast them playing a match against the... against Darwin, it's the first Rugby League match I ever saw. I played a bit of [Rugby] Union whilst I was away in the service,

30:00 yeah, and so there were interesting things that went on. And I think that bell rung.

Tell us about coaching this full-blood aboriginal team. What was their name and how did you do it?

Well I did it because I got involved with these people. They came and asked me about coaching. They said, "We can't offer you anything, only headaches." And I thought, "Well that's a novel

30:30 approach. That doesn't happen very often." But they said, "Would you like to come... mind coming over and just watching us train?" And fortunately they were training in an oval not very far from where I lived in Fanny Bay. So I went over and I was just amazed at the skill of these blokes and I just got involved. But I found that in the finish, I be going down to get a boat to meet them from coming in from the islands and from... and driving around

31:00 somewhere, half the way round to the other side of the harbour to pick them up and buying them shorts and socks and even buying jock straps for them and, you know, the... It was just heavily involved and it took up so much of me... It was taking up apart from my job, that kept me fairly busy. But coaching this Aboriginal team was... kept me twice as busy. But I... they had such wonderful personalities

31:30 I don't know whether you ever saw a picture called, Jedda. Yeah, well Robert Tudawali, Bobby Wilson, he played with us. And he was a great footballer. Yeah, Bobby played with us. And actually I went... I was with his brother at... I went and saw a football match for the first time in many years last Saturday. I was asked to go and toss a coin at a match and last week the administrator

32:00 picked his best football side, since he's been here, he's been here since 1950 and he nominated me as coach. So I was suddenly back into the ball again with football. And however it was a good game out, (UNCLEAR) won. They're on top of the list again for the first time, almost since I had them, and it was a wonderful game.

32:30 And there were three of my old aboriginal team mates there, one I drove home him and his wife, he's waiting a kidney transplant, the poor bugger. And anyway that's that. I won't get to too many matches though, I'm just not capable of it.

And looking back at all your experiences, what do you think are some of the things that you learnt from these experiences?

33:00 Oh, I think what I've learnt... the main thing I've learnt is to accept responsibility. To be a bit humble and it's pretty easy to be a braggart and a shout, but it's better to be a person. I've learnt a lot about humanity and that's got me the work with the aboriginal

33:30 people, because in my job I also finished up doing some work with aboriginals. And I think those... But I think a lot of them, a lot of those emanated from my mother and father. They sort of set the standards and they weren't really hard standards to keep up.

34:00 And yeah, so. But also comradeship, I mean, I've got friends in the air force, who were in the air force with me, now that I haven't seen I suppose some of them for ten years. But if I saw them now it'd be just as though they'd never gone away.

34:30 **What are the best memories?**

The best memories? Well the best memories are with my family. My, you know, the fact that I got married and I got a pretty wonderful family and also that I came from a wonderful family. But also

35:00 I've got so many wonderful... there's still a lot of wonderful friends that I had in the services, and I know and they know that we'd still do anything for..., you know, to help out if it was necessary and still know that if we were called upon or if I called upon them that they'd be along to give you a prop

35:30 and prop you along. And so I believe that I'm much better person for having experienced my time in the services than I would have been had I just grown up as a little larrikin around Leederville and... But who knows. I don't know. But

36:00 I'm pleased and everything seems to have fallen on its face for me in my lifetime. I didn't ever win Lotto or make millions of money. But we have been comfortable, and fortunately have got to this stage without really major illnesses in the family or major tragedy. Which is quite, you know, quite unique really because, you know, in 60 years of marriage and

36:30 totalling up the total amount of marriage in the family with us and my four daughters and my granddaughters, we've got somewhere in the vicinity of 190 years of marriage. So we've enjoyed that and we've had no tragedies amongst us. I don't want to tempt fate now and say that sort of thing. But there are few people that

37:00 have been as fortunate as that. And I put a lot of that down to my participation in it, a lot of that down to what I'd learnt in the services and whatever I've contributed has been tremendously affected by the way my service affected my life.

37:30 **What are the worst times? What are the worst memories?**

The worst memories are being there and seeing me mates blow up.

38:00 No the... no I'll answer the... I've got to. You know, the people that we lost? I don't want to... I don't want that repeated. They're memories that... they still live with me. They're not memories I cherish, but

38:30 I believe that I've got to remember. Cut.

That'll do. That's the end of the interview.

INTERVIEW ENDS