Australians at War Film Archive

Martin Kane - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **A summary of your life up until now?**

Yes well I was born in Cairns on 19th of July, 1925, grew up in Cairns

01:00 and my education was there and then when I left school I went as a grocer boy until I was old enough to join up and I was real keen to go. So anyhow we eventually joined the air force, after the grocery shop business, and from there we went through the various stages of

01:30 training and then I think it was on the 1st of January in 1944 we left Australia then. We flew out into New Guinea, so we did Papua New Guinea and the Markham Valley, across to Cape Gloucester in New Britain, back to Papua New Guinea along the north coast through to Dutch New Guinea,

02:00 over to a little island called Noemfoor and where I left the hospital unit or the casualty clearing station as it was, and then I was transferred to 77 Squadron. They were Kittyhawk fighter planes and we finished up in Borneo, a little island called Labuan and the war came to an end, the cease-fire, and so then they

02:30 sent us home and I came back then. I was stationed at [RAAF] Garbutt [Royal Australian Air Force Base, Townsville] then for the next six months until my discharge. I came back and my little grocery job was still there for me. There was four other chappies had also come back too, see and our jobs were still there for us, so that was good and so I had twelve months back there, and of course I was mad keen on the ambulance service,

03:00 had been for quite a long time and I finished up, I gained a permanent position with them in Cairns and from there my career really took off and Cairns was very interesting because they had the aerial ambulance service which covered the Cape York Peninsula, fair bit of the Gulf country, so I finished up I was flying with them for fifteen years and whilst I didn't get to fly with

03:30 the air force, I certainly flew with the aerial ambulance and that's when I got my wing, which was a great deal. From there, after a little while, I thought, "Oh well I'll try a bit of promotion" and silly idea, you know, went off to chase the gold braid and I went to a small centre, this is Monto

04:00 and I was there for ten years, which was a very good centre actually, very good to me in my career and then I transferred back to Gordonvale because of the large staff, bigger centre. I was there for two years and then I transferred to Caboolture which was a bigger centre again and so anyhow I got there and we worked like billyo because the place was broke and it

04:30 took a lot of work to get it back to normal. And then the electric train service came into Caboolture and of course a lot of the dairy farms were split up into real estate and people moving in and it was a big boom time for them and so the place grew and we worked like billyo, long hours, to try and sort of make sure finance was

05:00 available to carry on and by the time I'd finished, I had eleven years there and then I retired, and it was, I'd put in what we call sub-centres, in different parts of the area. There was four of those went in. One had already been there, this Bribie Island, and I put in one at the Glasshouse Mountains area in Beerwah,

05:30 another one at Woodford and another one at Deception Bay so, and all those centres were all free of debt the day we opened them, so that was a pretty good achievement. So then we retired out of the place and I had forty years service with the ambulance service, which was then the old QATB, the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade, and then the new act came in, it became Queensland Ambulance Service.

06:00 Well that's when I moved out and there were big changes then in the service after I'd left it but it was pretty good. Well then we'd bought a home down at a place called Beachmere, which was only about

ten, or twelve kilometres from Caboolture and we were there for quite a while and then this place, I heard about this place

06:30 and this place is for RAAF veterans and there's only eight units here and there's a lot over at Sherwood. They're still building again and I think it was the best move we made, you know. It was great and of course all air force fellers here and we have a little session of an afternoon down at the corner down here. One chap hasn't got a car

07:00 so we use his carport as the pub, which is very good and we have some very good conversations and but then there's a bit of humour with it all because the chappie on that side of me, his name is Tom Jones and he tells you that he cannot sing and he's certainly not rich and the fellow on this side, that you'll see tomorrow, is

07:30 McDonald. He was a fighter pilot and he said, you know, "Well I'm McDonald" he said, "not as in hamburger like" you know and then of course we go across, directly opposite us there's a chappie there. He's Charlie Brown, so that's our [group].

What a great crew.

It's alright.

Fantastic.

Yeh.

So you're happy in this place?

08:00 Gosh yes. Well everything is so convenient to us. There's a city bus terminus just down at the end here. There's a big shopping centre. There's the council library and a swimming pool; behind that is the Kedron-Wavell RSL [Returned and Soldiers League]. Everything is just, you know, just so handy to us.

What about your children Martin, where are they?

Well the lad, he's over at Bracken Ridge and he's hoping to go over to England round about

08:30 May next year. He's been over once and he liked it and he'd like to go back again so alright, but I didn't know whether they would go or not, because we've got our first great grandchild arrived and I didn't know whether Diane might sort of, you know want to go, be too keen to go away now, but anyhow looks like it's still on. Anyhow we'll see as the time gets closer and the daughter, Pat, Patricia, she's

09:00 just up around the corner here at Nudgee Way sort of thing, you know, and her husband, he drives heavy trucks, like cranes and that sort of thing and she's got a part-time job. She does twenty, twenty five hours or something a week with the grocery lot, with the supermarket and that's at Milton and then of course the daughter at Monto and

09:30 with her little bit of business and they're doing pretty well too. Otherwise we're pretty knit, Monto's only about five or six hours away. It all depends who's driving of course, you know, how fast it is but it's pretty good but it's all

And your wife Hazel, how long have you known Hazel?

Well, yeh, well there hangs a long story. When I came back from the war and this girl

10:00 was in the office in there. It works out that she was the first girl working in the office, apart from Brisbane like, you know and anyhow we eventually got together and we married then on the 27th of March in 1948, '47, yeh '47 and

10:30 cost me five pounds to get out of the church, that's what I had to pay the minister to marry us, like that was a lot of money then, you know. Anyhow that was alright and so we, she's been terrific with me through my whole service because when we went out on our promotions and we were only in two-man and three-man centres and then until we came to Caboolture, well we had a separate residence. Otherwise we lived

11:00 on top of the residence on top of the ambulance buildings and she helped me a lot with their fundraising and all that sort of thing, you know. Any dogfight that was on, we were there like, you know. It was good but then we got involved in, particularly at Monto, we become involved in the schools, like, you know the P and C's [Parents and Citizens associations] and the Rotary [Club] and

11:30 all these sorts of things, you know. I know I finished up with the secretary's job. There was one year there, I was secretary of Rotary and secretary of the High School P and C and what was the other one? Yeh, the Festival Board, the Dairy Festival Board. I was the secretary for that and I had to write different letters at different times, you know, and then Haze would type them out for me. I said, "You'd better do this one out for me again, dear". "Why, did I make

12:00 a mistake?" "Yes, you've used the wrong letterhead". I had that many things going on like, you know, but otherwise it was, we've done pretty well together really, you know so after fifty-six years and we're still going, like, you know that's pretty good.

Fantastic.

But we've kept pretty good health, until the last couple of years anyway. She gave me a bit of a scare a couple of years ago

12:30 with the possibility of a cancer sort of thing, you know but which had been a bit trying because the eldest girl, Patricia, she finished up she's been in remission now for about fifteen, sixteen years I s'pose. She's doing pretty well. And then we went to Turkey and we had ten days touring Turkey and we went down then into Gallipoli and we followed

13:00 a trip, they called it "following the Anzacs" and we went to Gallipoli and we came back to France and Belgium and then back to Paris, caught the aircraft and come back home again and I think we had four weeks, five weeks or something, just like to do all this, which was really, really something, you know, and of course Gallipoli had a lot of meaning to us because Hazel's father was a World War I

13:30 man and he was at Gallipoli and this military historian, he can give us a lot of information and we were standing at one of the monuments, the Turkish monument where the last battle, where the battle had turned in favour of the Turks and we were standing there and

14:00 we could look straight down along one of the mountain ridges and he could show us where Hazel's father's battalion had landed and come along the beach and crawled up this mountain to come in, you know. It made it very interesting that way, and then of course over to France and Belgium and went through the different places that he was at and he was wounded at Pozieres. I believe that

14:30 the first day, there was five thousand Australian troops lost, on the first day at Pozieres and we stopped there for a lunch, which was very nice. They had it set up very nicely for us and anyhow we had a couple of beers in the memory of Pop. It was good and then on the way back they give us a little bonus.

15:00 We came around by Normandy which was, we had most of the day there and that was really good and then back to Paris and flew home so Gallipoli was quite a deep meaning for us, you know, yeh.

A special trip.

It was special alright and we'd been wanting to go for some time and we'd talked about it and, you know, nothing happened sort of thing

15:30 and so we sold the caravan because I was having a bit of a sight problem and I was coming up to, particularly roundabouts were the worst there, and when the sign is there and this road that way and this one goes to so-and-so and this one, and I couldn't read those signs until I got up to them and by that time it was too late to sort of sort myself out to which lane I wanted, so I thought, "Oh well, this is not much

16:00 good" so we decided to sell the van before I crashed it and so the money we got from that, that took us to Turkey, you know, but we'd travelled by caravan for many years on our holidays and everything, you know. It was the easiest way. We could sort of take the kids with us and have a comfortable holiday financially and still all be together as a family, you know. It was great.

That's great. I want to take you back now Martin

16:30 **to the very beginning again, that's fantastic, and hear a little bit about your childhood, growing up in Cairns and what Cairns was like when you were growing up?**

Yes well.

What are your memories?

Yeh, no it's, Cairns, I don't suppose it's changed all that much though because it's only three feet above sea level and there's a bit of a hollow at the back of the city like, you know and there was swampy ground

17:00 and I can remember my Dad and I, I used to go the Parramatta School and up on one side of there, there was this swamp that used to go through and duck season, we used to go over there and Waterloo Park they used to call it, and we used to go over there and we'd get our couple of ducks that we wanted and go back home again but we only walked off the street, like the streets that's coming

17:30 past here and in here like, you know we were in this water and up to our middles in swamp water and get the ducks but it was gradually filled in and there's buildings all over it now and with the school, I went to Parramatta, as I say, and anyhow we finished up when I left school, went on to this grocery

18:00 place. But with this Waterloo Park as they call it, this swamp area, and when Hazel and I got married, we built a home just on the other side of that swamp area like, you know, and of course flood time would come and you were up to your knees in water walking down the road that went past our place and it was one of those

18:30 things. They eventually drained it and I don't know where the water went to but anyhow it drained off and they put a lot of fill in and built up on it and it's all residential there now. You wouldn't go down there and fire off a shotgun now because you'd get pinched very quickly because it's all houses.

Well what about brothers and sisters, did you have brothers and sisters?

No I was the only child, yes, only child.

Did you want brothers and sisters?

I'd loved to have had a brother and sister,

19:00 yeh. It'd have been great I reckon but watching our own kids like, you know, and I thought, you know "they'd have a pretty close time" you know but I was on my own, you know.

That was pretty rare in those days wasn't it, to have an only child?

Yeh well apparently there was medical problems and that was it, you know but

19:30 my Dad had built a home in Cairns. He was born in Croydon, out in the gulf country and the old grandfather, he up and died. He was an old Irishman. He up and died intestate, with no will of course, and they lost everything more or less through probate and all that sort of thing and he finished up, the boys finished up

20:00 with twenty five head of cattle each, so he sold his lot to his brother, or one of his brothers, and he went down to Cairns and hopped onto a tramp steamer that used to sail from Cairns to Melbourne and he studied and got his steam tickets, like for steam engines and that sort of thing, got his certificates for that and then

20:30 Mum and Dad got married of course. Well then he give that away and he had couple of other little jobs and eventually went into the Cairns brewery and he studied again and he had his steam certificates and he went in then for the diesel and electric and he had the whole caboodle in the finish, you know. It was really, really great and then one morning he, about five o'clock in the morning, he had

21:00 a massive coronary and that was it, you know. It was three months before he was sixty so it was a bit of a blow that way, but then I was out at a place called Edmund. It was the sub-centre to Cairns and Mum came to live with us after a while and we eventually sold the old home in Draper Street and we were up there recently on a holiday

21:30 and we run around and the old place was still the same except that whoever owns it now has put it up on higher blocks like, you know. It looks ridiculous, you know so I don't want to see it again, you know. It's ruined everything, you know.

What was it like, what do you remember of that house, growing up?

Well it was a small place. It was, you know quite good. The

22:00 neighbourhood around was really good and all those kids used to get out there. We'd be playing cricket and Dads used to come out and they'd be playing with us like, you know and after a while we found that we weren't getting a turn at the bat at all. The old blokes were all doing that but even the girls used to come out and they'd play a bit of cricket with us and you could play along the roadside. It was fairly wide streets but

22:30 traffic wasn't all that bad, you know and they never went fast because the cars weren't built that way, you know but it was good that way and we weren't that far from the actually city, the Cairns city and it, I don't know, it just sort of, some of the buildings, they've been renovated and they still look pretty good.

23:00 Some of the old pubs have been knocked down and built again. I believe there was about thirty two pubs in Cairns at one stage and they were up around the main streets and the main blocks mainly. Then there was a few out around the suburbs which were pretty good because in our young days and if you had a car or your mate had a car or something, you know

23:30 well quite often we'd go out and do a bit of a pub crawl, you know but nothing silly but it was all in good fun and we used to go out to the beaches of an evening, weekends in particular, holidays. We'd have a beach party like, you know there'd be a barbeque and then we'd go in for a swim sort of thing, you know. It was

24:00 all good fun and all the girls were there. Everybody joined in. There was no silly business, no nonsense and everybody had a great time. It was really beaut but I often think back. We used to go in. It was dark, you know. We'd go in and we'd have our swim and come back and more or less have some games of some sort along the beach and I look back and I think now the sharks

24:30 that were there and in my job, I think there's been one shark attack really since but I think I had the last fatal one and I often think back on how lucky we were like, you know and of course all the stingers have come in. Nobody, well they didn't seem to be as prevalent then as what, you know they are now, you know but I think they've found out a few things of where they're coming from and they,

25:00 but it was great times on the beach in the evenings, you know. We had our movie theatres of course and our dances. The dances used to be great. There was two particular places, the old Trocadero, that was

the fifty-fifty. It was half old time and half jazz and the Aquatic down on the waterfront. It was all old time, very seldom you'd get any jazz there but occasionally they'd throw something in,

25:30 but it was all old time and we used to have a whale of a time then and of course when the war was on, all the troops were in, you were flat out getting your girl to get a dance with her like, you know but it was good and they

What sort of dances did you like?

Well any of the old time stuff like, you know, it was great. Some of the jazz stuff was good. We used to, the Aquatic used to be on a

26:00 Saturday night and the Trocadero, it was usually on a Wednesday night and that'd be playing on a Saturday night too so there was a lot of stress. I mean we had to think, "Now which one are we going to go to tonight?" you know but it was good crowds like, you know and you had a lot of fun and the movie theatres.

26:30 They weren't too bad. They were good but then there was a couple of movie theatres had been built out along the suburbs a bit. They were very good but they didn't last all that many years. People had more, better transport and, you know they went elsewhere. Dances, the country dances out in the suburbs were good. They were really, really beaut and of course

27:00 the ambulance used to run dances in the different parts of the suburbs and we used to go out and more or less run those and it was, had to get a quid somewhere and the crowd used to follow the dances like, you know particularly the, and of course the dance band was usually a piano accordion and a violin or a piano and a set of drums or something like this, you know. Sometimes there'd be a violin but it was

27:30 good music and we gradually then grew up into bigger bands and all that and particularly when the Yanks [Americans] arrived and bands seemed to be made up overnight, you know. A lot of the fellers used to play very well and of course a lot of the army fellows could play instruments too and they used to join in with the band and then of course

28:00 when the Yanks were in, there was a lot of the jive stuff, you know and that was strenuous stuff that, by gee, trying to keep up with that sort of thing.

Did all the Australians learn the jive when it came?

Not all of them but a lot of them, a lot of us did like, you know, some of the antics we used to get up to and do like, you know. Gees, I'd hate to try and do it now because, goodness me, but it was, dancing,

28:30 it was good. You met a lot of people and particularly in the country dances, there'd always be a supper on like, you know and it was good. Supper was, that was in the price of your ticket coming in like, you know. You'd go down and then of course a ball would be on for some reason. One of the organisations would put a ball on and the

29:00 debutantes would come in, you know. They were fascinating things, you know.

You mentioned before that the dances were sometimes to raise funds for the ambulance?

Yeh.

Were you involved in the ambulance then as well?

Yes.

What was your involvement with them?

Well I was always hanging around the ambulances until I could get onto the staff like, you know and we had what they called an honorary officer. You were part-time.

29:30 You had, your hours were set, like you might have had, I might have had a Thursday night that I'd go in. I'd do about three hours, four hours, whatever it was. You'd go in at weekends. You'd do the sports meetings, like football and car racing, speed cars and all this sort of thing and you'd be on standby for that, races. We used to go to the races, follow the horse round in a car.

30:00 With the country races, out in the Gulf country, we'd fly out on the Friday morning because there'd be something on the Friday afternoon, like a preliminary race sort of thing, then that night there'd be a dance and then Saturday was a pretty busy day and there was the big races in the afternoon and then there was a ball at nighttime and that's when the ladies

30:30 used to turn out, the race meeting itself they had beautiful dresses on and long gloves and hats and, you know dressed up to the nines, and husband would be there in his work jeans sort of thing, you know and his elastic side boots and they'd be having a good time and the bar was four sticks in the ground with

31:00 a bit of brambles over the top to keep the shade on a bit and the beer, it was off the ice, about two hundred and fifty miles off the ice, you know. It was kept cool with a wet sack bag over it and they had music there that, as I say, this is where the violins and the piano accordions came in and they put out

good music and it was good dance timing

31:30 like, you know. It was really, really beaut but then back in the city with the dances, we used to run them. We had to earn a quid somehow and dances were good. People would “Oh it’s the ambulance dance tonight, we’ll go” you know. It was great.

And what was your interest in the ambulances, why were you interested?

Well I wanted to be an ambulance man. It was what I wanted and my Dad

32:00 being one of these honorary officers at the time and he, I s’pose I thought, you know, “This looks pretty good”. It had a nice big yellow car and it had a uniform and I thought, you know “Well this is alright,” you know but I don’t think it was that really that sort of took me in but it was the work that was done and once we did our studies and we got our certificates and our qualifications and we,

32:30 and as time went on in the service, so they, we didn’t get a lot. We had a manual to study from and one of the permanent staff would give these lectures and the doctors would come along and they’d examine you on, you know whether you can or you can’t sort of thing, and as time went on of course all the training ideas improved

33:00 and then they used to take us into Brisbane. I think the first lot was about a fortnight and it was fairly packed studies like, you know to go and then it went to three weeks and then there was a month. We used to go into the training school in Brisbane and the old ambulance station in Ann Street; it’s all gone now. I think it’s being used as a bit of a parking lot sort of thing. I don’t know what’s there now and they

33:30 brought us up to paramedic standards and of course I’d just got into the paramedics sort of thing when I’d retired, you know but I had a bit of an advantage over the ambulance blokes in so far as that being in the air force, see I was nursing there for three years and I had that knowledge behind me and their training, well

34:00 I did my rookies or the basic drills and all this sort of thing, firearms, commando stuff and all that business.

Before we get into the training, I just want to stay in your early childhood a little bit more. When the war broke out, where were you and do you remember?

I was in Cairns, yes. Matter of fact, I was in having a shower and Dad says, give a knock on the door

34:30 and he marched in. He said, “England has just declared war on Germany” he said, “We’re at war, son”. I said, “Oh gosh” you know and of course, you know it all sort of hit pretty quick. I sort of couldn’t sort of fathom it for quite a while but then I thought “Oh well” you know and everybody, all the fellers were going off and that, you know but when I joined, I joined

35:00 the medical team and joined as a medic and we went in then and we did our rookies at Sandgate then they trained us in our medical side of it in Melbourne. I think we had six weeks down there doing that and that was a pretty packed program because we’d be up early. We’d go for a route march or out doing drill or something, come back. You’d have your breakfast

35:30 and you’re in lectures by eight a.m. and you had a break for lunch. They’d give you a few minutes at a smoko time but you didn’t have a cup of tea or anything. You had a glass of water and got back to business again. You’d knock off for tea for a couple of hours and you could go and have a shower and freshen up and then you were back in lectures again until nine p.m.

Cairns, can you tell us what,

36:00 **how the atmosphere in Cairns changed when the war started and when the American troops started to turn up?**

Yeh well it was a free and easy town, like, you know it was a city that you could, nighttime particularly, you could go anywhere in Cairns like, you know and you were quite safe, no problems and then as years went by of course and since the war it’s changed a bit now. You don’t, some

36:30 places you don’t go traipsing around by yourself but it’s like any other town, you know but it was a quiet town, peaceful. People were pretty friendly. A lot of people knew each other, you know. It’d be nothing to go up town and particularly on Christmas Eve and all the shops would be open, the decorations would be up. There’d be bands playing and everybody

37:00 would have a whale of a time and you’d see different ones. You mightn’t have seen them for a couple of months or so, you know and stop there and then the policeman would come down, “Keep moving and keep to the left please” on the footpath and they did have a yellow line drawn on the footpath as to “you keep to the left” you know, keep it flowing but Christmas Eve was a really big thing and it

37:30 used to get all the people out and the activities that used to be put on, not only at Christmas Eve but at other times, you know. They’d have things and us kids, we used to make all our own fun like, you know. There was none of this sitting around “Oh I’m bored. What am I going to do?” you know but then as we got into our teenage stage and that, you know and there’d be a group of us, I suppose there was twenty or thirty of us, we’d all

38:00 join up. We'd go to your place this Saturday night, you know or then they'd come to my place and we'd sort of circle around and the Mums and Dads would put on a bit of a smoko at nighttime for us, you know. It was, and they used to enjoy that too you see and then we, gradually the war started to really enlarge and I joined, well I was with,

38:30 had my nose into the ambulance all the time and then they decided that they'd better have what they called the ARP, the Air Raid Precautions, and they had the likes of teams. There was ambulance, there was fire, there was assistant police, wardens to go around "Put your…" because everything was blacked out you see, no lights and they'd come around "Your light's showing through that window, pull the curtain" or something.

39:00 It was one of those situations where everybody sort of joined a team somewhere and I joined the little ambulance team, which was four people, and they got anybody that owned a utility truck, they donated that. If the air raid sirens went off they'd go to a certain place and we had our little station and we'd go straight to there

39:30 and whoever owned the utility would come there too you see and we'd have stretchers there and we'd have it all set up to go, work and as the, there were a couple of raids come over Cairns, a couple of aircraft there but Cairns didn't cop any damage from bombs but I think it was further

40:00 north that, was this Mossman, they dropped a bomb at Mossman somewhere and it fell on the cane farm somewhere, not far from the farmer's house and the only one that got hurt was an Italian girl so, and they were in cahoots with the Japanese at that time, you know but these people weren't interned or anything. They were Australian born and that sort of thing and so they, you know we'd

40:30 hear the siren go off and we'd duck down and of course we were all dead scared as what was going to happen but excited that something is happening, you know. We never thought of death. Even during my service overseas, death wasn't a thing, like, you know. You might get skittled or something, you know but nobody thought about being dead, but different blokes that I've spoken to, they've have the same

41:00 thoughts, like, you know. Never thought about being dead.

Tape 2

00:31 **A bomb in Mossman?**

Yeh there was a bomb had dropped in Mossman.

Did you actually see?

No we didn't see it. No, Mossman's another fifty miles north.

So within the ambulance service, was there some panic when war started to heat up?

No, the only panic came from the boss because a bloke would come in and say, "Well I've joined up, boss. I'll be going off" you know. Then he'd have to find staff to put in the vacancy but it was all

01:00 just took it in their stride, you know, the way it went. They had older men that were available to do the job but weren't, well they were over military age to join up and the young fellers were all heading off and I think the fellers from the Cairns ambulance, I think they all, I don't know, I think practically all of them

01:30 finished up as medics along the line, you know and there was no problems there.

When the war first broke out, did you want to join straight away?

Yeh but I knew that I couldn't. I wasn't allowed to. Well they wouldn't take me anyway and I was about sixteen or something when it happened, something like that and they

02:00 made you wait then until you were 18 and then you could sign on the dotted line, although at seventeen I did volunteer for the navy and I went down, had my medical and passed that all OK and I wanted to go into sick bay attendant. Anyhow I'm still waiting for the navy call-up. It hasn't arrived yet. It's lost in the mail somewhere I think,

02:30 but so I thought, "Oh well if that's, they don't want me. I'll join the air force then" as soon as my age allowed me you see. I could get into the navy at an earlier age but it didn't work out that way.

What did your parents think of you joining?

Well they weren't very impressed. They weren't impressed at all because my Dad had tried a couple of times, put his age back and all the rest of it and they

03:00 wrote him a very nice letter in the finish and he was very upset about, you know he couldn't go because

a lot of the fellers that he'd mixed with had gone off, you know. Then of course it came my turn to go. Well that sort of upset him again, you know, but Mum didn't appreciate the fact that I was off but, yeh, never mind. That happened with all the families and that was the way it went.

03:30 But then the Catalina [long range amphibious aircraft, flying boat] squadrons, they came in and they had a big base in Cairns. They had their flying boats in the inlet and they had, along the beachfront, they had quite a big camp near where the hospital is and it was a pretty good set up

04:00 and the locals used to invite the lads out for a meal or party or something, you know. They'd have some entertainment going and "Oh get some of the air force blokes over" you know and which was quite good and of course as time went by and of course I realised then that the Catalinas also did a lot of air-sea rescue work and I thought "Well that's for me" you know. I wanted to fly,

04:30 didn't have the brains to be a pilot. My mathematics wasn't all that crash hot. Anyhow when I did join up and a fellow said, "What part of the service do you want to be in?" and I said, "Well I'd like to go into the air-sea rescue with the Catalinas" and of course he looked at me. He said, "Oh you come from Cairns don't you?" and I said, "Yes" and he's looking at these papers of mine there and he said

05:00 "There's a big post there". He said, "Yes, no" he said, "we'll send you down". He said, "You do your medical training" he said, "and you'll probably be an orderly in one of the hospitals somewhere". I said, "But I want to go into the air-sea rescue". He said, "No we can't put you in that squadron" he said, the Number 11 Squadron it was and he said, "You can't go there". He said, "Cairns is your home town". He said, "Everybody in the town knows when an aircraft takes off and they know exactly how many

05:30 come back". He said "No" he said, "We can't do that" so I didn't get into air-sea rescue but maybe it was a good thing. I always believe in fate walks with you, you know. If it happens, it's going to happen but then of course there was a lot of military there and army vehicles and all sorts of vehicles and they were all very interesting

06:00 and the locals they more or less got in, mixed pretty well with the troops and when the Americans arrived of course, you know they were well paid and all that sort of thing and they had the money to dash around and of course the girls got a lot of nylons and the Yanks could take them somewhere, where they could afford a taxi

06:30 whereas the poor old Aussie, like if you had a pushbike, the girl would sit on the bar and he'd push her around on it and

Do you remember any fights breaking out with the Americans?

Yes, there was a few fights particularly at dances and a Yank would sort of get onto some girl at the dance or something, you know, and the boyfriend would be in the party too, you see, in the dance and that's when it'd be on, "Come on Yank",

07:00 you know "you've had a couple of dances, that's enough" you know. Then there'd be a brawl on of course, you know and I remember once there the Australians had the big camps up on the Tablelands, like through Atherton, Mareeba and through there and Rocky Creek it was known as. There was a big army base there and of course the fellers that were coming back from Middle East, they were doing all their jungle training there before they went off to New Guinea

07:30 and there was, I don't know what started it or how it all came about, but there was a big brawl on and the troops came down from there down to Cairns and we were at the dance that night at the Trocadero and, which is in the main block of the city, and the Americans were there and this brawl started and it finished up down on the footpath and

08:00 out of the hall, down onto the footpath and into the street. Well, goodness gracious me, you've never seen so many military police arrived on the scene. There was a brawl there. It went for a while so a couple of the mates and I, we decided, "Well we're not going to get in this. We can see better up here" so we crawled out the big door and the awning over the footpath and we just sat on there and we were looking at the, ringside seats we had looking at the brawl that went on

08:30 but it eventually broke up and

What do you remember seeing when you were up there, what sort of images do you remember?

What, during the brawl?

Yeh?

God, there was all sorts of weapons used. There was pickets off the fences and I don't know where some of these batons, I think they must have got them off the military police or must have took them off them and got stuck into things and

09:00 fists of course were main ones but nevertheless they, but there was nobody seriously injured. I mean some of them were a bit bent but they weren't all that bad, you know, nothing life threatening but no, they eventually broke it up and they got on fairly well after that, you know but well, within reason type

of thing, you know and

09:30 **What about the black American soldiers, did you see any of those?**

Yes there used to be quite a bit around but they were pretty well segregated. The Americans didn't let them into, they didn't sort of come to the dances or anything like that. They used to have their own but there weren't all that many black girls up there that could sort of, you know so they were on the outer as far as that went but the black ones, you'd see them in the town on transports,

10:00 good drivers in big semi-trailers. We often used to watch them. We were fascinated with them that they'd reverse a trailer. Now they could reverse a trailer into here with a couple of inches on each side and they wouldn't damage anything, you know they'd just back in and then of course there was their own military police and they used to get around on the big Harley Davidson motorbikes

10:30 and, you know to watch them on those motorbikes. They were just really great, you know but not a nerve in their body I think, you know for what they used to do and travel all around but they were always very polite, spoke very well, you know. They were all, the segregation between the black and the whites, the Americans, it was pretty heavy and we weren't used to that sort of thing, you know and

11:00 cause I mean goodness me, we used to knock around with the black population a bit, you know, not all that much but we used to and of course we were at school with a lot of them, you know and I remember at school we were at a singing lesson and there were a couple of classes put in this room and the ones at the back had

11:30 to stand on the long form, the seat, you see and the desk in front of us and we're standing up and they had just too many on the form that I was on and I was at one end and this other chappie, the black fellow, he was down at the other end and we were good mates, Walter Pitt was his name. He had two lovely, very attractive sisters and they used to do singing and

12:00 the guitars and all this and they'd go to the dances and they'd put on a turn and all the rest of it. They were great and anyhow we're in this singing class and God we used to hate this singing, all these boys, you know. If it wasn't for singing, we'd be doing fancy work or be learning cooking or something, you know, used to do all that sort of thing and something happened and I nearly fell off you see and I just went like that with my hip you see to the bloke next door to me and it went

12:30 all the way down the end and poor old Walter fell off the end, crash and everybody burst out laughing and I'll never forget it because the song that we were singing was "Oh Shenandoah, I Love Your Daughter", you know. God I'll never forget that. Anyhow we all settled down and we started to sing again you see and right in the middle of this damn song and I

13:00 started to laugh again and that was it. Walter and I, we were expelled from the singing class. We didn't have to go back anymore. That was great so we went down in the schoolyard then and practised our sports like our high jumping and everything for the big sports day coming up you see and we thought this is, inter school sports, so that was good too.

13:30 Every singing lesson we used to be down the paddock doing this so that was

So was he an aboriginal boy?

Torres Strait boy, yeh. His father was, I think he was employed by the Harbour Board as a diver. He used to do a lot of the diving, inspect the pylons and around the wharves and the jetties and the navigation system, the lights and that sort of thing, you know.

14:00 He used to do all that sort of thing. They'd put him in this great helmet and all the rest of it and away he'd go and thoroughly enjoyed it but they were a nice family. They were a lovely family but yeh, poor old Walter.

So it must have surprised you then that the Americans really segregated the black population?

It was a big surprise to us, like we didn't realise that there was so much demarcation between them, you know.

How would the Australian

14:30 **population treat the black American soldiers?**

They were alright, yeh but we didn't see that many of them because they weren't…you know, sometimes they'd come into town. They'd have a leave pass to go into the city sort of thing and we'd talk to them and all the rest of it, you know and they were quite happy that we stopped and did talk to them, you know and of course they were interesting people, you know. They were good

15:00 but the white Yanks, they didn't like them at all.

What would happen if they would go against what the white Americans wanted them, did you hear of any incidents?

Yes, they were told to get out of the place, you know, yeh, but they did all the dirty jobs, you know but it was a big surprise and

15:30 when we look back on it, you think how disappointing it was because there was some very nice fellows amongst them but, yeh, oh well that's the way it all goes and I don't think it's changed over there. I think, from what I've seen of it, it's all the same, you know although there's a lot more highly qualified Negroes there now

16:00 than what there was then of course, because you see them in the professions and they're well up in some of these professions and they're acting on the screen and everything, you know. They're doing pretty well but at least they're educated, you know and they do things.

When did you start to hear that some of the young guys around you weren't coming home?

16:30 Well it was a bit of a revelation really because we thought, "Oh" you know "that can't be right" you know "he'll turn up somewhere" but he didn't, and I think one of the worst that I'd felt was

17:00 a chappie that was down in the next block from us, from my home, I was at school with him and he finished up as a navigator on Beaufighters and eventually he and I met up again. I was with Number 77 Squadron then and we were doing, you know strip duty and we used to stand beside the control tower

17:30 with our ambulance waiting and all the rest of it there in case mishaps and this aircraft had taxied out and he was getting ready to take off and anyhow I realised who it was. It was this Norm Stanton and anyhow when they came back and I had a yarn to him and he said,

18:00 "Oh" he said, he was a sergeant and I was a brand new corporal and he said, "You'll have to come over" he said "and have a meal with me". He said, "I think we're busy for the next couple of three days" he said, "pop around then" he said "and come down and have dinner with us at the mess". I said "Alright" so that was all arranged. Anyhow I think it was the, not next day, day after, we saw the aircraft

18:30 coming out and Norm was there sitting in his plane as they're going along and give a wave as he went past the control tower and that was the last we saw of him, yeh. That was it and that was I s'pose more or less growing up with him and then having made the arrangement that we were going to meet and of course he didn't turn up but that

19:00 really hit home, you know.

Did you hear what had happened to Norm?

No, they just went down somewhere and I don't know whether they'd been shot down or just what, you know cause a lot of those islands, they'd be down strafing them and all that sort of thing and anything could happen, although the Beaufighter was a pretty reliable aircraft, you know. It was known as 'Whispering Death' because they'd come in

19:30 low, fly in low and you didn't hear them until they were past you because that's when you heard the exhausts of the motors but you couldn't hear them coming towards you. They were a good aircraft that way and I think they had quite a bit of speed when it was required and the armament on them was good and they were a good aeroplane. It only had two crew. There was a pilot up the front and the navigator

20:00 was down the back a bit and so he was the navigator but, yeh, so that was the one that sort of hit home pretty hard, you know, yeh.

After you joined the air force you said that they didn't put you in the air-sea rescue?

Yeh.

What happened after that?

Well I went into a hospital. They formed up what they call a casualty clearing

20:30 station. There was thirty blokes in it and we had thirty tons of equipment. We know because we moved every damn thing by, you know. We worked out that we moved so many times that each man on the unit had moved the whole unit once.

So this is after training was it?

After the training yes, after we'd done our medical training.

And the rookie training as well?

And the rookie training, yeh.

So can you backtrack a little bit for me Martin and tell

21:00 **me a bit about joining the air force and going to rookie training?**

Yes. We hopped on the train. All our papers had been signed. We were going to the air force and anyhow

all the recruits had been, whether you were army, navy, air force, everybody went down on the same train and we all went out to Redbank out here towards Ipswich way.

21:30 We came down on the train, on the trooper, and it was packed out of course. I was a brand new eighteen, eighteen and one week I think I was when I left home. I thought, “What gives now”, like, you know. Didn’t take me long to sort myself out and I wasn’t sort of lost too much, you know but anyhow as we

22:00 go along, you’re making friends with different ones and you’re sort of forgetting about all this other sort, you know. I mean you don’t forget your family but you forget about a lot of the other things because this is the present, this is what you’re doing now and anyhow we came down to this Redbank and it was July. It was pretty cool out at Redbank and they said “Alright” and we got there, it was a bit late in the afternoon,

22:30 and they said, “Alright line up. Now we’ll see you all in the morning after your breakfast. The mess is over there” sort of thing, you know, “and get all your eating irons and that sort of thing and we’ll see you then and we’ll sort you out then as to where you’re going and what you’re going to do” and they said, “now over in that big tent over there, there’s

23:00 a lot of hessian bags”. “Oh yes.” “And there’s a big pile of straw there”. “Yeh”. “Well, fill that hessian bag with as much straw as you like” you know “That’s your palliasse, that’s what you’re going to sleep on tonight”. “Alright.” So we went over, this is a novelty, you know so we put this in and come back and used our luggage carrying stuff, little ports and all that sort of thing as a pillow and God it was cold. We had one blanket

23:30 underneath us and one blanket on top. That’s what they gave us and Redbank was cold, oh God. I thought to myself, “I want to go home” you know but it passed. Well then the next morning they just lined us up and they said “Well those that are going to the air force, you get in that line and navy there and the army there” and anyhow it sorted itself out and they said “Right, now you’ll go over to Sandgate and do your rookies training” you see. Well they

24:00 took us out there and drilled us and got some discipline into us and then we did firearms and bayonet training and all this sort of thing and then they took us out down towards Scarborough and we did this what they call this unarmed combat and commando stuff, and it was all very interesting. We had quite a time. It was quite good and we

24:30 came back after they taught me how to kill people. They sent me to Melbourne then to the medical school to patch them up again so that was alright.

Had you ever used a gun before?

Yes, at home, like, you know duck shooting and I had my own twenty-two [.22 calibre] rifle and course Dad had the big shotgun and the first time I had a shot out of the uncle’s gun actually, we were on a lagoon out in

25:00 the back country a bit and I was standing on the end of this lagoon and it was all pretty wet, moist and slippery, pulled, got her up, you know and instead of pulling one trigger, I pulled both of them at the same time and next thing I sort of opened my eyes and I’m laying on my back and my feet are in the water and, you know, and the Dad and my uncle are just standing there laughing, killing themselves laughing because bang, it really kicked me

25:30 right over, yeh. I didn’t fall for that trick again but yes, and they taught me a lot about firearms themselves, you know, more or less how to look after them and how to look after yourself with them and not pointing a gun at anybody else, you know, all the safety features and I had a pretty fair grounding in that before I even got to the stage where the air force told us thing

26:00 and they didn’t tell us very much different to what my Dad had told us and it was good.

What did you find hard about rookie training?

The training? Well I don’t know that there was anything hard. I mean our training at the medical school was pretty solid, pretty constant. It was long hours and there were exams about every three, four, five days

26:30 and all depends what the subject was that we were studying and then they’d have a couple of others there and then you’d have to be examined on all of that sort of thing, you know and working up then till the big one at the end. Well then when we came out of that training after six weeks, it was alleged that we were taught, or were supposed to know, as much as a three-year nurse had learnt over her period of training. I s’pose we did to a certain degree because

27:00 whilst it was all a lot of theory, it was when we got into our clearing station and then we started to take out-patients and then we’d get the practical side of it going, you know. We had more theory in our training that we had practical side of it, but it all worked out pretty well but it was pretty, really solid going, you know. You had to keep your nose to the book sort of thing to

27:30 your textbooks and have them close by you.

What was the nursing school like when you first got there?

Very good. Actually they sent us off to [RAAF] Laverton and there were three of us and we arrived there and we walked into the orderly room and put our papers on the counter and there was a bloke looked up, he said, “Yeh, what do you want?” “We’ve come to report in. We’ve been posted here”. “Oh yeh” so he had a look at the papers. He said “Oh,

28:00 this is the medical training?” I said, “Yeh”. He said, “It’s not here” he said, “don’t know where it is” he said “it’s not at Laverton” and it turns out that they’d moved the training school over to Larundle [?], it was out at East Preston in Melbourne. “Oh yeh, how do we get there?” “You’ll have to go back catch the train, go back into Melbourne and get a tram out to East Preston” sort of thing, you know. “There could be a truck hanging around at the station somewhere. See if they might

28:30 be going out that way” so we were lucky. We did find a truck to take us out and Larundle turned out to be Number One RAAF Training Depot and there was a thousand-odd girls on the station and anyhow medical school, our training school, I think there was about thirty five or forty blokes there and the,

29:00 what do they call it, telegraph police, you know the, what do they call them, I’ll think of their name shortly, I suppose it’d be the same number. Well you can imagine, you know less than a hundred blokes there in amongst all these thousand-odd girls on the station. Well it was great because if you had a button to be sewn on or some work to be done on your uniform,

29:30 the girls would soon do that. They’d line up and do that. They used to look after us extremely well, you know, course then we’d take them to the movies, and we’d have, we didn’t get much time off. We used to have about one Sunday in every two. That was a weekend otherwise we were working on weekends and we’d get into the city and you’d go to a big concert that’d be on. They were all for free,

30:00 you know. They used to put these on and course we’d go and then we’d come back on the tram to the terminus at East Preston and as you got off the tram, you walked round the corner of the thing and there was a fish and chip shop there and we used to go in and get a piece of flake and some chips and we’d start walking then. We had about mile and a half, two miles to go out to the depot, out to Larundle but Larundle

30:30 apparently was built to be an asylum, a female asylum and of course the air force took it over and put the WAAAFs [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force] in it for training. They were telegraphy people, like that was the word I was trying to think of. Well a lot of girls were training to be telegraphists and they did a pretty mighty job and all sorts of training they did there and it was pretty good that way and

31:00 yeh.

What sort of things did you learn there at the nursing school?

The nursing school? General nursing, more or less general diseases, general illnesses, infectious diseases, how to nurse them and how to make the bed to suit a person with rheumatics or pneumonia or a cardiac job

31:30 or something, you know, what sort of a bed that they’d have to have and if that bed wasn’t made correctly the sister would be around and she’d pick you off. She’d show you once, like, again and if you did the same damn thing she’d tear a strip off you, but we had two sisters. I’ve got a photo there we’ll show you after of the course that I was on and Sister Maher, she was a lovely lady and she had an offsider, Sister…

32:00 anyhow, her name’s on the board there and our CO [Commanding Officer] the squadron leader doctor, Gabriel, Squadron Leader Gabriel, he was a very fair man examining and all the rest of it, and he’d talk to you, you know he didn’t sort of say, “What’s so-and-so and so-and-so” you know but he’d put it in

32:30 such a manner that you were at ease pretty well straight away and the instructor that we had was Sergeant Orb Murray. He did a pretty good job, you know he was a fellow that he used to have some humour in his lectures. He didn’t sort of go down the straight and narrow all the time. He put a bit of humour into it

33:00 and break the tension, like, you know. He had a good method and we learnt a lot there but how you, and then of course a lot of my field came into a lot of actual first aid work and the clearing station is set out as, there was only, what, ten or twelve orderlies and course your officers and your X-ray technician and general hand and

33:30 the cooks and that, and that made up your thirty and they would have, the orderlies would be doing all this sort of training and the first aid side of it, as I say, was more or less in my field, applying splints and that but the general purpose of the clearing

34:00 station was that we went and got our patients. If there was an instance where say we’d had a raid and we’d go in and get the patients or if we were attacked we’d go out, cause we were all unarmed, like, you know and we’d go out and get our patients and get them into the clearing station, fix them all up and what we couldn’t handle, we’d send back to the base hospital,

34:30 but fortunately we didn’t have any kamikaze [Japanese suicide pilots] idiots there like the banzai

[Japanese battle cry] blokes bashing at you, like, you know and it was only from air raids that was, there was one morning we hadn't been, getting up to that attacks type of thing. When we landed in Markham Valley,

35:00 we flew into Port Moresby. They kept us there overnight and they flew us into the Markham Valley at Nadzab the next day and we had to set up our camp. I think we were there for about two days and we'd just finished setting up and we were ready to take patients and we were down at breakfast. It was about seven o'clock in the morning and we could hear the Yanks were building the airstrip again because we,

35:30 when we arrived we landed on the Jap [Japanese] strip, like, you know which wasn't, it was a bit hairy, like, you know landing after what we'd been used to and anyhow we're there and we're just about finished our breakfast and I've got a piece of toast and a cup of tea left, and next thing we heard all this machinegun fire going off and we thought "Oh well, somebody's having a practice" you know and it seemed to be moving around a fair bit

36:00 and we were more or less at the end but to one side of the end of the airstrip, like, you know where the planes take off and anyway the mate and I, we decided we'd go out and have a look, see what was happening so we walked out of our mess tent and looking all around, can't see anything, you know and next thing we hear this rat-a-tat-a-tat behind us and we looked around and here's a Jap Zero [fighter aircraft] coming down at us. It's strafing. Well my cup of tea went that

36:30 way and my toast went that way and the slit trench was there and I think I took one dive and I was in it. Frightened hell out of us and we looked up and as he flew past you could see him leaning out the cockpit "Oh, being so sorry please" you know but it was a real eye opener and an early lesson for us, don't stick your head out. Make sure that there's nothing coming and particularly look over your shoulder, see what was behind you, you know, be very careful.

37:00 So we never got caught again, like, you know when any of the machinegun fire was on, "Where is he?" but that was a big fright that morning so we had to go back to see if we could get another piece of toast but there was none left.

Was anyone injured in that?

No, as a matter of fact it was only a matter of, there were some of our fighters up in

37:30 the air at the time and they got him. I s'pose it was about, within about ten minutes of him strafing us they had him. They'd shot him down and I think they came in from Lae. That was about thirty mile down the river and I think that's where they came from mainly, or we were led to believe that's where they'd come from because Lae hadn't been taken at that stage

38:00 but we didn't have any red crosses on our buildings, on our tents or anything. You see that session that used to be on, the comedy one that, MASH [Mobile Surgical Hospital, popularised in the television series of the same name] the American hospitals and the big red cross up on the tent. We never had any of that sort of thing. We were advised not to put any red crosses up or not to have any red crosses visible from any distance,

38:30 you know, yeh.

So how far would the fire have been from you, the bullets coming over?

Coming at us? Well I s'pose from here to the side of the wall I s'pose.

A couple of metres?

Yeh but we'd shifted and I got down in a little slit trench, you know and that but I think, you don't know what these blokes are thinking of when they're coming

39:00 at you but whether he was just going to strafe up our line of tents and everything, you know, all our wards and everything, four big tents set up as wards you see and then of course there was other, the troop, the staff lines, tents and all the rest of it and I s'pose he thought he'd give them a rattle too but we were a bit lucky there that he didn't hit anything, you know so we didn't have any holes in our roof

39:30 to leak when it rained, which was every night and yeh, so it was a lesson learned early in the piece. Fortunately no injuries to us and it made us very cautious. When we heard any firearms discharging, we wanted to know where it was and what was happening, you know, yeh.

How big was the plane and how close was it?

The Zero?

40:00 An ordinary single-seater fighter, Jap fighter plane, big radial engine on it and quite frightening when it's coming towards you and spitting at you.

How far away would it have been from you?

Well it'd be hard to say just how high he was but he wasn't all that high. I think he'd done a sort of a swoop down in strafing and he was starting to pull up again, you know to come

40:30 but I s'pose looking at him, he'd be up about that, like, you know, straight up to about there on that angle, yeh but the others, you know, there's usually, some were down low, some were high, you know. It all depends on what their job was, whether they were going to bomb you or strafe you but didn't mind the bombing so much. I mean that was dangerous

41:00 enough but the strafing I didn't like at all, you know. It's no good at all, yeh.

Tape 3

00:31 **Martin I'd like to go back a little bit and talk a bit more about your training. Remember you spoke about recruit training, that was where they taught you to kill people, I think you said.**

Yeh.

Can you tell us a little bit more about how they taught you to do that?

Well, how to handle a rifle, how to handle the bayonet, how to use the bayonet. They used to have a big bag hang out, was stuffed with straw or some damn thing, you know, was

01:00 fairly heavy. There was a bit of weight in it and it was on a big rack type of thing, you know. You'd be charging up to this and you'd have to put your bayonet into it and pull it back and there was procedure to follow sort of thing, and then your unarmed combat was by using your rifle and more or less smacking your enemy with the butt of the rifle.

01:30 The procedure then is to, once he'd sort of collapsed, you give him a good smack over the head with it or in the belly type of thing, you know, make sure he wasn't more dangerous to you and then of course with the other firearms like the grenades and that sort of thing, how to throw your grenade. They used to be a bit frightening. It was alright when you were handling it but when your mate

02:00 was handling it, you weren't too sure whether he knew what he was doing, you know because once that little pin came out and the lever came up you had, I think it was about three or four seconds or something, to get rid of it and there was different timings on them. And the first day that we had grenade training, more or less teaching us how to use them, we were in this trench

02:30 and the mound of dirt that came out of the trench was mounded up over the edge of it you see and this corporal drill instructor was lecturing us on the use of this grenade and how to use it so he said "Now you pull the pin out" he said "you don't need that anymore" he said "you can throw it away" which he promptly did and he said "now when I let this lever go" and the lever flew out - it was on a spring -

03:00 it flew out and he said "then you get rid of it" and he's holding it up like this. Then he put it on the mound and he just pushed it and it went down the other side and it went off. Well, you know we were covered in dust and dirt for a while, you know but just more or less made us realise just how damn dangerous they were, you know and of course when we joined up nobody told us this war was going to be dangerous when we got there, like, you know and people shooting at us and

03:30 the big machineguns, they were good. I used to like the big Bren gun [Bren light machine gun]. It was a lovely gun to use and course there's difference in, it's common language these days, "somebody had a gun", you know. Well there's pistols and there's revolvers and there's like various handguns and

04:00 this sort of thing and the only gun of course is the big guns on a big naval vessel, you know, or batteries of guns like the army use, and then of course there's rifles and there's, when you're referring to something, "He had a three o three rifle [Lee-Enfield .303 calibre service rifle] or a twenty-two [.22 calibre rifle] or a shotgun" or something like this, you know but it's just not a gun, you don't know, but anyhow.

Did you learn to use the machineguns in that training?

04:30 Yes and what we used to do then on, getting away from the training, but when we were in the islands and we used to go down, might have a few hours off and we'd go down to where the Yanks were, the armourers were doing their maintenance and of course they'd fix up the big Browning point fives [.50 calibre heavy machine gun] from the aircraft and they had this big

05:00 frame out, big pipe frame and they had the fittings and everything there and had this point five up on the, the big Browning gun it was, and put it up on this frame and they'd have to fire so many rounds through it just testing it to see if it was alright and they used to get sick of doing it, you know and we used to go down and might be two or three of us would go down one day and we used to have a great old time there and we'd pick our imaginary target out in the water. They'd be firing out over the water

05:30 and we'd pick out our imaginary target and that'd be it you see so

So just to take you back again to the training, did you make friends in those early days of the training?

Yes, some good friends. Some of those fellows were posted to this clearing station

06:00 that I was posted to which was Number 24 MCS it was known as, a Medical Clearing Station, and there was a few of them. We all got posted to the same unit and I saw quite a bit of them for quite a few months then and it was just over twelve months I think I was with the clearing station, then I was transferred or posted over to

06:30 77 Squadron which, their sick quarters was, there was a doctor, a flight lieutenant doctor, a sergeant, a corporal and an LAC, he's the leading aircraftsman. The doctor of course was a flight looey [Flight Lieutenant] and that was all that was on the squadron. Numbers of, the strength of the squadron used to vary a bit

07:00 at times and I don't know whether they ever had, it all depends how many aircraft they were handling and how many men they could cope with sort of thing, you know. They weren't overly big that they could sort of get out of control, you know. It was quite good. If it got that way they'd build another squadron type of thing, to get them.

So you became quite friendly early on in the training?

Yes.

How

07:30 **were friendships formed at that stage?**

Because through common knowledge and common activities that we were doing. We were more or less in the same thing and we had an affinity to everybody, you know that was doing the same course and after lectures and that type of thing, after your day's training you could go back and particularly at mess time you could talk

08:00 about, there might have been a funny incident happen, somebody fell out of the tree while he was doing this or that, you know or he might have forget the patient who fell out of bed on him, like, you know you could talk about these sort of things and I found even in my life, the eventual career that we could talk amongst ourselves about

08:30 different instances and that sort of give us a greater knowledge of, and friendship, and bonds, bonded pretty well, you know. It was good and there was one chap in particular that we sort of clicked it off pretty well the same and we've been friends for donkey's years, you know and then I went down to

09:00 Melbourne, this accident, and getting assessed and I went into, or came out from the orthopaedic surgeon rooms and I said to Haze, you know "Let's go and have a cup of tea" and right opposite was the RSL in Collins Street so we went in there and it's like a real rabbit warren, you know there's little offices all over for professional people and there's a brass plate there and it's got

09:30 E D M Ryan, ophthalmologist and I said to Haze, "I wonder if that's the old CO?" I said, "It can't be, he wouldn't be practising now, he'd be too old" so I went around to his office and went in and this old dear is sitting there and she looked and I said, "Dr Ryan?" "Oh yes" she said, "Have you an appointment?" I said, "No, I'm hoping I don't have to have one". "Oh" she said, looked at me, you know

10:00 like "who are you?" sort of thing, you know and I said "Was Dr Ryan in the air force?" "Yes" she said. I said, "He was a squadron leader?" "Yes" and she started to sort of, you know get a bit interested and I said "Well look I wonder if I could see him just for a few minutes?" I said, "I think it's my old CO" I said "I haven't seen him since the end of the war, or before the end of the war". "Oh" she said, "Well he's out just now, he's not in but he should be in within the half hour". She said, "You go and have a cup of coffee

10:30 and come back", so we did. We came back and I said, "Don't tell him that I'm here". She knew who I was and she said "Alright" so she sent me into his office and he looked at me and he knew me pretty well straightaway, you know. He had to think about the name for a little while but he remembered me in the finish, you know. We had quite a yarn there. Then he started to pull out some photos. He wanted to find some

11:00 photos and he couldn't find them in his desk and I looked at his desk and I thought to myself "Gee, old feller you've changed" because in his office, with the hospital unit, everything in its place and every place had its thing, you know and when I looked at his office, well you've never seen such an old crumbled-down WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK house in all your life as what he had there. Anyhow we had quite a yarn there for a while and I said, "Well I think you've got some patients waiting, we'd better choof off" but

11:30 then he said "You know our doctor?" he said, "our surgeon" he said. Prescott was his name. He was a superintendent of one of the hospitals anyway down in Melbourne in the surgery line and he said, "He had a stroke a couple of years ago" he said, "he's dead". I said, "Oh yeh". He named a couple of others and I said

12:00 "What about Ian McGregor?" "Oh yes" he said, "He's dead too. He had a heart attack". I thought, "Christ I'm getting out of there before he's got me dead too" and I said, there was our cook, Fred

Vonstanky and Fred was a very nice fellow, well built, you know muscular, in fit condition and he was a chef by trade. I think he was in, I think it was the Hotel Federal or something in Melbourne and he joined up and we were very lucky to have him with the

12:30 clearing station because the food that he used to put out from a tin of bully beef or a tin of herrings in sauce or something, you know, it was something special, the way he used to turn it out and he said "Oh yes" he said, "he's a very rich man" and I said "Oh is he still cooking?" and he said "No" he said "he's got three or four lobster boats" he said "down at Robe". "Oh yeh", so we were down there on holidays. We went around that way. We were in the caravan and we went around that way so I made some inquiries

13:00 and got a phone number and rang and some lady answered and I told her who I was and who I was looking for and why and "Oh" she said "just a minute" and some fellow came on and said, "I'll get the son" so he came on and I told him who I was and what I wanted. "Oh" he said, "I'm sorry" he said "but Dad passed away two years ago". "Oh" I said, "well that wasn't very nice of him. He shouldn't have done that. He knew I was coming", you know but anyhow

13:30 I thought "Well the sooner I get out of Doc Ryan's office, the better".

Was Dr Ryan, when was he your CO?

Late 1943, no I'm sorry '44, about February, March something like that. In February 1944 and he was still the CO of the hospital unit when I left

14:00 to go over to 77 Squadron. I believe he stayed with the hospital until his return to Australia. He came back just before the war finished and it was, yeh it'd be, yeh 1945 it finished, August 1945 isn't it?

And what sort of a CO was he?

Terrific, a terrific man, very fair. He used to give us lectures about every one or two

14:30 weeks. He'd have a lecture on about some subject, about a patient that had come in, like, you know and more or less the treatments and what he thought was the best way to go about it and you had to know your anatomy and physiology sort of thing, you know and the thing was he'd look at you and say, "What's so and so and so?" You either knew the answer and could tell him straight off or you didn't know the answer and say, "I'm sorry sir I don't know". "Well you'd better find out about it", you know, "get the books out and have a look at it" and this is the sort of thing that he

15:00 used to come at. He was a very fair man and he always was partial to the eyes. He wanted to be an eye specialist and which he finished up being on Collins Street, which I thought was a pretty good achievement, and I think he was around the 30, 32 years of age when he was with our hospital unit and I think he

15:30 got the squadron leader's rank naturally when he goes in and he was going to, well he'd be a flight looey to start with and then they'd promote him to CO of the hospital or something and he'd be a squadron leader and he, I think he went out with that rank too you see.

So just a couple of more questions about your training, so were there any accidents in training at all?

In training? Not that I can

16:00 recall, no, not that I can recall, nothing serious anyway. I mean the only thing that has affected me later in my life was, part of the training in the rookies part, you know they had a coil of barbed wire, big, you know. It's about so high and we had to, was a couple of rolls, you know on top of one another

16:30 and there was ten of us put together so, "Now you've got to go over that wire to get to the enemy on that point there". "Righto, how do we do that?" "Well the lead man, the first in the line, you hold the rifle in front of you. You run up and you throw yourself onto the coil of barbed wire with the rifle in front of you which pushes everything down", it would be alleged and "Oh yes"

17:00 and then the other nine coming up behind you, the idea is that they leap over you by putting their foot on your buttock and going straight over the wire. That's how you get through the coils of barbed wire. "Oh yeh". Well that was alright. The first bloke that came along, he stood on my buttock alright but I think the other eight came along and I think they all stood in the middle of my back, you know with these blasted great beetle crushers on that they wear and

17:30 it eventually it played up with me and did give me quite a bit of trouble, with the result that I finished up having two lots of surgical repair done on the spine and when I told the doctors what had actually happened in the first place and they were amazed, you know to think that we were allowed to do that sort of thing, but anyhow it happened but that was about the only thing that, whether any of the other lads had sort of

18:00 had same trouble and came out later in life, I don't know.

How did you find that physical training that you had to do in the rookies training?

It was a bit tough for about the first week, you know but then you got into the swing of it. It was quite good. It was, you know, interesting, how to go about things and you felt good, you know we were in the peak of condition and

18:30 when we were in the islands with the unit and where we could sort of set up a volleyball court, it was compulsory for every orderly in particular to have at least two games of volleyball each afternoon and I'll tell you what, we were very fit, very fit fellers, and you'd play your volleyball, down to the showers, have your shower and back to the mess and have your evening

19:00 meal and then you had the night to yourself. Course there was nowhere to go, you know, look out of your tent, the jungle's just there sort of thing, and it was something that the old CO was pretty strict on. You had to have that exercise. All the unit staff had to have this exercise, you know and, as I say, particularly the orderlies because we weren't doing, like

19:30 the general hand. He might be out using a pick and shovel whereas we'd be in handling nice soft touch, no touch techniques on our patients and dressings and all the rest of it you see and we had to get out and do the volleyball act.

Can you tell us Martin a little bit more about the training you did to be a nurse orderly?

Well, as I say, we learnt a lot in the textbooks to start with, what a disease was, what

20:00 type of disease it was, what name it had, its incubation period and more or less the stages it'd go through until it'd finished and you got rid of it, how to treat it. What sort of bed you would have it in because the patient could be a pretty weak type of thing or its affecting blood pressures and they couldn't stand up, you're feeling very weak and all this sort of thing, you know.

20:30 You'd have to learn all this about each particular disease and I remember pneumonia was one that was thumped into us because they maintained that you were in the jungle sort of thing and you were getting wet. You might be in your wet clothes for quite a long time and then you'd get cold and next thing you knew you had a pneumonia onto you, so you had to sort of watch for

21:00 telltale symptoms of different ones that could be coming down with, although usually the onset was fairly quick with pneumonia and different diseases. Then you'd have to, see the scourge in the jungle of course was typhus, mosquitos and you had to sort of

21:30 watch for temperatures, more or less skin colouring, whether the patient was flushed, whether he was hot and all this type of thing, hot and dry and watch his lips, a lot of observation. I mean I can still sit, say we've got visitors and I can look at somebody and I think, "Now he's not quite well", like, you know "he's got a bit of a pallor around the lips" or that, "has he got a bad blood flow or has

22:00 he got a crook heart or just what?" you know and then you, just to satisfy your own little mind you put a couple of little pertinent but delicate questions to them, you know without upsetting them and you usually find that, you weren't too far off the track, so it's something that's sort of stuck with me anyway. I think you'd find that most of the fellers that went through, they'd still have that ability to do that and, as I say,

22:30 then a lot of people, "should they be in bed, should they be in bed smothered with blankets or just a sheet over them for modesty sake type of thing" you know and you have to know just exactly what you wanted to do there. A person gets the shivers, like a rigor, you get and "I'm cold, I'm cold, give me blankets" you know and

23:00 so you've just go to watch that you don't overheat at the same time and with some of the patients now, some of our aircraft accidents, the patient's in shock anyway from the trauma that he's just experienced. You keep the patient warm but not overheated. Bandages, now you've got to be careful with your bandages because a bandage should be firm but not

23:30 tight. You don't want to restrict the blood flow in any particular areas, all little things of this nature and they all add up to one big thing and if you've done the wrong thing. Injections, you've got to be a bit careful with injections. When you're going to give an injection you always have somebody check what it is, whether it's something for diabetics, is it something for tetanus, is it penicillin or

24:00 whatever you might have and you check and then the dosage that you're going to give, you've got the doctor's instruction there. He wants morphine say, he wants a quarter of morphine or sixth of morphine or whatever it might be. So you'd work it out and you put it in the syringe, your offsider checks the label. He checks the syringe and as you push off so much to leave the amount to actually inject,

24:30 he checks that as well. Then when you put it say into the arm, you check, you normally pull back a little bit on the plunger and if that fills up with blood, you withdraw the needle slightly or you push it in a bit further and when there's no blood running into it, OK give it to them because it goes into the tissue. If you put it into the, some drugs, if you put it directly into the bloodstream, you could kill your patient

25:00 if you're not too careful. Penicillin, when penicillin first came out and it used to come in a vial of about so long. It was a pretty, goldy colour, real deep honey. Then we'd have to fill that with sterile water to, I forget the measurements now. It's about twenty-two c's or something and make sure that it's all mixed

25:30 up and dissolved as best you can. Then you might have to use a couple of thousand units into the patient so you draw so much into the syringe and you had a check with your mate to see that it's the right dosage, put the new needle on it because the penicillin in those days had a great habit of blocking the needle and we used to have a wide ball needle and

26:00 into the buttocks, you could be tempting fate a bit because of the sciatic nerve and you always injected into the upper outer quadrant of the buttock type of thing, you know so you wouldn't hit that nerve, the sciatic nerve, cause if you did you could cripple somebody and pretty painful and then we used to use it like a dart to get it in. Instead of this great long needle like that, you know, pushed in slowly, that hurts

26:30 too much so you just sort of, you know "How's that mate, you can feel your fingers?" and next thing you know you've got your needle into it. He doesn't know that it's happened until it's too late, then you push it in. Well then sometimes that needle would block. You'd have to take it all out, put a new needle on and do it again for him until he got all his dosage in. You had, there was little tricks that you had to learn to do it

27:00 and of course the sterilisation of these instruments and all the rest of it, they were pretty strict on that sort of thing and some instruments you can boil, others you can't, got to be very careful with glass syringes and particularly if there's any metal on them. You never boil a sharp instrument, sharp bladed instrument like a pair of scissors, scalpels and anything with a very sharp

27:30 fine edge on it because it bluntens it. You used alcohol or you used your autoclave to sterilise the thing. These days they've got gamma rays of course and that's pretty good.

And you learnt all of these things, all about this in just a really short period of time?

Six weeks.

In six weeks?

Six weeks yeh.

So it was very intense?

Too right.

How did you find that study at the time?

Well it was alright

28:00 because we were young, we were interested. We wanted to stay in that particular, if you failed that you could be out as a general hand on a pick and shovel and we didn't want that. We wanted this thing that we'd chosen and we really got into it, you know and nighttime, we'd finished about nine p.m. Then if you wanted to, weren't too sure on something, you could go and have a talk with one of your mates or a couple, three of

28:30 them or you'd get a textbook out and you'd have a look at it before you went to sleep that night, you know before lights out which was usually around about ten o'clock and by ten o'clock came you were ready for your bunk because you had to get up early again the next morning to go for a drill or route march or whatever. The interesting thing too of course was all that was theatre work, operating theatre. The old CO

29:00 he used to do all the anaesthetics and he'd have an orderly standing by him and we'd fill the ether bottles and there was, the initial one, well the powder of course that goes over it and you had that all set up just nicely and how it should be arranged, how to make the powder. Then there was a bottle of what they called ether chlorine or ether chlor and it had a spray on it. Well it would mostly go over the patient's face and then

29:30 they'd spray this ether chlor around and that would, you know put him out and that's when he'd start to resist and I've seen three and four of us laying across a patient, holding him down on the table, while he gets past this resistance stage and I'm very pleased that I never, ever had to have an anaesthetic of that nature because it must have been terrifying for these people that were going under it, you know, being held down and they're trying to, you know

30:00 get their breath and that and then they'd put the ether on, so many drops, like, you know just and the vapour would just sort of put him right out. Well the orderly that was offsiding for the anaesthetist, the old CO would say, there were three stages and he'd look at him and say "Right Kane, what stage is he in?" "He's in second stage doctor. He's got a bit more to go yet". "Righto, thank you, good"

30:30 If you weren't too sure you'd say "Well look I'm not too sure doctor, whether he's" you know "whether he's such and such or not". Well he would tell you, like, so that you'd know next time and in theatre and of course when the surgery started, there was the surgeon. The sergeant usually used to offside. Well the sergeant did offside for him. Sometimes he'd be helping his,

31:00 having his hand in his comics [?] or whatever, you know, whatever it was they were doing and then the likes of me, I finished up as a lousy little corporal with two hooks on. I was next in line for, to sort of offside, you know. You might be a theatre scout and there'd be an orderly doing scouting. The doctor

might want something, alright you had it and you had to be sterile as well because you were handling sterile instruments

31:30 and one little thing that we found, some of the surgical operations or procedures, they were breaking down. They were becoming infected and it had the doctors beat as to why because everything, they'd go through it, you know before the operation started but what we were doing, we had a big mosquito net over the whole theatre, just inside the tent

32:00 more or less to keep insects out mainly and anyhow we'd go round then with pyrethrum to spray anything that might have been in the thing you see. Well then the patient would be brought in and prepped, prepared and put him to sleep and the surgery could start, sew him up and a couple of days it was all infected and they couldn't work out why and somebody said one day, "Would it be the pyrethrum that we spray

32:30 around?" and they started to think then, "Well this is possible, we won't use it again", stopped the infections, you know, just simple little thing, trying to cure one thing within the sterile area and we were more or less compounding it, you know unbeknown to us but anyhow that was sort of sorted out no trouble at all.

That's fascinating really, so they must have been very pleased to find that out?

They were yes

33:00 because like once there was an infection come in, the surgeon wasn't very happy about it at all, you know. Where did he go wrong, what did he do? Had somebody touched an instrument or something, you know, that shouldn't have, and then more or less to come out of the anaesthetic, the patient's coming out of the anaesthetic, we used to have to keep an eye on him naturally, that he didn't swallow his tongue and all this sort of jazz and once he came out

33:30 cause ether made a person very ill, a lot of vomiting went on. I think they must have swallowed an awful lot of it, you know and you'd have to keep a pretty close eye on it and you were checking the pulse, temperature, every fifteen minutes, blood pressures and if there was any changes to the detrimental side

34:00 the doctor had to know straight away, which he did too. The worst ones of course were bad burns, somebody in an aircraft and got burnt up in an aircraft. Some of them were quite hideous really but we carried a big tin plunge bath with us and we used to fill that with saltwater, about

34:30 tablespoon to the pint of water I think it was of salt to water, pint of water and we used to measure this out and fill the plunge bath and we'd lower the patient into this and let him soak in that nice warm water, lift him out and just sort of dab dry him around the edges, not on the wound itself. Then we'd cover that wound with tulle grafe, a Vaseline gauze, and about four hours time we'd take all that off and put him

35:00 back in this plunge bath and they used to heal up without a scar on them, you know. That was very good and they found that out by the pilots coming back from Germany, their raids, and went into the English Channel and they might be in the water there for a few hours before they were picked up by the rescue launch and they found that these fellows that had been burnt, their burns were healing very well, thank you very much, because of the saltwater so that was a treatment that they went on. Then of course

35:30 penicillin came on. There were sulphur drugs, what was there? Sulphur gynadine was for dysenteries and sulphur thalidomide, couple of the others. I just can't think of their names offhand. They were more or less infections. You often heard of Americans calling in some of these movies "Oh get me some sulphur drugs", you know. Well this is what they were, like,

36:00 they were an infection, bacteria thing, you know. It was good but with theatre, everything was very sterile, naturally. It had to be and two of us would count all the instruments before the patient came in. We'd count all the instruments and it was noted down, how many pairs of scissors, how many forceps, how many scalpels and so on and

36:30 when the surgeon had finished and he said "Right you can take him away," well before they took him out, we'd count all the instruments that were back on the tray again, "Oh there's one missing, Doc". "Oh I wonder where it is." It might be under a towel or something, "Oh it's found". "OK take him away" but everything was counted and when I first struck this I thought "Well" you know, "surely to goodness the doc would know if he's left something in there" but it's so simple to leave something,

37:00 you know. You've got a clamp, what they call a Spencer Wells forcep and you just clamp that down. It could quite easily be left in, no trouble at all, you know and it has been known, well there's that lady down in Sydney or Melbourne or something that had this pair of scissors there that lasted for quite a long time. She had them for a few years, didn't she? She should have paid rent for those, goodness me.

Did you, while you were there in the islands, were

37:30 **any instruments ever found to be left?**

No because we had a pretty good check on it. Two of us would count the instruments to start with and

two of us would count them again like, you know. Usually it was a different two that counted the next lot, like, you know before and after so that, “Oh gee I don’t know where that is”. “Oh, put it down” you know. No, it was two different blokes that would do that, not that we didn’t trust each other but, you know mistakes can happen and

38:00 makes you wonder then, but theatre was a very interesting situation and we were fortunate in some times. There was one bloke, he’d had some burns and his eyes were damaged and they had an American. He was an eye specialist in private practise and he used to come over every day to see this particular patient and the treatments that he

38:30 did were so delicate and the old CO, you know if he got any closer to it the operating surgeon wouldn’t have been able to see his patient, you know cause he was so keen. That’s what he wanted to do and he eventually did do and it was burns, burns from the accidents, aircraft accidents, crashes. They were, as I say, they were just hideous some of them and then once they

39:00 got, really bad ones, once they got to a certain stage we could send them back then to a base because you couldn’t really send him back straightaway unless you were on the move or something like that but they’d keep him there as long as they possibly could until he’d settled and then the wound is starting to heal so that you couldn’t sort of put him on an aircraft and send him back

39:30 to the base hospital because you’d have probably killed him so it was just as well to keep him and if we got into trouble, well he was going to die anyhow, you know. That was the attitude but otherwise theatre was very interesting, the types of surgery that was done. It was all emergency surgery mainly, you know appendix or something like that or an accident that had happened.

40:00 Then of course if we lost any patients, they’d be taken down to the morgue of course. Then there’d be a PM [post mortem] on it and then you had to prepare that patient. He was still known as a patient and he still had to be prepared properly and the surgeon would eventually arrive and he’d do the PM and this is where we learnt a lot of our

40:30 anatomy as where such-and-such was, you know and we had various organs just handed to us that we had to put in the basins and they were all put in order so they went back approximately to the approximate places that they were taken from and when the surgeon had found out what the cause of death was, well you could put them back

41:00 and then the orderlies would put everything back and we’d sew him up again and with the final touches, more or less get him ready for his funeral, for which there was no boxes. They were just wrapped in a blanket and sewn up but they were shaved, their hair was done. All full dignity was given to that particular

41:30 person, you know and it was explained to us “Now if that was a relative of yours, you would like such and such a thing done, do it for this fellow”, and that was thumped into us pretty strong and it was good.

Tape 4

00:31 **We were talking about post mortems. So you did a post mortem on everybody who died?**

Yeh anybody that came into our hospital unit, they had to check out to see what actually killed that person. Now there’s an example. We had one of our pilots or one of the squadron pilots, he didn’t quite make it back to the island and he crashed into the sea

01:00 and by the time they could get lifting gear to lift him out, he was in fairly deep water and to lift it out and they had to lift the whole aircraft out. They couldn’t get down to him but he was under water for ten days, just on ten days.

You were talking about the pilot who crashed into the sea?

Yeh well he was in the aircraft for ten days before we got him up at the hospital.

01:30 That was terrible, you know because he’d been in for so long and of course none of the sea life could get at him because of his cockpit he was in but they didn’t know whether he just drowned, whether he’d been shot, whether he’d been injured in his crash so they had to do

02:00 a PM to find out actual cause of death. Then they could say, “Oh yes he was injured in the crash. He fractured his neck, he fractured his spine or internal injuries of whatever and then it was accompanied by drowning” and so, whatever, but they had to make all these records of how that person actually died,

02:30 what was the actual cause of death because down the track it all comes back into payments, pensions and this type of things because of his next of kin. His wife would have had to have a pension given to her because of his death and that type of thing, you know so they had to know exactly what killed him.

Martin had you assisted in doing any post mortems during training?

03:00 No we just had to observe more or less. Our ambulance training you mean?

Well during the training you did for the nurse orderly?

No.

But you had observed a post mortem?

Yeh but then with our ambulance training, when I was doing that and they sent us off and we were doing all this paramedic stuff, they used to take us down to the Brisbane City Morgue and whatever was

03:30 going on there and we'd observe that and the surgeon that was doing the job, or the pathologist, he would be explaining things to you. If you didn't understand anything you'd ask him and he would explain it all out to you, you know so that was more or less the way we were learning, exactly the same as the doctors do. As to where things are kept here and

04:00 what they do and what's their job and that's it, you know.

You were so young when you were doing that training, do you remember the first time you observed a post mortem?

Yes, thank you very much, I do. We had two fellows that were digging a latrine pit and apparently it was going a little bit tough like, you know and they were getting towards the end of the job and

04:30 they had an argument and one bloke was fairly hot-tempered apparently and they were getting stuck into it. So anyhow he picked up the pick that they were using and took the handle out of it and hit this fellow over the head with it and it killed him so they brought him down to us, "Oh yes he's dead" so that afternoon the

05:00 Doc did the PM, you know, we didn't like to keep them too long. We couldn't keep them too long anyway because of the weather like, you know and anyhow all the orderlies were to go to the PM because he was going to do a complete full PM you see and I was left in charge of the unit, of the wards, while all the orderlies went up to see the PM and then one bloke was to come back and relieve me while I

05:30 went up, which duly happened and I said to him, when I was about to go, I said, "What are they up to now?" He said, "They're just opening the stomach". "Oh yeh" and of course I went in and that's what I expected to see when I walked in but instead of that here's the doc. He's got a, what they did was they cut from the back, come around to the front, then they pull the scalp right down under the chin so that they can work on the skull itself you see.

06:00 Well here's me and I just walked straight in and I thought, "Oh well, looking into the stomach", like, you know, "this will be alright" and I walks in and here's the doc with a great piece of gauze on the top of the skull and he's got the hacksaw and he's going around, cut the skull out you see and I looked up, he's, so I finished up I went outside and I had a cigarette, you know and came back in. I was alright then because I knew then and I blew the socks off this bloke when I went back.

06:30 He said, "Did it worry you?" I said, "Did it worry me?" I said, "If I'd have known what to expect I'd have been alright" you know. Anyhow I didn't hit him over the head with a pick handle because I knew how dangerous it was but that was the first one that I'd ever struck but then.

Where did that happen?

That was in Nadzab in the Markham Valley.

And were they Australian soldiers?

Yeh.

So one Australian soldier had

07:00 **killed another one?**

RAAF blokes yeh, all over a silly argument of some sort, you know, yeh so one bloke didn't do any more overseas service. He came back and he was in the jug. They put him away, yeh, and he didn't get treated for troppo. We hadn't been up there that long but no, it was just a silly damned argument over something and tempers flared and that's what he did but the number of fractures that he had. I think there was ten or twelve

07:30 fractures, line fractures going out from where the sudden hit, hit him, you know. That's the way it blows and

Did any of the other orderlies have trouble observing the post mortems and?

First up, like, you know and the surgeon, Prescott, he said, "Look fellers" he said, "When you come in" he said, "and this is going on" he said, "it's not a human being," he said, "don't worry about that. It's not a human being".

08:00 He said, "Treat it as a pig because the pig flesh and human flesh are fairly close" he said, "so treat it as

a pig" he said, "imagine it's a pig that you're working on" and that seemed to settle a lot of blokes right down, you know, and then the clean up after of course. Well when you got your hands dirty, well that was alright, you know we settled down pretty well because you were hands on. You were actually doing the thing

08:30 and they used to make us put, as he'd take the organs out and put them into their bowls, well then we'd have to put those organs back. He used to watch us, "What are you going to do with that, where do you think you're putting that?" and that sort of thing, and you'd sort of think for a minute and "Oh yes, that goes there", you know. You put it back into its correct place and then you would sew him up.

That was a very demanding job for a young man to have?

Well we

09:00 were all in the same boat. It's like, well all the troops. You take our pilots. Now they did some fantastic things, silly things but being young and silly, you had no thought of the consequences. It didn't worry you greatly, you know and

09:30 it was just one of those things that, you know just sort of came 'a la natural', you know. You're in an environment where you knew it was going to happen and if it happened, well you had to deal with it and that was all there was to it.

When you were doing your training as a nurse orderly back in Australia, were there only men training with you or did you have?

That's all. No it was only the men.

Only men, so no women were being trained to go over to that?

No because the women that were in were already qualified sisters,

10:00 nursing sisters. They went into base hospitals but they didn't come into clearing stations, mainly because we were front line stuff and they didn't, at that stage, want women in the front line. I s'pose there were some reasons, like, you know I mean if there was a raid, they were captured or anything, you know we didn't want our Australian women as play toys for the

10:30 enemy sort of thing, you know. I think that was one of the main reasons but the nursing sisters were in the base hospitals but they were in the thick of it too a lot of those girls, you know. Some of them had some pretty trying times but no, they didn't train any womenfolk at all for, they went in as nursing aides but they were in a base hospital.

But how did you,

11:00 **when you were doing that training, you had a lot of women around?**

No.

Weren't there women?

Only the two nursing sisters, that was all we had.

Sorry, where was it that you had so many women?

At the training depot, the WAAAF training depot.

At the WAAAF training depot?

Yeh, well they were training for all sorts of chores, typists, telegraphists and general clerks and cooks and you name it.

Was there much socialising between you guys and the?

Yeh,

11:30 well you try and stop it, yeh. No, there was. There was quite a lot. They used to have concerts and all this sort of thing, you know. It was pretty good that way, you know. Some of the girls, they kept up a bit of correspondence with me. Then when I got overseas like, you know but I was already engaged to be married and I was being

12:00 a good boy and it all worked out that some of the girls even wrote to, her name was Hazel too, and they even wrote to her about different things and activities that we were doing and all that sort of thing.

How had you met your fiancé?

The first one? Well we were at school together

12:30 and then she went into an office in the city and I eventually got into the ambulance and I was still working as a grocer boy like, you know when we first started to go out together and then time came to go off to the war. Well then we got engaged and I don't know whether it was the right thing or the

wrong thing but it's all behind us now.

How did she feel about you going off to the war?

13:00 Well she wasn't impressed like, you know. I mean no, she was a bit upset that we, you know, goodness knows where I'd finish up, because particularly then when it was a bit worse then when I come home on pre-embarkation leave and they knew I was going somewhere, you know. Nobody knew where we were going but we didn't even know at that time and I think, you know that sort of upset everybody a fair bit but then with that one, that lass,

13:30 the war finished and they lined us all up one morning and it was just before Christmas, yes October, yeh, September, October wasn't it? August the war finished, yeh. September, October and they lined us all up and they said, "Now the squadron has been posted off to Japan in the occupation force". I thought "Oh yes" and

14:00 they said, "Those who want to go back to Australia, step forward one. Those that want to go to Japan, stay where you are" and we had about ten minutes to think about it and I thought "Crikey" you know, "well I've been here, it's a month short of two years and I've been in the jungle all this time. I wonder what it's like at home and that" you know and I thought, "Well, I think I'll go back home to

14:30 Australia, yeh" and I thought, "Oh well, here goes" so that's what I did and I didn't get a Dear John letter [ending the relationship] over there but I got it when I got home, so I got real annoyed then, went and pinched some other bloke's sheila and married her instead so that was alright. But, and as it's worked out, after fifty-six years, it must have been alright but that's the way it all blows and that's the way it all went.

15:00 **So before you went across to the islands, you'd made the decision to make that commitment to get married?**

Yes.

That was a big decision to make knowing that you were going into a war?

Yeh, well.

What did you consider about your future then?

Well, as I say, early in the piece there we didn't think about death, "I'll be back" sort of thing, you know. That's what was in your mind. You'll go back home some day

15:30 and that'd be it, you know, so then you get on with your life. I think that was more or less basically what we thought about, you know. We didn't think about getting ourselves killed or anything like that, you know. It was just one of those things and the way I s'pose we looked at things at that time. Being young, not much experience I think had a lot to do with it.

What was the situation in the war at the time

16:00 **that you went across?**

Well they'd just stopped the Japs in Papua New Guinea from sort of infiltrating back down towards Port Moresby and the ranges and the Owen Stanleys and that sort of thing, you know. They'd already got them out of the Kokoda Track and everything and they were still along the north coast of New Guinea and they were still at Lae when we landed in there

16:30 at Nadzab and we were on the Markham River and they were still there, like, you know still trying to come pick up but the lines of communications were pretty well shot because their food supplies and their shipping and everything was being hindered to come down along the tracks to bring supplies and ammunition

17:00 and all this sort of thing down to them, fresh troops. These blokes had been there for years like, you know trying to get through, the Jap blokes, so it was still pretty hotted up, and just before we landed, a few days before we landed, our lot sent in paratroops and dropped them into the Markham Valley and then they

17:30 sort of went on and mopping up a lot of the camps anyhow and this is what pushed them back a bit further so then they packed us up and they sent us over to New Britain, to a place called Cape Gloucester which, once again the Americans had gone in there and they were only a couple of days ahead of us and we just come in and set up our hospital.

18:00 **So what were you told Martin before you left Australia about what to expect in terms of conflict and resistance?**

Nothing. You were just trained for the likelihood of these things happening, not that we would actually encounter it straight away when we got there, but you knew the chance was there that you'd be doing something. The only time that we were given a rifle, as I say, we were non-combatants

18:30 although we'd been trained in all the firearms and everything. When we were going into New Britain

she was pretty wild and woolly country and the Nips [Japanese] are still there and make sure there's no red crosses to be seen and here's your rifles and shoot to kill. That was our instructions, whether we were medical orderlies or otherwise, you know and so it was either him or us so it wasn't going to be us

19:00 as far as we were concerned, you know, and they didn't want to abide by the Geneva Conventions, well why should we, and that was the general thoughts of it, you know.

As a person who was trained to help heal people, how did you come to terms with the idea that you might have to kill somebody?

It was a pretty hard thought; you know "Jesus, what will I do? Will I

19:30 kill him straight out or will I just wound him or will I just, what am I going to do?" you know and I don't know what one would do until it actually happens, but in the heat of the moment you, you sort of "Well, this is no good. He's got to be finished" like, you know "it's either him or me and it's not going to be me" and you had to think of these things but once again, you don't know what's going to happen until the incident

20:00 arrives, you know but you've only got some idea of what's available for you to do and that's about it.

Martin, can you tell us about your trip from Australia across to Markham Valley?

To Markham Valley yeh, we went off from Townsville, well DC4s as they're known, like, you know mostly they're referred to as a DC3 [variations of Douglas DC3 transport aircraft]

20:30 but it was a configuration of the military aircraft with DC4s, you know the seating, all that sort of thing. There was no lounge chairs in them, you know, like they have in the civilian ones but anyhow we boarded at Townsville at Garbutt Airport and we had, was round about twelve or fifteen aircraft. I think it was about fifteen of us, fifteen aircraft used to take us off

21:00 and that was all our gear, all our staff and everything and it was all in one caboodle and we'd get to a place and everything was unloaded and we knew where it was and we didn't have to wait for a couple of days while the tents arrived or something, you know. Then we went to Port Moresby. We landed there and they gave us an evening meal and a bed and then we flew out from Port Moresby the next morning early into the Markham Valley.

21:30 Well then the Owen Stanley Ranges, I crossed the Owen Stanley Ranges, one, two, three, four times but I flew over mine, I didn't walk over them, no. I could look down on it, you know and think "Gee whiz", you know, "these fellers had pretty tough going" you know but it was fascinating in so far as when we left Moresby

22:00 and we eventually got to go around and they had to go through this gap. There was a big cliff on the starboard side and you didn't seem to be too far away from it, from here to the wall away, well further than that of course, but they used to go around this and get up their course again until they went into the Markham Valley itself, into the landing. It was pretty dangerous the area just there for

22:30 aircraft, been a lot of aircraft accidents there ever since and I was reading recently, when I could still see, about an aircraft that had crashed at the end of where this cliff was and they sort of couldn't get to it properly, you know. Eventually they did and the trip that they had to get into it that they could, there was helicopters used eventually to

23:00 get them so that's how long it had been there before they could, sort of from the World War until the helicopters came on the scene before they could sort of go and inspect this aircraft and get the bodies out of it and take it away.

So Martin what preparations had you had in terms of any medical things to protect yourselves from getting sick while you were there?

23:30 I think that we used to mix with these various things, infectious diseases and this type of thing. I think we used to mix with these things so that we used to get these germs alright but in quantities that our antibodies could sort of handle it and I think a lot of this came but then again, on the other hand, we had inoculations for various diseases.

24:00 That certainly helped us like, you know to stay fit but I think a lot of it basically was that we had sort of breathed in a lot of these germs and our body processes sort of worked up an immunity to it, like, you know and I think a lot of this was that, helped by those inoculations of course.

What sort of inoculations had you had?

Well of course there's the good old tetanus one.

24:30 Well there are two types. There's an ATS [Anti-Tetanus Serum] and TDS [Tetanus-Diphtheria Serum]. One's for instant, if you get a wound and for instant action they give you this ATS tetanus needle and then more or less for the immunisation there's a tetanus toxoid, a TD one and that takes a little while to get through the body and work and get up the antibodies and that way. Well we were getting those and then we had cholera of course

25:00 and what else? I'd have to look up my pay book now to see which ones I had.

That's alright, what about medication to prevent malaria?

Yes they had what they, they had a little tablet they called Atebrin. It was a sort of a yellowy little thing and after a while you looked like you had jaundice like, you know yellowish eyes

25:30 and the whites went sort of yellowy and your skin went a bit yellowy and if you weren't that colour the boss knew that you weren't taking your Atebrin pills, you know and next thing you're down with malaria. But it was pretty good and I think that saved a lot of us from that and the other thing was of course they used to make us swallow a salt tablet daily and of an evening when we'd go to the mess the duty

26:00 officer would be there and he'd have his plate full of salt tablets. You'd have to take a salt tablet. I said "Sorry sir, I can't take it". "You take it", you know, so anyhow I was sick there one day from this blasted salt tablet so he didn't give me any more but I just couldn't take that much salt in a solid lump, you know. I like salt, yeh sure but it was pretty hard to sort of swallow this pill but the Atebrin,

26:30 you had that Atebrin each day and anybody that didn't take it was just a damn fool, you know a real smarty.

And there were people who weren't taking it?

A couple of them, yeh.

Why was that?

I think they wanted a homer, get home sort of thing, you know, get malaria and go home but they didn't know just how deadly malaria was and particularly Blackwater fever, which is one of the forms of malaria, it was a pretty dangerous one.

27:00 Well if you got that you were really sick but getting malaria, I mean you get occurrences of it, like, you know and you can be very, very sick with malaria and just for the sake of not taking your pill and wanting a homer sort of thing. I mean it's a hell of a lot of suffering just to do it, you know and these things, I think it's always just as well to listen to the blokes that designed the pill

27:30 and what for and what it's preventing, you know. It's much better.

Did you ever get sick while you were there?

No, only the dysenteries, that was all but otherwise we kept pretty fit. Our food was hard tack sort of thing, but the bully beef, and I didn't mind the old bully beef and the baked beans, you know. I still eat them, you know, but

28:00 they had tins of herrings in tomato sauce and if you started to take the lid off one here right now, I'd be three blocks away. I can't stand it. It's terrible stuff and they used to plop it on your plate as you went through at the mess, like, you know. You'd walk straight in. You'd come back and have a piece of bread and cheese or something, you know. The butter was tinned butter.

28:30 It wasn't too bad once you got used to it. Then there was a lot of foods, a lot of dried foods, like dehydrated potatoes, eggs and onions and that type of thing, dehydrated and they were alright when they were cooked up but if you had chlorinated water, as soon as you boiled the water, like, you know cooked with the water

29:00 the chlorination would come to the fore, and the taste would go right through and you just couldn't eat it, like, you know. It was terrible but you weren't game to have the water unless it was chlorinated, you know. There was too many diseases coming out of, particularly cholera. You didn't know just where and cholera and typhoid. Typhoid was another injection that we used to have too and you had to be, you were pretty cautious with your water.

29:30 You didn't have, just go over and have a drink of water and down with it, you know, boiling it or your cups of tea, even the tea went off when the chlorination came through, it was a bit strong, like, you know but then they had a, if you were, you had a little bottle of pills, little water testing kit and you could go down to the creek and

30:00 you'd take a cupful and you'd put a pill in it. If it turned a certain colour you didn't drink it. If it turned another colour, it's alright. You could put some sterilisation pills in it, you know. That was alright but you didn't do it all that often.

Did you always have enough to eat and drink?

Yes plenty but when I went to the squadron we used to get two bottles of beer a month. That

30:30 was it you see. Well by the time you finished your second bottle of beer, you were scatty because you hadn't had any for the other part of the month and that's where, I don't know where the saying came from but I've got a feeling that that's where the saying came "He's just a two pot screamer", like, you drink your two bottles of beer and you'd be scatty but yeh.

What was the reason behind taking the salt tablets?

Because of the climate was so hot and

31:00 perspiration from the body, you were burning up so much moisture and the salt was pouring away in your perspiration and they wanted to replace the salt that you were losing, like water. You're supposed to drink a lot of water to replace because the body is mostly water anyway and just as well we've got some bones in the middle just to hold us up, isn't it? Otherwise you'd see a lump of jelly floating around the floor but

31:30 salt was a must, but I used to have plenty on my food and that was all that my body required, you know. It was good that way, yeh.

Martin can you tell us about first arriving in Markham Valley and what you saw there?

Yeh, well when we landed of course, it was very dusty because the old Jap strip wasn't a real first class job,

32:00 you know. It was very dusty and as soon as you opened the door of the aircraft to get out like you were in further dust because your aircraft and other aircraft around you like were stirring up all the dirt and dust and we thought, "Well what sort of a damn joint is this?" you know, and then we looked around and we could see this big, wide river. We were camped on the banks, like it was a high bank and

32:30 I don't know whether it ever floods or not. I s'pose it does but it didn't, we didn't ever go under water anyway but we were on this high bank, fairly level and fairly flat in the bottom of the valley itself, plenty of grass, like what they call kunai grass. It's pretty tall stuff, very heavy

33:00 to sort of, you've got to push your way through it well and truly or cut your way through it and like some of the vegetation was quite strange to us because we didn't realise it was so big and particularly the grasses and that, you know but because of the moisture there, it rained, I don't think there was a night went past unless it rained, you know. Late in the afternoon it would start to shower and storm

33:30 and that sort of thing and, but surprising, it used to get quite cool too, you know. Quite often you'd put a jumper on at night.

And can you describe the camp for us and the living conditions?

The camp usually had the wards. We started off with the

34:00 surgical ward was the first one and beside that and towards the back of it was the operating theatre that we used. Next was the X-ray tent. There was a sergeant technician there that used to operate the X-rays for them. Then there was a general medical ward. Then there was

34:30 an infectious diseases ward, like dysentery and all that sort of gadgets. Then there was another little ward there that was very seldom used but if you had somebody that was very sick you could put him in there and then next door to that was the mortuary, a big tent but they were all just big tents. Each ward had about twelve or fifteen beds

35:00 in it and they were little bunks. They were a nice little bed. They were comfortable too because there were excess bunks like, you know and the orderlies had them in our tents like, you know. Then in the middle of the thing was the administration tent, the dispensary and the CO's office.

35:30 Behind that was the cookhouse and the mess beside that. Then along the back there was the officers' tent line. There were three officers and they all had a tent each, that's privilege of rank. Then the rest of our things well there was sergeants, I think there was two sergeants to a tent. What did we have? We had a flight sergeant

36:00 and one, two, think we had about four sergeants for different sections and transport and technician bloke and, that's right, the corporal. The cook was a corporal too but we weren't too bad as far as our blokes. We weren't too proud. We'd eat with the airmen too, not like the others, they'd, you know, but anyhow the sergeants

36:30 and then there was the other ranks tent line, four to a tent and what we used to do is an ordinary tent, just a pole each end sort of thing and nice little sloping tent and we used to have a four gallon tin and we used to fill those up with sand and we'd put our tent poles on that, put our tent up then

37:00 loosen all the guy ropes off and everybody would just lift the poles up onto the, of the tent, tighten your guy ropes and we had a nice high tent and then the flaps on the tent we'd just sort of tie out which give us a bit more room you see and it was quite good. Well then the fly that came over the top of that, we had it arranged so that when it rained the water came down and, I don't know where we got it from, but we got a good, clean

37:30 44-gallon drum, completely open top and we used to have the rain, we had it worked so that the fly would just drain the rainwater down into this tank so we had good, clean rainwater all the time so we didn't have to drink the chlorinated junk, you know, which was good and that just about, that's right. There was the transport section. He was more or less at the start of the

38:00 entrance to the camp and he had his bit of a workshop there and little shed there, or tents rather, for his jeeps. We had three jeeps and they were fitted out with frames on, to transport stretcher patients, to put them on the aircraft and that and they also had a trailer there with our own generator which they

38:30 called the KVA [kilovolt-ampere, measure of generator output]. It was set up and the mechanics used to look after that too, you know because certain time of an afternoon he'd start it all up and everybody would have power or if there was surgery on and they wanted the operating theatre, that machine was operating because theatre had to have electricity for the big lights, dome lights over the theatre and sterilisation purposes and all the rest of it and that

39:00 was pretty good and he didn't have a lot of maintenance to do on the jeeps, you know and they were all in pretty good nick but that was about all.

How long did it take to set up the camp?

Well we could arrive there this morning, middle of the morning we'd have everything all set up. Possibly the next morning we'd probably just put all the bits and pieces in like beds

39:30 and cupboards and unpack a lot of the instruments and medicines and that type of thing, so I s'pose twenty four hours we could be taking patients and we could have done it sooner if the need have of been, like, you know we could have done it quicker. We couldn't, wouldn't, needn't have had everything in its place, you know to start with. I mean we could have managed putting the essentials in and starting earlier, like, you know

40:00 but if we could well we used to take say about twenty four hours to set it all up. Sometimes there'd be a bit of a snag, more or less trying to do something with the tents and everything and of course while this is going on the general hand is over and he's digging latrine pits and sullage pits and all that from the kitchen. The kitchen was quite good. When

40:30 we were moving or arriving anywhere, it was amazing the jobs that we could find that we didn't have to go down and help them to set the kitchen up because to get the stove off the aircraft onto a transport and then back down to our base and with this stove. Now it was an oil-burning stove, as heavy as all get-out, you know. Goodness me, how the aeroplanes ever lifted off the ground with them in, I don't know, but

41:00 it was terribly heavy and, as I say, it was amazing what jobs we could find when the stove was to be lifted. We'd, "Look, I'm sorry. I've got to fix this. The CO wants this done", you know. "Oh righto", you know but yeh, you'd think of something to get out of it.

Tape 5

00:32 **Martin when were you in a situation where you were closest to the conflict?**

Yeh well Cape Gloucester on New Britain. We took a walk one day. There was a big volcano behind us, two actually. One was extinct and the other one was still smoking

01:00 and we went up to have a look at it and there was, I think there was four or five of us. We went up to have a look and on the way we decided "Well we've seen it now, we'll go back" and somebody said, "There's another track over here, we'll take this one hey?" "Yeh, alright might as well have a different scene" and when we looked out from this place we could see our camp straight down. We thought, "Well we'll probably be pretty right" so we followed this track and finished up and we didn't realise that we were moving

01:30 away from our original base and we came into a village that was deserted and apparently it had only just been deserted. They'd just cleaned the Japs out of it. Well we didn't realise that at the time. We only had one rifle between the four or five of us, I think it was, five of us there and we thought, "Gee whiz" you know, "pity we didn't have some more firearms" and we kept a sharp eye out and

02:00 came down the side of the mountain and came out onto a beach and we thought, "Now this is not the right place. We're a long way from our camp" and we heard all this beautiful singing, lovely. It sounded so nice and it was dark and we were pretty hungry by this time. Anyhow we walked along the beach towards the music and we come to this village and a couple of the fuzzy-wuzzies [indigenous New Guinea people] come out to meet us,

02:30 told them, you know "we were looking for our camp, where is it, somebody took it" and they said, "Yeh, you're a long way" you know, "round the beach" you know, "we'll take you back, yeh". "Alright". "First you have something to eat, hey?" "Yeh, alright, yeh we'll have something to eat". Well we had coconut and the coconut milk was absolutely beautiful. We were so dry and thirsty and that. It was lovely and we were eating coconut and there was something else they'd given us too and I forget what it was now. Anyhow it didn't make us crook but

03:00 we enjoyed that and they were singing and the harmonising between them and the womenfolk they

were really good, you know, and a couple of blokes were in with the real bass voice. Then they took us back and they got so far and they said, “There’s your camp there”, you know, “you go in there.” So next morning the flight sergeant that was with us, being the senior sergeant, he was on the mat

03:30 with the CO the next morning, “Where did we go? What did we do? Why did we go that way?” Holy mackerel and that’s when we found out that the place had only just been cleaned out. The Nips, they were just ahead of us, you know. We could have walked straight into their evening meal or something. You never know but the huts and everything, we just had a look in the door. We didn’t go into them, which is probably a good thing because they’re probably booby trapped anyway. We could have been

04:00 in big trouble but yes, so I remember the sergeant getting into trouble. Then he came down and tore a strip off us because somebody suggested, it wasn’t him that suggested we take the wrong track back so somebody had to cop the blame, but then there was that one. And then along through Aitape where the big tidal wave hit just recently in the last couple of years, we camped there for a while.

04:30 Goddamn place it was, swampy. We nearly crashed there. They have the metal sheeting on the strip for aircraft to land on and we landed and there must have been a bit of a ledge, one of the things must have come undone and must have been poking up and it burst a tyre on us and of course it stuck its foot into the mud sort of thing, and we’re going round and round and round in a circle down the thing. There was two of us

05:00 on board, apart from the aircrew and we were sitting on the mailbags and we’re spinning around and round and round in the middle of this airstrip so we could have been hurt there too, like, you know if it stood on its nose and we could have been in trouble. And then we went on to Hollandia [now Jayapura] in Dutch New Guinea. There’s a big lake

05:30 behind there, Lake Sentani. That was very good. The fuzzies were very friendly there and they used to take us out in their big log canoes there and they’d take us out for a bit of a ride around on the thing and show us their fishing and all the rest of it. Their huts came out over the top of the water on long, thin poles. Then Noemfoor Island, yeh well I mean they were fairly

06:00 close to us there but then at Morotai we based there for a while. It was fairly well occupied and then we went into Labuan Island and the AIF boys had gone in there. They landed and then we were coming up, there’s one photo there of us coming in off our boat

06:30 walking through the water. Water up to here and the sea, like, you know and I’ve got my medical kit up there and more or less to try and get in. Well they were just ahead of us like, just above the beach where we came in so that was about the closest there that we got but it was only when they had aeroplanes that they could get real close to us, you know so, yeh. So

07:00 we were fortunate in that way, you know. A hell of a lot better off than the army blokes because they, you know.

When did you experience the most casualties?

Yeh, I think it was around Noemfoor was quite a bit

07:30 and course I wasn’t with the hospital unit then when we landed at Labuan because I was with the squadron then and we only had the four of us in with the doc. It’d be Noemfoor I suppose when we had the most.

Can you tell us what happened there?

Well the planes had been out. They’d been bombing and strafing and some of them had been shot and

08:00 hit sort of thing, you know and we’d get a couple of crew off the bombers that came in and some of them were fairly bad. Most of them were in the limbs; few of them had abdominal wounds. We didn’t have any head ones though, no head injuries from firearms on the aircraft, only when they crashed if they burnt or

08:30 something like that, then they were bad. Well we might have quite a few crew onboard because you’ve got your two pilots on these bombers and then there was a navigator and a bomb aimer and there was, it all depended on how many machineguns there was poking out of it, that you had gunners for that but if they crashed like that well we had, that’s when we’d have a few bulky ones all of a sudden, to hit.

09:00 **So would you go out and get the casualties or would they?**

Yes we’d go and get them.

Can you remember an incident there where you went out and had to bring some people back?

Yeh, well Noemfoor was one place that I think it was more or less the most that we had and we’d go out, cause we had these little stretchers and then there was an ambulance on the strip too

09:30 that could carry four stretcher cases and that’d more or less transport a few up to the hospital for us, although they didn’t like taking the ambulance away while there was aircraft landing and taking off and so we had our little jeeps there we could put our stretchers on. They used to carry three. There was one

across the back and two across the bonnet of the front so we had three stretchers that we could transport as well.

10:00 But we'd go down there and we'd fix them all up and of course we'd supply the customers, particularly those that were badly burnt, with morphine injections and that, you know. Well when I came back from the war and went into the ambulance service and a couple of accidents that I'd been to and I thought, "Now gee, wouldn't it be great if I only had this morphine injection to give this person" but no, we weren't permitted. We didn't know anything

10:30 about it. We didn't know how to give it and all this sort of thing and yet I'd just had three years being trained how to do it, you know, so it was a bit frustrating when we couldn't, weren't allowed but anyhow things have changed now. I don't think they're allowed morphine or anything, but there are a few things there that they use, but that sort of thing, well we could do that. That was no great hassle at all, you know because

11:00 most of the pilots, well all the pilots, they're supposed to have had anyway, their little escape kit and they had their morphine injections and all the rest of it so, and there was a little box onboard the aircraft too, so if a gunner got shot up, well they could give him morphine from this little box like, you know. It was good.

So when you'd get to a scene, would you and a doctor go and assess the situation or how would it?

Yeh well there was all those, like usually in

11:30 our case, it was a flight sergeant with us. He'd go or the doctor would come down and one doctor would stay at the hospital. Usually the surgeon would stay at the hospital supervising the preparation of the theatre and because most of these things had to go to theatre anyway and other squadrons, the squadron doctors, like there was only one doctor on a squadron, well he'd come over to the hospital too to assist

12:00 what was going on you see. They'd call them in but the flight sergeant, we used to assess most of them. I mean we were better off without the doctor anyway because we knew what we were looking for and we knew how to move that patient. They'd trained us how to move these people whereas the doctor's not trained in that at all. All he can tell you is "Oh yes, look he's got a pretty bad fracture there, give him a quarter of morphine" or something, you know and he walks away and lets you do it.

12:30 With all due respects to the doc, I mean that's alright, he can go on and do something else that's a bit more demanding than what we're qualified for, but then we can assess and get rid of these patients and get them mobile or get them, to get mobile onto the hospital like, you know. From that point of view it was good. It used to work out fairly well, yeh.

Do you remember a situation where it was difficult to get a

13:00 **casualty out of a crash?**

Yes and the pilot, all we could hear him saying, "Shoot me" because his aircraft was on fire. He was jammed and we couldn't get to him. The fire brigade couldn't get into him and all we heard him singing out was "Shoot me". He said, "Shoot me, for God's sake, shoot me", you know…

Awful.

13:30 Yes, you can't do anything for them but.

Where was that Martin?

That was on Noemfoor Island. See we had bombers and fighter strip there but we worked mainly on the fighter strips and they used to take off three at a time

14:00 and land them three at a time. They'd, I forget their timing now but it was only a matter of so many seconds between each flight that took off like, because, I mean conservation of petrol. The more aircraft that they had to get into the air, the sooner they could get them into the air and away so that their petrol wasn't being used up because they had to go to point B to sort of come back to

14:30 point A. They still had to have reserve and if they could conserve fuel getting off well that's when they used to take off three at a time, and then coming back if they'd been in a bit of a stoush and they'd received some fireworks, they could call up the control tower and tell them they wanted immediate clear landing sort of thing, you know and they used to get it, because we knew what was happening.

15:00 Well that's when our engines would start up and the ambulance and fire tender and as soon as they'd land well we'd follow them down until they stopped rolling and if they were alright we'd come back to control tower but if his legs fell up and went along his belly well at least we were there, you know, to handle that type of thing, yeh.

15:30 **And did you eventually get the pilot out that was screaming for you?**

No, he was burnt with his aircraft. We got him out after he'd been burnt, yeh. He was dead then but no,

that was very distressing that.

How did everyone react at the time?

Well I don't think anybody could speak for a while. You just couldn't do anything and

16:00 there wasn't a military policeman around that could have shot him anyway, if he'd have had the guts to do it, you know, but then who knows what the person's temperament was if he'd been there. Would he have done it? Could he have done it, you know, and the way we're trained, I mean you don't shoot your own mate type of thing, you know. There's always a chance but not when they're jammed into an aircraft and nobody can get to it, you know,

16:30 no.

It must be an awful situation to be in because?

It is. Yeh it is. You can't, well there's just nothing you can do about it, you know, yeh so they're one of the things I'd like to forget.

Yeh sure?

Well, not really forget about it but you put it on hold somewhere,

17:00 you know. It's filed away in the little brain box and you don't forget these fellers but and then you think, "Oh yes, 19 or 20" sort of thing, you know, "hasn't had a chance at life at all", you know and that's the way it goes but then when you take these jobs on, as I said earlier, nobody told us that the war was dangerous when we got there like, you know.

17:30 We found out the hard way, like losing your cup of tea and your toast, yeh.

But then you saved a lot of lives as well I imagine so?

Yes.

So I mean there's situations equal to that where you probably got them out?

That's right, yeh. We'd have saved more than we'd lost actually in more or less instances like that.

What was a particularly rewarding moment where you saved some life?

Well

18:00 particularly burns cases. I think when they came so good and were able to travel and we could send them back, you think, "Well there's another one that", you know, "we pulled through" like, you know. It was good because burns are one of the most hideous injuries that you could get and the shock in there and the loss of moisture from the body, the fluids getting away from

18:30 all that burnt area, it's just unbelievable just what tissues are damaged and what fluid is lost through that, like, you know.

And incredible pain?

The pain must be terrible, yeh and particularly when any cold air comes in, like, you know. We had one lad; we lost him unfortunately

19:00 and he was an aircraft fitter, yeh. He was a fitter 2A working on the airframes of the machine and he was up in the belly of the aircraft, in the root of the wing, working in the root of the wing and he'd taken the cover plates off. I forget what he was actually doing. There was something he had to repair inside. I don't know whether it had been

19:30 damaged through bullets or just whether it broke. I don't know. I just forget now and he was in, and of course a lot of these blokes, the rig that you worked in, was shorts and your beetle crushers on and your shirt. Well then the likes of him, now he was going up into this opening. It's not very big. Shirts would be off sort of thing,

20:00 you know and he's in and he's doing, now they had a machine like that operated a spray. You could put different liquids into it and spray and they used to clean the aircraft down with them and they used petrol at times to spray some of the heavy oils and that in the engine, like, you know in the engine compartment, to clean the engine down and

20:30 they tell me that there was a memo went around to all the engineering officers on all the squadrons that this particular machine was not to be used for that purpose, because it was dangerous. Anyhow this bloke, the engineering officer of this particular squadron, he'd signed it as being read and he hadn't read it at all apparently. It came out in evidence, he hadn't read it really and

21:00 he didn't stop the machine being used and of course they were using it and this fellow was in the, like from knees, hips, inside the aircraft and his legs are hanging out of the flaps and course it blew up and he got badly burnt all over all the top body and by the time he got out he was really in a mess and we got him into the big tub and he was filled up with morphine and

21:30 drips and everything to try and get fluids into him and I think we kept him alive for about twelve hours, ten or twelve hours, and he was in agony like, you know. Even the morphine didn't sort of quieten him down a lot but he was still in a lot of pain, the poor kid, and he was only about twenty and just one of those, I think it was one of the worst ones that we had because we got

22:00 him. We had our hands on him to fix him sort of thing but then we lost him, you know. It was bad luck there but wasn't for the want of trying and I must say our doctors, both doctors, they had the pharmacist there too sort of working out the different drugs for them, and they weren't too proud. They'd call on the squadron

22:30 or something, get another couple of doctors. They'd call the Yanks in too, like you know. If they had something new, they might have had some new technique or something. They'd try anything, but about ten or twelve hours we kept him going but a bit of a Godsend really I think that he went because it'd have been months and months before he'd have been, he'd have had many skin grafts and

23:00 I think that would have probably killed him anyway. He didn't have much skin on him anyway. It was only on his thighs and the calf of his legs but no, I think it'd have been about one of the worst ones but burns were the worst I think.

That must have been really disappointing at the end of twelve hours?

Yeh.

For the group?

But he was so badly burnt that there was nothing, and he couldn't get out very quick either you see and nobody could help him to get out and

23:30 to sort of get out and of course once the cold air, like, you know and the sea-breeze is blowing in on you, you know. The pain would be absolutely terrible, but the likes of other injuries like fractures and abdominal injuries, head injuries, I mean surgeons can do so much with that, whereas they can't do a lot with such a massive area of body that's burnt.

24:00 It's a real…

And I guess that came into your area a lot with the RAAF because it was natural accidents from the crashes?

Yeh well aircraft fires and they were very severe and very fierce fires like, you know but you'd look at an aircraft and you think it's all tin but it's amazing just how easy that stuff burns, you know and of course there's the likes of all your fuel and everything that's all around it and oils

24:30 and it does make quite a mess of things. There's no doubt about that, you know, yeh.

Did they have any safety procedures in place as crew; did they have anything onboard that would help in a situation like that?

No not really, no. They had fire blankets but nothing, no. Fire blankets were

25:00 only really new things at that stage, you know, not like they are today and not really, only the morphine to more or less quieten them down. That was all they could do to try and control a bit of shock, get some fluids into them if they could.

Would you speak to them and try and calm them down as well?

Yes if you could, yeh.

What sort of things were you saying?

Well, you know "We'll give you such and such mate. This will

25:30 ease your pain off" or "We'll put a drip in here, get some fluids back in and you'll find it'll ease off after a while, it's going to hurt for a while though, don't", you know, "don't expect it to happen too quick but it will happen, you'll be alright" you know but try and talk, once he sort of settles down, and say something absolutely bloody stupid, you know, try and get a bloody smile on his face and

26:00 things that, you don't tell him corny jokes or anything but more or less if you can get them to calm down and relax. Relaxation is the whole secret and talk to them gently but don't tell them fibs, you know. You're going to say, "Well look mate, you've got a pretty bad burn here and it's going to take a fair while to get over this," you know, "just take it easy", you know and, "be sensible to yourself and do the right thing", you know

26:30 but nothing, you don't raise your voice and start to go crook, "Now stop that silly nonsense" or something, you know. That doesn't work. He's just as likely to want to get up and fight you, you know.

Were you taught that or was it more in your character?

Well I think it comes 'a la natural', you know. I think it's just one of those things, you know that you

don’t,

27:00 sometimes you feel like saying, you know “This bloody idiot”, you know “smack him under the ear” or something but you don’t, no, it’s, you’ve got to talk to them sensibly and as a grown up, at the age that they know, yet you’ve got to take it easy like, you know because you’ve got to remember that they’re in a hell of a lot of shock at the time, firstly because of their

27:30 injuries, because of the incident that’s happened, “Why me?” like, you know. “Well you, unfortunately you were just on it, weren’t you?” you know. I remember one. There was a Beaufort bomber crashed at Noemfoor, at Labuan I’m sorry it was, and there was all the shell holes around and there’s mounds of dirt all up around them, like, you know and the shell holes are full of water and the airstrip had sort of

28:00 gone down in between like a row of them and this bloke, was his third attempt at taking off. Now with these Beaufort bombers, apparently they pull to one side, like, you know the revs [revolutions] and the props are going, like, you know and it sort of pulls off to one side and he was taking off and it was going over and he was going to run off the strip so he cut his motors and settled

28:30 back, went back and had another go and the same thing happened and he must have been getting a bit cranky with it, you know and he thought he’d give it the works this time, so he give it the works alright and he’s belting down the strip and he’s starting to go off the strip again so he lifted and fortunately he just got enough airspace to sort of lift him up, but his legs were still down and one leg, the port leg, hit the top of one of these mounds of dirt that’s on the shell hole and spun him right around

29:00 and crash, bang, just sat her down there and then. Well we followed him up of course and we got there and everybody piled out. We didn’t have to go in for anybody. They all got out and the pilot’s there, it’s a flight lieutenant, and “Anybody else in there sir, have you got all your crew out?” “Yes, all the crew is out”. “Anybody seen that sergeant, the army sergeant, where’s that army sergeant?” “Haven’t seen one”.

29:30 “Oh well he must be still in there” so somebody went in and, “No, can’t find him. He’s not in here, can’t find him anywhere” and somebody came along and said, “Who you looking for?” and they said, “There’s an army sergeant missing from here”. “Oh” he said, “is that the bloke who was going helter skelter down the road there?” and he said, “don’t know” he said “could have been, well it must have been because he’s not here”, you know, “must have been him.” But the pilot was taking him on a little trip just to show him what they were

30:00 doing like, “We’ll show you army blokes what we do”, you know and of course, well if anybody, the SPs [Service Police, RAAF police] had come down, or the military police or any of the officers had come down and found this foreigner on the aeroplane and it’s crashed, “What are you doing in there?” So the poor old flight looey pilot would have copped the crow too you see, so he got out very smartly but he didn’t tell anybody that he was leaving,

30:30 yeh but some funny instances, like, you know. We prefer to think of them more or less than the other things, you know but yes.

Were there American flights that you had to help at any point?

Beg your pardon?

Were there American pilots that you had to help or planes that you?

Yeh well usually on the bombers,

31:00 but the bombers didn’t land on our strip a lot. It was on the one that was prepared for bombers and ours was a fighter strip but yes, they used to help at times, you know. It’d all depend on which crew was looking after the ambulance crews on the airstrip and if there was a big accident well it didn’t take the relevant service very long to get

31:30 crews there to sort of fix things up like, you know, yeh.

And you said you were trained in getting people out of those situations even more than the doctors?

Yeh.

What exactly would happen when you’d get to the crash sight, what would be the procedure?

Well we’d hopefully hope that the fire boys are there with their foam and once they were there and with their foam, well we used to relax a bit. I mean

32:00 there were still chances of it blowing up on you but once the foam was there, well you had a better chance of getting anybody out. Well somebody would go in. There’d be no more than two of us would go in. We’d get in the side door. One would more or less look one way and the other would look that way and go through it and “Oh, it’s all clear” well you’d get out, get the hell out of it but if there was somebody there, well “Alright give us a hand here” like, you know and then you’d assess

32:30 quickly what the damage was done to the bloke and get the appropriate method of carrying him out,

getting him out of it, whether it was one under his arms and one under his legs or get him to the door where you could pass him out to somebody on the ground level to take him from there. If he was badly smashed up, give him a hit with some morphine and even if you lashed his legs together, say he had broken legs, you lash his legs together and

33:00 at least that gives some support and as long as you could get some support to them, pertaining to the type of injury they had, it was alright and give them a jab of morphine and give it a few moments to sort of start to take affect on him, a few minutes and then you can start to move him but you just didn't pile in and grab him unless there was fire and if there was fire, everybody got out, whether you hurt him and that and if he passed out on the way

33:30 out, well so much the better and that was it, you know.

And what about moving burn victims, is there a special way to approach them?

Yeh well, they were always pretty touchy because you don't like to touch the burn and sort of pick somebody up because you're just as likely to take all the flesh away with you so it's better to sort of have some prototype thing that you can put them on, like whether it's

34:00 a blanket or something that you can hold the corners up to, more or less spreading the weight out over the area, the distance, where if you just used your hands well all the weight of the body is on your hands and that's not good. You don't worry too much at that stage about washing your hands with germs on because what germs are in that wound then are in there, like, you know you're not going to put any more in there, or you might put more in but it's not going to do any more

34:30 damage than what it is but if you can lift a person out with a blanket or canvas, whatever, you know something substantial that's not going to tear on you, so much the better. Well then you roll the patient over, roll the thing up, the blanket up, like a bit of a roll and you put that under one side and you roll that back and then you can just roll him over a bit and pull that blanket out and you've got a flat surface underneath then that you can roll

35:00 them up you see, pick them up and yeh. Well you've seen them in hospitals changing a patient in bed and clean sheets on, you know and they roll it all up. They push it underneath and pull the patient over as far as you can and let him roll back onto that side and then pull that sheet out and then straighten it out and tuck it in so more or less basically that's the same principle. Well it is the same principle that's used, lifting things out

35:30 particularly those nasty burn things, you know, yeh but you've got to be careful with burns. I mean, as I say, you don't know just how deep the burn has gone in, partial thickness or just what might be, you know. At one time it used to be first, second and third degrees and the first burns was more or less a scorching type of thing and the second

36:00 degree is burnt into tissues and you've got blisters all over you and the third degree is when the whole full depth of the tissue is burnt right in and even to put cold water over them, it still takes a while to cool that area down so you don't sort of want to lift a person out. You don't put your hands under it to move them out because, as I say, you don't know how deeply it's burnt and that tissue could just come away. You've made a hell of a mess of

36:30 things like, you know, but if say the body is burnt and you can hold the arms and the legs, well fair enough you can move, particularly if it looks like it's on fire and it's going to blow up on you. Well of course the rescuers have got to get out as well so the sooner it's done the better, yeh.

As a young man, how long did it take you, do you think, to come to terms with seeing this kind of

37:00 **tragedy?**

Well the thoughts never leave you. A lot of those thoughts are still with me, but at the time it doesn't seem to be too long but you can get into it again. I mean if there was, you've cleaned this lot up

37:30 and something happens another five minutes later, you still can go and do it, you know. More or less you're trained to that way of thinking, that you can go and do it. It's when you stop and you knock off and you go back and you think, "Goodness me, did I do everything that I could have done?" you know and you start to think about this but when you think it all out, quite reasonably, "Yes, you did do all you could do" you know so you can sort of relax a bit but at the same time

38:00 these thoughts really stay with you, you know. Well the nasty ones like that, yeh.

And when you'd see a crash, was your initial reaction a kind of learned reaction, did you go into a process mode of just knowing what to do or did you panic or?

No you haven't got time to panic.

38:30 You know what to do because you've sort of been trained up to a pitch to do it. You know what to expect, what type of injuries you may be looking at and what you're going to do, how you're going to treat it and so that you've sort of got it pretty well tied up to get into it like, you know, yeh. It's just one of those things that

39:00 like everything else, it's all in the training, you know, yeh. It's all in the training.

Were you adequately trained do you believe for that?

Were we? Yes.

Cause it was a short course.

A short course, yeh but, as I say, we came out at the end of it allegedly knowing what a third year nurse learns and she takes three years to learn it. Well we had six weeks and the reason being of course

39:30 they wanted orderlies there and then like, you know, as soon as can be, but at the same time, the individual's temperament has got to be such that they're willing to learn it and know what to do straight off without sort of "Oh gee, should I do this or should I do that?" you know. You don't mess around. Yeh, well this is your training and you remember your textbook and you

40:00 remember your practical work and you just go ahead and do it, you know, but it's quite simple that way. I s'pose it is a simple way of looking at it but that's the way it works, you know.

No that's understandable and we've actually heard that in different areas as well.

Yeh.

Tape 6

00:31 **OK Martin?**

We were talking about cleaning up our cars and getting ready for the next lot, didn't it, and how we more or less handled our staff but any of the nasties like, you know, get them to talk about it.

Yeh so what would happen after an accident?

Well when the crew came back to the centre, we'd clean up the car

01:00 like, you know we'd all get in and clean the car up ready for the next one. Then we'd all go into the kitchen and have a cup of tea. There's usually biscuits or cake or something there, you know and we'd have a bit of a talk, you know, "What did you see at the accident, what did you do?" "Oh such and such and so and so", you know. "Oh yes" and while we didn't laugh at a person's misfortune, there's always something funny

01:30 happened at an accident and we'd sort of dwell on that, "Well tell us what happened there" you know "What was the funny thing that you saw?" Well everybody would be laughing and relaxing sort of thing and more or less I suppose it was our way of counselling them, you know and they'd talk it off their chest and then they were ready for the next one. If they could go downstairs and get another call, they could go straight out and no worries at all, you know. They

02:00 were really good but different, funny things that had happened and you'd think now goodness me, somebody would hear us, the crew or mob, you know they're laughing at somebody's misfortune but no, it wasn't that. It was getting these blokes out of themselves and getting back into the swing of things again, you know. It was good.

How important do you think it was for you and everybody else to have a bit of a laugh?

02:30 Very important, very important. Once you saw your blokes were relaxed and everything and back, you knew they were going out to do a good job again, and that everything was pretty safe and it sort of give you a bit of confidence that you'd done the right thing by your staff at the same time, you know, was good that way.

So do you think it was a kind of coping mechanism?

Like a what?

A coping mechanism, a way to cope?

Yes, way to cope yes.

03:00 They didn't sort of carry it home. The other ones was that, children were the worst, who were badly injured or we lost sort of thing. They were the worst ones of the lot to sort of get over. It'd take a few days to sort of get over but we'd still talk about these things and we sort of didn't put it in one corner of the mind and harbour it there, you know, talk it out sort of thing, you know.

03:30 **Who were the children who you were seeing?**

No, my staff.

Your staff, yeh, when you say the children?

Children in accidents.

Yes but what children were you coming across?

Well in accidents. You'd go to a motorcar accident along the road and there could be kids in it you see.

So local children?

Locals yeh.

That's what I was getting at, I suppose. So they were native children?

No, Australian. This is back in Australia.

Oh sorry this is back in Australia? Sorry I'm

04:00 **totally confused, I apologise, I didn't realise we were talking about that.**

Yeh I digressed a bit. We were talking about aircraft crashes and more or less how we sort of coped with them and this was one way of more or less trying to explain what I was on about.

I apologise. I didn't realise we were back in Australia when you were talking about that, so they were young children?

Yeh infants, just ordinary Aussie kids, you know. They were pretty good though.

And that was

04:30 **the hardest for people to deal with?**

Yeh particularly if we lost them like, you know. If they were killed in the accident it was pretty hard, you know, but I mean an adult, I mean it's bad enough but at least they've had some life, you know. Kids hadn't started, pretty hard for them to try and understand what was happening, yeh.

So just going back then to your time in New Guinea and so forth, what sort of contact did you have with local people?

05:00 Quite often, we didn't or you'd go to a village but there was always a group of us went to a village and talk and all that sort of thing, you know. They'd give us lots of their fruit. They'd be growing bananas and some of them had pineapples and

05:30 citrus fruits. They didn't have much in the way of; well we didn't get much in the way of vegies from them. It was mainly the fruits that they'd give us and bananas like, you know, "You have this" you know. It was good. They'd give it away with pleasure, you know and if we had something like extra cigarettes or something, because we were on American rations for quite a bit of the time and American

06:00 rations were, the carton of cigarettes, packet of ten to a carton, we'd get that one or two every ten days and of course we used to have a bit of a store built up, you know, and you'd give a lot of these to the natives and they appreciated it because they liked their cigarettes too. So did we but I'd stopped smoking

06:30 when I joined up and when we got over there and got on these American rations and we had that many cigarettes, well you couldn't give them to your mates because they had exactly the same and a lot of the police boys that used to come through, the native fuzzy-wuzzies come through, they used to have plenty of cigarettes but if we went to the village, well then you could sort of offload a few but they

07:00 were good in that respect, you know.

Was there a bit of a black market?

Not really, no. We didn't charge them for them but I suppose there was one or two of the fellers would, but they were giving us lots of fruit, fresh fruit and that type of thing, was good. I mean it was only up to us to, and sometimes we'd, it might be payday and we didn't get much. We didn't draw much over there cause we didn't need the money and we used to put

07:30 it into our allowance to go back home and sometimes our canteen would open late of an afternoon, particularly after our payday had come through and we'd buy some chocolates or something like that and sweets or whatever, and we'd go down to the village like and give the kids a few sweeties like, you know but they knew the days too that we were coming when it was canteen day. They were there to meet you yeh, was really good.

So how did you communicate with them?

08:00 Quite good. There was a lot of Pidgin English. See there was a lot of English-speaking people there on, now I had an uncle that, I think it was Bulolo, yeh Bulolo and he had a dairy farm there and he was only one in the area like, you know. There was lots of other English-speaking and of course they all spoke

08:30 English and the natives were speaking Pidgin English and of course everybody, if you live there long

enough, you started to pick it up pretty well, you know and it was pretty good that way, no troubles at all, language. You'd always make yourself understood about something, yeh.

And so how did the children react to you?

A lot of curiosity with them, you know and "What's this for?" and "What's that for" and "Can I have this?"

09:00 But, as I say, when you'd go down after canteen and we'd take some sweets down for the kids, they knew what sweets were and how good they were. They enjoyed them, yeh.

Well what sort of things did you do for pleasure while you were there?

Pleasure? Well we had our volleyball of course and our sport and occasionally there'd be a football match played somewhere around one of the squadrons

09:30 and sometimes there might be a bit of a hit up for cricket but there were concerts, what's-a-name parties used to come through, entertainment crowds would come through, and we had our little five gallon tin and that was our seat for the movies that night and was usually, quite a few nights of the week, was movies and then different people would come through. Now John Wayne brought

10:00 a crowd through and the Yanks didn't like him. They booed him off the stage and the ballet dancers he had with him or the chorus girls, they put on a couple of numbers and then John said "You fellers don't want me" he said, "so we'll put a movie on" so they put a movie on. It was John Wayne chasing some crooks up a train somewhere. But then we had Gracie Fields would come and a couple of those other good actresses

10:30 that sang very nicely. We had Bing Crosby, Jerry Colonna. We had, who else did we have? Liberace came in, yeh. He was absolutely 'gorgeous', you know. His beautiful coat, you know all these sparkly things but he certainly could put on a show for us like, you know. It was really great, yeh.

So you saw a lot of very, quite famous

11:00 **American performers?**

Yes.

How did you enjoy those concerts?

Good. It was good because I mean there was nothing else in the area like that and it was a good change, you know to get, and of course the big names, you know, "Well I saw Bing Crosby" or whatever, you know, was great. They did a lot those people; you know to get people out.

What was the atmosphere like at one of those concerts?

11:30 Pretty good, there was no dissension between the Aussies and the Yanks. They were all mates and swapped cigarettes and "Oh you've got such and such a brand of cigarette. I've got this, do you want, try these" you know and they'd want to try an Aussie cigarette, you know. "Yeh, well you'll have to roll it yourself mate", you know but they were quite affable really, you know, yeh good.

And were there many people at those concerts, was it pretty crowded?

Yes they

12:00 had quite a few, like there was a few hundred blokes at our squadrons and the Yanks had quite a lot. They certainly had men all over the place and they were pretty good to get on with, no trouble at all. If you were short of gum they had plenty of gum to give you and they weren't mean about anything,

12:30 you know. I did like their rations. They were great. As I say, these cigarettes and I smoked them until I came back, quite a few years and I finished up. I got crook and after about three weeks I was alright again and I looked at the dressing table in my room and thought, "I don't want the cigarettes" you know and I've never smoked from that day to this,

13:00 it's forty five years ago but anyhow.

So when you say that you liked the American rations, what?

Yeh their food supplies. Sometimes we'd get into an area where we didn't get Australian food but it was American food that came in for us and there was likes of tinned turkey, tinned hams, plenty of hams. We landed at this Cape Gloucester on New

13:30 Britain and much to our surprise, the Yanks came down and they saw what we were trying to do, put up tents for our hospital and they said, "We've got a sawmill down here". They'd only landed a couple of days and, "We've got a sawmill, we'll bring up some." There was an officer came up and he said, "Well, we'll build a hospital, where do you want it?" "There". "Alright." So next day there was a team of blokes come down with a heap of timber and they built us two nice wards like, lovely.

14:00 And for a meal that night we had tinned hams and they'd put up their ice cream factory. They made

their ice cream factory there and we thought, “Gee this is alright” you know, “I might transfer to the Yankee army” because the tucker was good but they didn’t go very far without that ice cream. They had to have their ice cream, big cakes like, you know flash,

14:30 you know beauties but they lived well, no doubt about it but once again the big difference between them and us was they were well paid. They had better uniforms, better material in their uniforms and I’d say better material, not so much the uniform but they were pretty good that way.

So they were better paid and better fed?

Well yeh, well

At least they had

15:00 **some interesting food?**

More or less interesting food and I suppose we enjoyed it because we’d been on the good old bully beef and baked beans and that bloody tinned goldfish, Gorblimey, that was terrible stuff that but, as I say, it was something that was just different and it was good to have a bit of a change.

So was there any animosity between the Australians and Americans there?

No animosity, no, not really, no.

15:30 The Japanese used to drop a paper drop on us at times with a fair bit of pornography and they’d show us pictures like, “Go home Aussie, this is what the Yanks are doing back home” you know and of course you see your girlfriend out with these Yanks, you know and they tried to demoralise us with this sort of thing, you know but it didn’t really work. We had a great

16:00 joke about it but yes, they’d come at all sorts of things these Japs and then we used to have a wireless. We used to get a lass, Tokyo Rose she was known as. She was a Japanese girl, Japanese born and bred, but she’d been educated in America and about a week before Pearl Harbour, she went home to Japan

16:30 cause it was all, we found out it was all set up sort of thing, you know and she used to broadcast back. I remember her one night and she was saying that the Japanese soldier is the bravest soldier in the world, you know, “He’s this and that. He’s very good, very clever. And next”, she said “would come the Australians, but they’re mad anyway,

17:00 oh yes. And then comes the Americans, oh yes the Americans, but they’re no good until they blow half the jungle down,” which was very true because the Yanks have arrived and they’re going to land somewhere and they’d shell it and bomb it and blast it, you know, and there’d be no jungle left in that area. You could land there no trouble at all, but yeh the Australians, they were mad. She used to put over some good broadcasts but it was quite good.

17:30 **What did you think of the Japanese as an enemy?**

Treacherous, you didn’t know just where you had him and of course it was all, in those days, it was all in the Samurai era, like for the Japanese. Life meant nothing to them and they didn’t care how you lost your life, you know. I mean if they tortured you well they got a lot of pleasure out of that sort of thing, like some of these Middle East people now,

18:00 the way they carry on. But I’ve got nothing against the Japanese, the new generation, because they’ve really changed and that changed when the Americans went in, like after, when the occupation forces went in and of course the young people growing up and they decided, well they were going to wear western clothes. They were going to see TV. They were going to do this and that, which they did and of course the older generation that were coming up in the Samurai days

18:30 they’ve sort of lost out and died out a lot, you know, but they’re alright. They’re still human I s’pose, but I didn’t have the misfortune really to have prisoner of war sort of contact with them but from what I did see like, you know they were pretty ruthless.

19:00 We got some Indian prisoners. They were walking along the beach. I’ll show you the map later where they got them and the American torpedo boat was doing a patrol and they saw these fellers walking along and they weren’t too sure what they were so they got a bit closer. They found that they were Indians and they were waving and cheering and all the rest of it, so they got onboard the torpedo boat and they brought them back to Noemfoor Island and they

19:30 came to our little hospital and they were a nice lot of fellows and skinny as all, bent out like, so we fed them up and we said well, the doc said one morning, he said, “We’re going to send you back to Australia, fatten you up”. “No, no, we don’t want to go Australia, we don’t want to”. “Why, don’t you like Australia?” “Yeh we like Australia but we don’t want to go”. “Well why don’t you want to go?” “We want to stay here”. “And what do you want to do back here?”

20:00 “We look after prison camp, hey, we look after the prisoners camp” and that’s all they wanted to do and they took the gates off the prison yards and the towers like at each corner and of course there were machineguns and pretty well manned and the Japs could be walking around the compound and you’d get a few of these Indian blokes near the open gate, “Hey psst, come here, come here” sort of thing, you

know, but none of the Japs would walk out because they knew that as soon as they did,

20:30 they'd be shot from the towers, escaping but that's all they wanted to do. They wanted to come back and get even sort of thing that way, yeh.

What was their general health like when they came out?

Very poor, great lack of vitamins and we had to fill them up with a lot of vitamins to sort of help and then with getting good food into them and with the little hospital that we

21:00 had. Course when the aerial ambulance came in, they used to bring in fresh food for us and there'd be steaks and nice fresh vegetables and that type of thing and fed them up and two or three occasions there these Indians said "We make the tea tonight, we make the tea". "Alright" so they used to make curry and it was lovely, beautiful, all nice fresh meat and vegies and nice hot curry.

21:30 It was really something and it was great. But that's all they wanted to do, they were very grateful that the Yanks had picked them up and brought them over and we were looking after them, you know, yeh.

Did they tell you much about their experiences in the prison camp?

No, just that the Japanese were very cruel, you know very cruel. I think they got off a bit better than the white men in the Japanese camp because

22:00 while they were sort of, well the white ones, I mean they were taboo sort of thing but the coloured people, they sort of managed a bit better than what the white boys would do in there, yeh.

You were talking about the Americans coming in and sort of destroying the bush, did you observe any of those?

Yeh, too right. When we were ready to land at Labuan Island and

22:30 these boats, sometimes they used them is what they called an LCI, a landing craft infantry, and they had down the sharp end they had ladders down each side where the troops could go down and march up to the beach you see and some of them had been converted and they had platforms at the front and at the after end of the ship and they had these rocket launching things

23:00 on it and they came in there and they just faced the ship onto it like, you know might be three or four of them lined up and then they'd let all these rockets off into the bush and turn the ship around and then the back ones would go. While the back ones are firing off, they're loading the front ones again. They'd turn the ship around and she was ready to go so it was pretty near non-stop, just to blow these things apart and then of course they blew the big fuel tanks up. Well

23:30 they were still burning when I left there six weeks later like, you know, goodness me. Fascinating to see the, you know the column of smoke that was going up, black smoke, oil tanks and that, you know. Yes they had to clear a lot but then on the other hand, they had the equipment and plenty of blokes to come in and build an airstrip and

24:00 it was just marvellous. At Nadzab in the Markham Valley, they built three airstrips in twenty-one days and they worked around the clock. It was terrific and they really built an airstrip, like, you know it was really nice and really good but even in Australia where they built airstrips, all up the coast, up in the north and when I was flying with the aerial ambulance we'd be flying along and you'd see an airstrip, you know because you're

24:30 looking over some of the wilder country up in the peninsula and here would be an airstrip there. You'd think, "Oh well, that's alright. If we're in trouble there's an airstrip there. We can get down with no trouble" but they built airstrips all over the place. There's still a lot there. I s'pose some of them have got a lot of trees on them now but wouldn't take much to clean them up, you know to, yeh.

You were moving around almost constantly really, weren't you?

Yes.

So how hard, what were the challenges of moving around so much?

"Oh, not again."

25:00 They'd say, "We're on the move". "Oh, not again", you know and you'd more or less just get yourself nice and comfortable, your tent all set just the way you want it. Then you'd have to pull it down and go again but, as I say, there was approximately thirty ton of equipment we had and there were thirty blokes. That's with our officers and men, right down and we'd have fourteen, fifteen aircraft,

25:30 the old DC4s and we'd load them up to the capacity of what they'd take and head off into the next area that we were assigned to.

What was the most difficult equipment to move?

Kitchen stove. It was as heavy as all get out, you know. It was terrible but there was nothing that was really, the only heavy equipment

26:00 was the stove and the X-ray equipment. Everything else was pretty well transportable. All the medical equipment and the drugs and everything were all in these big cane panniers. They had a handle at each end and they weren't all that heavy really. The beds, the legs would fold up and they'd stack up half a dozen to a stack sort of thing. All the linen, the blankets and everything so it wasn't really

26:30 a big job. It was pretty well organised. Somebody had done a lot of working out and thought as to the equipment that you need to take and how best to transport it and how to fold it up and that, you know. It was pretty good that way.

Can you describe the X-ray equipment that you were using?

Yes well it was something like that stand with that light, big heavier naturally of course

27:00 and big box at the end where he used to put his what he wanted it to do, the timing and depth and all that sort of thing but it was the only, the one machine, you know. That was all there was and they'd take reasonable pictures. I mean some of them come out a bit black at times but they could still see what they

27:30 wanted to see and it was pretty good. Well then the technician, he was a sergeant, he did very well with photos. I've got some photos there that he'd done. Somebody come in with some good photos and he'd run off a stack of them, you know, was good old paper and I don't know whether he charged the bloke. He didn't charge our fellers but I think he might have charged some of the squadron

28:00 blokes, you know, what they wanted but he'd do their films for them, develop them, print them out but the X-ray machinery, it was early days more or less before the real modernisation came but it was serviceable, was easily enough moved but was fairly heavy with electronics and magnetisms and all the rest of it that were in the machine. They were all heavy stuff

28:30 but they used to take pretty reasonable sort of pictures, you know, yeh.

And when the operating theatre was set up, can you describe that for us?

The theatre? Yes it was under a big tent and then we had this enormous great mosquito net all down. It was flat across the top and the sides hung right down and had little weights on the bottom of it, can't remember what they were. I think it was like the bottom of a fishing line, little

29:00 lead roundels on the thing more or less to hold it down and there was a door at one end so that soon as everybody wanted to get in or out like, you know the door would be held back, wasn't held back for long particularly if there was much insects about and that was what it was there for, mosquitos and other insects coming in while they were operating and

29:30 it had a wooden floor. I don't remember loading the wooden floor onto any of the aircraft but everywhere we went we seemed to have this, but it was a different wooden floor so they must have got timber from somewhere and of course the Yanks being around, they'd probably scrounge it off them, and the Yanks certainly had equipment. There was no doubt about that. It was really great that they had this because

30:00 the equipment that they had certainly won the war, like, you know. They had the materials there to do it and it was good that they came to Australia like, you know and got us out of a lot of trouble.

What were the greatest challenges do you think of performing operations and other medical things, procedures, in the conditions that you were in?

Well it was a big challenge but once again it was teamwork.

30:30 Each person was trained to each section. He knew what he was to do. The doctor would say, "Well look I'd like to do such and such". "Alright." Well we knew what he was up to and we could sort of work accordingly with what we'd been trained to do for that particular procedure, like, you know it was no trouble at all. They used to have the Plaster of Paris.

31:00 That was a little tent beside the theatre and somebody with fractured legs or arms or something, we used to put them on the little bunk in there and then they'd do it all up with the Plaster of Paris, the bandage, all in bandage and soak it, then wrap it on and let it dry and smooth it out and that was quite an interesting procedure but as long as you knew what you were doing with the roll of bandage, it was quite good,

31:30 no problem at all.

What about the actual conditions that you were operating in, in terms of being in a war situation and in the jungle, what were the greatest difficulties associated with that?

The only difficulty that we had; there were only two occasions. We struck it very lucky but we had an air raid come over. One was at nighttime. We were operating.

32:00 He was doing an appendix actually and it was the quickest removal of an appendix I've ever seen.

I might get you just to go back to the beginning of that story to tell us about the air raid?

Yes on the theatre. Yes well it was doing an appendix and we didn't have sirens but we had the big ack-ack guns [anti-aircraft guns], the Bofors ack-ack guns, and they'd fire off

32:30 three rounds and that was a yellow one was there's a possibility of a raid but then if it went up as red flares, it was an air raid was on, you know, the aircraft were pretty close and once that went off, well all lights were extinguished and everything because we were lit up like Grand Central Station, you know and while the people on the coast here were all in a blackout but

33:00 as I say, it was the quickest appendix I've seen removed, very smartly it was done and they sewed him up and they said, "Alright, you can turn the lights off now" so the power went off and we just waited for a while. It was about an hour I suppose and, wouldn't have been that, and anyhow the ack-ack went off again

33:30 and they blew, the green light flares went up, you know. When the greens went up, well it's pretty right because radar had picked up the aircraft and it had gone, and yeh, this only happened twice, once in the daytime and once at nighttime. We were lucky that way that we didn't have constant interruptions. I think possibly we would have if, you see what was happening, the Americans

34:00 were doing this leapfrog business. They'd sort of, there's an island there, well there's a stack there. Well the Yanks would be on this island here but they'd come over to that island and supplies to these blokes was all cut off so he was had it like, you know, and of course aircraft from this island were strafing. They couldn't do too much, so I think this sort of stopped a lot of their aerial attacks on us and from that sort of thing eventually, and that of course

34:30 cut out their communications and they couldn't get back at us then, but until that happened, I mean they used to come over and frighten us with a couple of bombs and that was it, you know, yeh.

What about the daylight raid that you were in the operating theatre for that as well?

Yes.

Can you tell us about that?

That was, what was he doing there? I think it was something about a

35:00 bloke's leg, doing an operation on this bloke's leg. He'd had something happen. He'd had, think he'd had it crushed. I think the bomb, that's right, the bomb. They were loading bombs onto the aircraft and one hooked in the hole or something and it give way and the bomb fell down on this bloke's leg. That's what it was. Fortunately it only split all the tissue and everything.

35:30 It didn't do much bone damage. It did a bit but nothing drastic and they just ignored the raid and just carried on. There was nothing they could do. He had plenty of light to see what he was doing and that was alright, no problem, yeh.

Well what was it like for you to be in the middle of an air raid?

Well you wondered what was going to happen. You get a bit worried at times, you know when things

36:00 seemed to be, the bombs are going off and you could hear explosions getting closer. You didn't know which way this bloke was going, whether he was coming towards you or going away from you to the side, you know but it was in your mind as to what, we were a bit worried about him. Nighttime it was a bit worse because you couldn't damn well see anything. It was, but they didn't come over much

36:30 at nighttime. I don't know why. It'd have been pretty hard for them to pick up the actual, to pinpoint the spots where we were. Yeh they didn't come at night because they couldn't sort of pinpoint with great difficulty to get them and of course we being nasty little

37:00 boys, we'd turn our lights off you see but, yeh oh well, yeh.

What were you laughing about then?

I was just thinking of, I've got to tell you about our choofer doovers and what we called the choofer. It was forty-four gallon drum of fuel up on a bit of a frame, substantial frame. A big copper pipe used to come out the end and

37:30 down onto the ground and run over to about from that wall to there, to the wall here and a little coil at the bottom and the empty piece used to come round to the bottom and we'd turn the petrol on and it'd run down this pipe and into here and turn the petrol off and throw a match in and we'd let all that copper pipe heat up you see. Then you'd turn the petrol on slowly and this thing would go choof, choof, choof, choof, you know and you could put a copper on there and do your washing

38:00 and all that sort of thing. So anyhow you could do your washing. You could boil the billy, make a cup of tea or something and they were pretty dangerous at times if these fellers, new blokes had arrived and they were going to use the choofer doover, you know. "She's right mate. I know all about it", and they'd blow themselves up, you know, get a few burns out of it but they learnt the hard way. But our

38:30 general hand, his first job soon as he got up of a morning, he'd go straight over to the kitchen and he'd light up this stove ready for the cook to come in and of course instead of using oil, they put this choofer doover into it you see, which was much quicker for the cook, and anyhow Curly came in and he put a bit of petrol. He must have put too much in it and he stood back and he threw a match and it

39:00 just went boom, away she went. It blew the top out of the stove. Of course all the loose plates and everything that, you know were taken out for cleaning and all that sort of thing, blew the lot out, so breakfast was a bit late that morning. Oh dear me but then we got two replacement pilots. We'd lost a couple and two new blokes came and they said, one was a warrant and one was a flight

39:30 sergeant and they decided they'd do their washing you see and they were shown their tents, or their tent, two of them to the tent and this choofer doover was more or less behind their tent. Anyhow they started off and I don't know what they did, whether they had too much petrol going or not I don't know but anyhow next thing it erupted and

40:00 their tent caught fire, burnt their tent down and half the blokes' next door. Two pilots in the next tent lost half their tent and the CO wasn't very impressed at all, you know. They didn't understand like, you know why that should happen but it did but nobody was injured in it, like it was a great giggle about it all, yeh.

Tape 7

00:37 Back to Labuan Island and the Japanese were in this hill. They'd dug their way in under this hill and they couldn't get at them you see and of course the AIF blokes, they'd been trying to get them out for a while and there was one evening that these Japs had come out of

01:00 this thing and they marched down the road and into the CB's [Construction Battalion, American, 'Seabees'] camp. Now that's the American dock workers, like there was black and white fellows in that and they used to work on the wharves, like fuelling vessels, unloading and loading and all this sort of thing and there was a few of them killed there that night. The Japs got in and killed a few of them and they got a couple of Japs too but they got back into the hill, you see, in the caves.

01:30 They decided they've got to get them out, so they got the bombers over and they bombed the place. It wasn't making any difference like, they couldn't get at them and the twenty-five pounders [field artillery] that were parked behind us, they were sort of firing over our head into this hill and that wasn't doing much good so they didn't know what to do and the [HMAS] Shropshire was close by apparently and it's standing about fourteen or fifteen miles out at sea

02:00 and its shelling, throwing these shells over and we heard these noises coming over and I thought, "Now what the Dickens is that?" Then we realised what it was and you think "Gorblimey", you know, "I hope none of these fall short" because we'll be just be a mess on the ground, and when we were on this tour on the cruise boat at Guadalcanal and this bloke was talking to us, the padre and he said

02:30 about the, "you talk" you know "you tell us what you, where you where and what happened and all the rest of it" course well then he'd pick on somebody else. Anyway yours truly got up and I mentioned about this Labuan, how we were a bit worried about shells falling short from the big boat because we knew they were a long way out at sea and hoped to God he could see what he was doing and knew what he was doing. Well I said, "Anyhow it all passed all

03:00 satisfactorily" I said, "It didn't fall on us so we were right" and when I sat down, there's a bloke at the back, stood up and a small voice and was only a shortish bloke and he said, "Thanks very much for the compliment mate" he said, because I did say "that whoever the gunners were, they did a good job, they missed us" and he said, "Thanks very much for the compliment" he said, "I was the gunner" and that was quite surprising, you know that

03:30 of all the world that we had to be in at that particular time, this bloke was there too, you know and it was a bit of a giggle on that but that's what happened with the Shropshire. But then the heavy shells off the ship, they weren't making much impression either, so the Yanks came over then with napalm and of course didn't know what part of the hill it hit and it run down into the caves and just fried them. That was

04:00 it. It finished them.

As someone in the medical field, what does napalm do?

It burns. I don't know what the stuff is. It's highly volatile. I don't know whether it's straight petrol and there's petrol and oils. I think there's quite a mixture in it but it's quite volatile stuff and, well, petrol ignites very easily and it's something similar to it so it'd be

04:30 about like petrol falling down on you and this stuff moves a bit slower than petrol would and it really burns a lot. It's like the same result as a flamethrower would do, just burn them up and that's it.

So it's not a live flame but the substance itself is burning?

Yeh it's a live flame, yeh there's a flame goes up and I should imagine the substance itself would burn you too, like, you know, would make

05:00 quite a mess of you but I don't know a lot about the napalm and its makeup of what it's all about. I know it's pretty dangerous stuff, you know.

Did you see that going down or?

Well we knew that they were dropping them. We could see something coming down but we didn't know at that time whether it was napalm or bombs or just what it was, you know. We could see them dropping the stuff onto it but

05:30 I'd hate to have been mixed up with anything like that, you know. I mean it'd have been terrible.

Did you see the affects of that after it'd happened?

After it was all, yes.

What do you remember seeing?

Just bodies all over the place, just burnt, you know, frazzled up, but I think the army blokes came in and buried them all and I think most of it was done by bulldozer like, you know, yeh.

And how many Japs do they estimate were in there?

I don't know. There was quite a few,

06:00 quite a lot in there, quite a lot and course then I think a lot of them had sort of worked their way south too because when we landed at Labuan Island there was, on the east and the west coast of Borneo, there's Tarakan one side, Sandakan the other. Was that the names of them?

06:30 Yeh and of course there'd been like a three-pronged attack on Borneo, on that side and from the top and I think these blokes had been trying to sort of edge their way down to more troops where there were more Japanese but it didn't work. They left their run too long I think, yeh. But, watching these things fall, when we'd left New

07:00 Britain to go up to Aitape, we're flying along the north coast there. We're flying past Wewak and the pilot sent a message down to us, was only about, there was another bloke and myself and I think one of the doctors was with us at that time but anyhow, he said, "Have a look out the port window" he said, "and you'll see our fighters over there strafing Wewak".

07:30 Well we looked out and we had a grandstand seat and we're watching our planes strafing the Japs down into Wewak, around the village of Wewak. Yeh that was fascinating, you know.

Do you know, how many of our blokes could you see?

Well we saw about, there was half a dozen Kittyhawks doing the strafing like, you know. Their identification marks were just too far away. We couldn't see the identification, which squadron they were but they were strafing at that particular time. They were having whoopee

08:00 then, but that's alright being strafed looking at it from that end, instead of where I first saw it, when they, looking at that end and it's coming towards us. No that was different, yeh.

That's not a grandstand view?

No it wasn't but no.

When did you join 77?

It was about February '45

08:30 I went over to.

Was it a good squadron to join?

Yes, great bunch of blokes. They were really, really good and course being the medics, we were always sort of in favour. I suppose they thought if they ever got hurt they'd like us to come but, "Be gentle with us won't you?" you know or "Don't give us any nasty pills to make us better" but I don't know. It's always been something about the medical world that you seem to

09:00 get on alright with everybody else like, you know.

Well they need you.

You're a different breed like, yeh but I noticed that particularly in the air force, you were welcomed in and no troubles at all like, you know, yeh.

We're just talking about joining the 77 Squadron?

Yeh.

And you'd been in the Pacific already for a while before that happened, hadn't you?

Yeh,

09:30 I went in the Pacific, I think it was the 1st of January '44 we left Australia.

Were you sad to leave the people behind before you went onto 77?

Yes I was because we were a pretty close-knit unit, being a small number of us. We knew each other pretty well, knew each other's habits and whatever happened and the three other blokes that were with me in the tent

10:00 like, we were all fairly close and, as I say, close knit bond of blokes, you know. It was good but then you go over and a week later you find that these fellers are just as nice over there as what you'd left behind, had some more new friends that you'd made, you know it's good.

Why did you have to move?

I wanted promotion, yeh. I went from a leading aircraftsman to a corporal, oh goodness me,

10:30 yeh. I thought they were going to give me the top job of directing directions but I didn't get there, no but then it was a promotional job that I went on it, so I must have done something right at the hospital too cause there was another fellow, he was promoted to a corporal as well so he stayed with the unit, the hospital unit and I went to the squadron. It was a change and

11:00 it was really nice and we were closer to aeroplanes which was quite good. You learnt a bit more about them and the blokes that drive them. Then of course we had, with the hospital unit, there's all nursing all the time, nursing, nursing, nursing all the time. Well then down at the airstrip, even on the squadron

11:30 grounds and the camp, we had a sick parade every morning. Then there'd be dressings done in the afternoon if they had to have dressings done. That was alright. There was a bit of variety there but then when we went down to the airstrip to do our airstrip duties, like we had the ambulance there and we used to watch them taking off and landing and

12:00 we had quite a bit of entertainment and variation of jobs and that, you know, so it made it quite pleasant and it was really good, yeh. Noemfoor Island was where they used to have belly tanks. A belly tank is what they used to carry the petrol in under the aircraft, the extra fuel

12:30 if they were going on a long sortie somewhere and they'd use that fuel in that belly tank and they'd go out and when that was emptied they'd drop it, didn't matter where they were, they'd drop it and then they'd go onto their normal tank supply of the aircraft and they'd still have enough to come back home on but some of the tanks would be damaged or a bit old or something, you know weren't quite up to standard and they used to cut the top out of them

13:00 and you'd hop into that and you could sort of paddle your way out on the drink you see. Well if there'd been any sort of a surf at all you could have had a nice surf float, you know but anyhow when there was an aircraft to have a test flight or they were going out to do some such thing, some test and it was

13:30 beer ration time, the armourers would take the guns out of the wings like, you know where they were kept and they'd load all your beer into there, they'd load your beer in and they'd put some, you wanted a change of diet, they'd put some bombs underneath, a couple of bombs, just the small ones, a 250 pounder or something, you know just the small ones and they'd go out and they'd be right up high and your beer would come back beautifully cold,

14:00 nicely chilled and it was great and anyhow they got into trouble after a while about that. The engineering officers, the boss of the engineering officers found out what was happening and they said, "Well that will have to stop". They never did stop while I was still with them like, you know. It still happened and they'd drop the bomb and course the concussion in the water would kill the fish and they'd all float to the top you see and out you'd go in your little belly tank, pick up the fish and all

14:30 the rest of it and come back and there'd be a working bee then cleaning the fish and having it ready, down to the kitchen and we'd have fish for tea and other squadrons, if you'd had a good catch, other squadrons would get it too like the hospital always got a good batch but that was great, a change of bully beef anyway and tinned ham from the Yanks but we still used to get our ice cream though. That was alright,

15:00 yeh.

What about other things that you observed people coming down with, like did you see anyone go troppo [mentally ill] or?

Yes I didn't actually, we didn't have anybody go really violent. They got very disturbed but not, they weren't violent with it like, you know and I had a

15:30 flying officer. He was a navigator in one of the bomb squadrons and he was getting a bit touchy around

and they decided they'd send him back to Australia and I was the only Queenslander at the time in the hospital unit and they said, "Alright, you'll escort this bloke back to Australia" and I thought, "Oh that's good", so which we did.

16:00 **How was he behaving?**

He was alright. You could talk to him but you had to think for him like, you know, do all his thinking and suggest things to him and he was quite happy then to sort of go on and his first name was Peter but I couldn't tell you now what his surname was but his first name was Peter and I definitely had to call him Peter. It wasn't 'sir' like, you know, "Right OK Peter, that'll do fine" so we got on and I

16:30 was very pleased. We had about a dozen pilots onboard going back to Australia. They were to have a week's leave and pick up a new aircraft to come back to the squadrons and at the time that used to happen fairly regularly, because sometimes they'd break an aeroplane or it was shot up too badly to be repaired and all that sort of thing and they had to replace them and they'd go down and they'd have their leave and they'd fly

17:00 them back and these blokes were there and I looked and I said, "Well, the flying officer is pretty nervy," and I said, "I've got to escort him back to Amberley". "Oh yes, oh well we'll give you a hand anyway, righto". I said, "If he gets naughty" they said, "we'll be right". I said, "He should be alright" so anyhow we come back and we flew down and we had to stop at

17:30 Bamaga or Jacky Jacky as it was known as then, the airstrip there, and there was quite a contingent of air force bods there, the big base there and we had to stay there overnight cause we wouldn't have made Brisbane in daylight and we got in and I said, "Peter, we'll go and have some dinner over at the mess, hey?" "Oh yes" he said and I thought, "Well this is going to be good". I said,

18:00 "I'm not allowed into the mess with you Peter because" I said, "I'm only a corporal you know". "Oh yes alright," so I saw these aircrew boys there and I said, "Well, keep an eye on him will you?" I said, "If you're having any trouble just let me know". "Righto, we'll be right" so they looked after him, had the meal and all the rest of it and when he came out I said, "What do you want to do now

18:30 Peter, would you like to go down to, there's a picture show on tonight. Would you like to go to the picture show, too early to go to bed?" "Oh yes" he said, "that'll do nicely." So I thought, "Well this will be good, be some distraction for a while". We went down and the movie started. Well of all movies that we had to strike was Mutiny on the Bounty, holy mackerel, what an evening that was, you know and he was yelling instructions for what the captain should be doing and

19:00 "Watch that feller down there", you know. God it was a funny night. So the next morning we took off and we got to Amberley and got him over to the sick quarters. They were lucky they kept the right bloke. They nearly kept me instead, you know, but then I had a couple of days in Brisbane and back in the aircraft then back to the islands.

What do you mean they're lucky they kept the right bloke, were you

19:30 **feeling stressed?**

Well they kept him and not me like, because I think if I'd have had much more time with him, I'd have been put in a bed there too I think. But my folk in Cairns of course, they didn't have the telephone on and there was nobody really that I could ring so I went back to the base like, you know and back to the unit and that was alright like, you know but

20:00 I wasn't all that flash about Brisbane when I got back to it. It was too busy. It was a big city in those days because I was a bush boy anyway so it didn't matter too much, though I would like to have been on the phone and spoken to home sort of thing, you know but never mind. It didn't happen.

Did it feel unusual being back in Australia?

Yes it did, to see all these people like, you know and think, "Goodness me, what's all this happening?" you know and

20:30 troops all over the place and I would like to have been back in Brisbane or back in Australia anyway when the cessation came through when they decided that the war was over and they had the big celebrations. I'd love to have been back for that but all we had was the cook put on a special dinner that night and we had a couple of bottles of beer and

21:00 so we had our celebration then, you know, but then they decided when it all finished, there was these boys from the twenty five pounders, the army blokes, behind us and this LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] and myself from our sick bay, we shared a tent and we'd gone to bed and put our lights out

21:30 and he said "Hey listen to that". I said, "Oh yeh what's that?" He said "What are they saying over there?" and next thing the army bloke yelled out again "War is over" so we thought, out of bed we got and much excitement of course. The war was finished but yes, the excitement that came and of course there was no more twenty-five pounders going off because we had just on three weeks

22:00 of them firing every day and every night, you know. We got used to the noise. We could sleep like, you

know, didn't worry us that much but it was when the noises stopped that we couldn't go back to sleep again you see, weren't used to it but no, it was quite good but I would like to have been back.

Was that in Morotai was it where there was three weeks of the?

No that was trying to blow up the hill in Labuan Island,

22:30 yeh.

That went for three weeks, that shelling?

Yeh, trying to shell it for three weeks, yeh, so it was just one of those things. It was a bit expensive but they weren't doing any good.

So how often would it happen and what could you hear?

Well it was about every hour they'd have a session of it like, you know and they'd go and they'd sort of knock off hoping that they'd come out to see what was happening and blow them again you see but that didn't work out that way, you know. I

23:00 don't know why but there are reasons all behind it all but, you know course they had to let the guns cool down too I suppose and get more ammunition in but no, it was quite strange. But then they decided to send us home when the war was over and those that were going back to Australia and I was posted back to Townsville

23:30 to Garbutt. I came back there to the sick quarters there and that was alright. We landed and went over and I found myself a bunk and we poured into the orderly room and they knew I was there. I was back on staff again then at the hospital at Garbutt, which was quite a good station there. I enjoyed Garbutt and Townsville. I mean we had more frequent leave. We could get into

24:00 town and Sunday nights we used to like, a few of us would go in and there was Louth's Hotel on the corner and we'd get some fish and chips and we'd sit on the kerbside outside the pub and eat our fish and chips and the Salvation Army would come along and they'd have their band with them and they'd give a service there on the thing, "Now fellers, we're going back to the citadel".

24:30 "Oh yes". "You'd better come with us. There's supper on too" like, you know so we used to follow their Salvation Army band back, you know. They were terrific those Salvos, you know. We found those fellers in the most, I don't know, you wouldn't realise that these blokes would be there but they always had their urn boiling and their cup of tea going and packet of biscuits

25:00 and they had writing paper. They had heaps of stuff, you know and they really did a terrific job and donations come around now. I give to the Salvos of course, you know, no troubles at all, don't think twice about it but we'd go down to the citadel then and we'd have an evening down there with them, you know. It was quite good. Then we'd catch the RAAF bus back out to Garbutt then to

25:30 get ready for the next days work. It was quite good. Well then I…

What sort of work were you doing back at the base there?

I was back in as medic orderly in the hospital there.

And what was being treated there at the time?

It was anything and everything there, more or less just general hospital stuff and nursing but minor accidents.

Much VD [venereal disease] about at that point?

26:00 There was. We used to take it in turns then. We might do one night a week each. We'd go into, just near the railway station there was the blue light outfit and one of us would go in there and we'd treat the fellers when they came in but there wasn't a lot that would come for treatment. I think a lot of them used to take a big risk, you know but there was

26:30 I believe, I don't know what the figures were but I think it was a bit high at one stage, cause there was the Americans and everybody finished up getting loaded like, you know, which got to be, yeh but we used to go one night a week in turns to the blue light outfit and be on duty there.

So what was it like in there?

That was an all night job, you know. Well there were just the different chemicals and the treatments that you did for them, just washouts and that

27:00 type of thing and just basic stuff. That was all it was, you know.

What was the treatment for VD at that point?

It wasn't treatment for VD. It was the prevention of, like they'd come in straight after their evening, after they'd had their intercourse and then you'd, Argyrol was one of the main treatments and you'd put

it down the tube for him and used to sting

27:30 a bit but it used to help kill the VD. I don't know just how effective it all was. I don't know because the gonorrhoea wasn't too bad, penicillin cleaned it up fairly rapidly, syphilis took a bit longer. There were a couple of others. There was yaws and a lot of yaws in New Guinea. Big ulcers come out on the breakout

28:00 and they're not very pleasant at all but it was just one of those things that more good luck than good management a lot of these blokes, you know.

That wouldn't have been a pleasant job cause I imagine after being out on the town they were probably drunk?

Yes they had a bit of alcohol in them, you know and course we were all pretty well wrapped up. We were masked and big rubber gloves, you know.

28:30 We didn't touch anybody without those gloves on, by gee we didn't, no way. No, we thought, "Oh well, serves you right mate. If you don't go out and pick your mark and take the right precautions, well it's your fault", you know but, yeh.

What about the girls, did you treat the girls?

No, they didn't come near us. I think they were too embarrassed. No, we didn't treat them. I think they'd go back to their unit and

29:00 see their medics there like, you know, although to my knowledge I never, ever saw any of our WAAAF's come into the hospital to have any attention so I don't know. I don't know about the womenfolk at all.

Yeh I actually meant the prostitutes. I've heard that there was some medical stuff set up, not in that situation but the in the Middle East particularly to deal with that?

Yeh.

29:30 **With the prostitutes, I wasn't sure if that was?**

Yeh well they were always a risk. I mean you didn't know which was the worst, the prosy or whether, I mean she was alleged to have medical examinations once a week but I mean she could have her examination now and go out and get a load straight off like, you wouldn't know but it makes it

30:00 rather difficult that way but I don't know about our girls, whether, as I say, I don't remember any of them coming in to, like after hours or sneaking in through the back door or anything. No I couldn't say about the lassies at all, yeh.

Was it hard for you to adjust to life back in Australia?

Yes it was for a while, yeh. Well I had a month short of two years

30:30 up in the islands and the most fascinating thing I think was to see all these white girls getting around and you see all the black ones and then you see the nice white ones, you know, big difference and you look at the black ones in the villages, I've got a photo there of one of them, she's got a baby in her arms

31:00 here having a feed and she's got a piglet in this arm. It's having a feed too like, you know. This sort of thing went on all the time. They had to feed that pig up because it was going to be food very shortly sort of thing, you know so they had to feed them too but yes, but it was good with Townsville and eventually the day came, I don't know what day it was but it was a 13th

31:30 of June in 1946 and I was told to go to Brisbane then and they were giving me the sack then. They were getting rid of me and I was rather sad and only that I'd come back from the, I was going to get married and otherwise in hindsight, if I'd known what was going to happen, I'd have stayed in the air force.

32:00 I'd have stayed in the service until I couldn't stay there any longer, till they kicked me out because of age or something, you know.

So you regretted not doing the occupying forces?

Well, yeh from that reasoning. If I'd known that she was going to call it off, I'd have gone on to Japan, yes, curiosity, see what the place was like,

32:30 but otherwise I don't think there was any great deal to, but much in all as I wanted to see my parents and I thought, "Well that'd be very nice. It'd be nice to go over there too" so I had to make a choice so to see my parents and to get married, well I thought "Well this is it" you know so I went home, missed out on a free trip to Japan.

What was it like seeing your parents again?

Great, absolutely wonderful, you know. There was a party.

33:00 I'd come home and they'd invited a few of their friends around and my friends and it was quite good, really wonderful and good to see everybody again. Some of my mates had already come back and they

were there and one or two of them had been discharged. Some of them were in the army and then the grocery shop where I'd worked,

33:30 there was four of them had sort of, was five of us all joined up and all our jobs were there for us when we came back and of course then we all had a bit of a party then too like, you know. We finished up out one of the beaches somewhere, if I remember rightly and we had a couple of tonics and few barbequed steaks and that was good. It was a lovely night, everybody to get back together again and course then the fellers, we all

34:00 got together and typical Australian dance like the girls were there sitting there on the stair waiting for a dance partner and everybody's out the front either drinking grog or just smoking out the front, you know, the blokes but we had quite a good time, yeh. It was nice to see them all and then the big day came and I came back to Brisbane and they handed me my discharge and

34:30 went home and they gave me a voucher to get me a new suit of clothes and all the rest of it, civvies and that was about it like, you know. So by the time I got home and Mum was all over me like a rash, you know, "Do you want this done, do you want that done, is there anything?" you know and what she'd been doing for Dad, I think he was put on

35:00 the shelf for a while until the novelty wore off that I was back home again but yeh.

That must have been difficult too. Two years of independence and then your mum sort of wanting to do things for you?

Well I didn't mind her doing it. I mean she wanted to do it and I didn't want to upset her like, you know "It'll be right Mum" you know but no, we were doing all our own washing and our own sewing and our meals were cooked for us but

35:30 I didn't mind like, you know, bit versatile but when I first joined the air force and we got to Melbourne, out to this WAAAF training depot and we got into the mess there, beautiful big mess there, lovely and a lot of room. Anyhow Mum used to cook my vegies in a special way sort of thing, special, you know. It was lovely and then the meats and all this sort of thing were

36:00 done nicely and it was something I'd grown up with and then when I joined up and got down to Melbourne and there was all this boiled cabbage and it's a bit sloshy and that, "That wasn't the way Mum's cooked it" you know. Well you know I damn near starved for the first three months but I'll just about eat anything now like, you know, there's no way about it, yes.

That soon went out the window?

It did, too right, yes,

36:30 I'll say and I had a meal there. It was sort of a stew type of thing and it was quite nice and anyhow I finished my plate and the WAAAF sitting opposite me said, "Do you want some more?" I said, "Yeh that was very nice. I wouldn't mind a little bit more, like not a lot" so she went and got it and brought it back and I'd just about finished and I said, "By the way, what is this?" like, you know and she said, "Rabbit, stewed rabbit" and it's the first time

37:00 I'd eaten rabbit like, you know. Gorblimey, it didn't taste any different to anything else, you know so.

How disappointing was the engagement break up for you, was it?

Beg your pardon?

How disappointing or shocking was the break up with the engagement?

Well it was something I didn't expect.

Had you been receiving much correspondence from her?

Yes, correspondence went on alright like, you know but I didn't even read anything between the lines.

37:30 I s'pose I was back about three weeks, a month and she decided well, that's it, whether I'd changed. I possibly had changed quite a bit, I don't know, probably not to her liking but as it turned out, over the time I've thought about it and I thought, "Well if I had married her, it probably wouldn't have worked out anyway", you know but, as I say, I pinched some other bloke's sheila and married her instead and I, but I thought she had the

38:00 money that she didn't have on the farm, yeh. No it was good so I must have made the right choice after all, you know, fifty-six years and yeh.

Did you talk to Hazel much about your experiences in the war?

Not a lot, no. There was a few things and when the historian bloke came and he had an interview with

38:30 me like, you know it was about half a day and then the book came back and she read it and she typed a lot of it up because I was having trouble reading the small print and a lot of the print of course was photocopied and it was sort of blurred and everything, you know. She had a bit of trouble getting, she

couldn’t get everything done to the way she wanted it, but that way I could read it. She put it in bigger print for me and it was quite good. I could read through it and there were sections of it that

39:00 I couldn’t remember things. Now I don’t ever remember one of the officers loading us onto aircraft to go, like moving on. We’d be weighed and we were in aircraft such and such and the registration of it. I don’t ever remember any of that being done. I don’t even remember having a haircut like, you know.

39:30 I’ve tried to think now who did cut our hair like, you know. I just can’t.

It’s quite amazing isn’t it different memories that people have?

Yes it’s just an everyday event sort of thing and you just don’t remember that sort of thing happening but being weighed, I don’t remember getting on to weigh, cause you had to get onto the scales and they weigh you, then you get your kitbag and that’s weighed with you and then that’s all made note of and it all come out in this book like,

40:00 that he made up like, you know. It amazed me, you know. I thought, “I don’t remember doing that. This must be wild guessing” but it couldn’t have been because it was too consistent right through.

Well maybe the excitement of getting onboard and getting away?

Yeh well that’s true too, wondering where we going to now sort of thing, you know, yes but lots of things that I can’t remember.

40:30 I’ve got a faint recollection of it but the details I can’t remember at all really. Possibly it doesn’t, it was something that was not impressed on me at the time, you know and it probably takes like somebody trying to strafe me or drop a bomb on me that I knew that was happening cause it went off with a big bang, you know, but actually it’s

41:00 been a terrific experience though just the same and as the saying is, I wouldn’t have missed it for quids but once again, you’re young and silly and you don’t know like, you know.

We’ve heard that before yeh.

Yeh.

Tape 8

00:33 **So when you finally left the air force and started working as a civilian, how did you find that?**

It was a bit of a culture shock. We’ll put it that way, because for the two years in the air force and the islands in particular I had a routine that we sort of followed but there could be changes

01:00 and you had to cope with the changes, but come back to civvy street it was just a routine job all the time, you know and in the grocery shop, yeh “Oh that shelf over there’s a bit empty. I’d better put some more jam in it” or whatever went into that shelf like, but with the job that I, from the air force, that I was doing and even when I came into the ambulance, I mean there was never two days the same.

01:30 There was always something different and this I think was the big satisfaction point that I got, you know. It was great and then, as I say, I went as far as I could go in the service, in the ambulance service and it was an achievement that I sort of set out to do, “Well I can do this job” and I proved to myself that I could do it and I

02:00 did and with the result that I put in three brand new sub-centres and they were all paid for the day they were all opened which was quite a thing, you know. It was good.

That must have been very rewarding for you?

It was yes because the way we used to collect our finance, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken] raffles and functions and all sorts of things, dances and carnivals and that type of thing and going around getting subscriptions, people

02:30 even those days, “Oh no, well look we’ve got two cars, we don’t really need”, you know “If something happens, well we’ve got the car”. “Yeh, but what say somebody’s not at home to drive the other car”, you know. “Oh yes I suppose, that’d be right, yeh” and “What if you’re both out in the same car and you’re both hurt, how are you going to get on?” “Yeh, yeh I see your point” say some of them until, you know, “Well,

03:00 I will join the subscription scheme” you know. You’d get them in but you’d have to really talk them into it, you know and but then there was the others that were just, one bloke, he’d had a bit of a mishap coming out of a service station onto the highway and he had another car smack him and of course he was unconscious and we were called and went down and, well, I sent a car down to it. They fixed him up and took him off to hospital

03:30 and details came back, he's a non-contributor so we sent him a bill. Well, did he go to town about this, sending him a bill. "I didn't call you." "No, you didn't call us". "No, well" he said, "if anybody's to be paid for it" he said, "it's the bloke at the service station, he phoned you" and I said "So?" He said, "Well send him the bill". "No" I said, "you've got to pay the bill" like, you know.

04:00 "You can't do that but" I said, "You were very pleased that we come and got you though weren't you?" "Oh yes" he said "yeh", that was alright, no trouble that way but he certainly said he wasn't going to pay the bill so I said, "Alright, that's fair enough" I said, "Down the track you'll hear a bit more from us" so next thing we'd sent him a bluey [court summons]. He had to face up to court. We were taking him through court to get our money and he came into the centre and he paid his account, out of court like, you know. A lot of them would do that at the last minute.

04:30 They'd let you go to all this worry and expense of getting things all organised, then they'd come in and they'd pay it out, you know, Gorblimey.

So how did you enjoy becoming a father?

That was terrific, yeh, never happened before and it was good, wonderful. I was on duty that night and I'd taken Haze into the hospital later in the afternoon and I went on to start shift at six o'clock

05:00 and I got up to the hospital once I think. I had a patient to go in so I whizzed around to the maternity section and no, everything, "She's sleeping now but she's doing alright" like, you know. "Alright" so next thing, next morning it was about half past six, quarter to seven or something and the chappie that I was on duty with, he came in. He'd answered the phone and he said, "Hey" he said, "You've got a boy, it's a son". "Oh, lovely."

05:30 So I did what duties I had to do urgently and hopped in one of the cars and went up to the hospital to see them, yeh. That was really great and that was in the Cairns Base Hospital and the same thing with Patricia and then the second daughter, she was born in what they call the Cavalry Hospital in Cairns. That was where the,

06:00 it was run by the Catholic sisters and we had a doctor there. He was a real larrikin. Anyway I was waiting at Cavalry and Hazel's in. Of course those days Daddy-o didn't go into the birth sort of thing, you know and, "God, no, you're only in the way. You'll probably get in the corner and faint or something", you know and anyhow Graham Dixon was the doctor and he came back and he had one of the nuns with him

06:30 and "Oh" he said, "Martin" he said, "I'm sorry" he said, "I don't know what went wrong" he said, "I was sure it was going to be a boy" and I said, "Isn't it a boy?" and he said, "No it's another girl" he said. I said, "Oh not another wedding breakfast?" Well you should have heard the little 'nunny' go off her bracket about it, did she go crook. "Fancy treating it like that" she said "oh no". Yeh.

So you enjoyed being a father?

Yes.

And now you're

07:00 **in fact a great grandfather, so over the years you've enjoyed that experience?**

Beg your pardon?

Over the years you've enjoyed that experience, becoming a grandfather and?

Yes, particularly when our kids had their own kids, you know, their own children and it was always great, you know. Well "Are you ready yet, Pat, when are you going in?" or to the daughter in law, you know, "It's about time you made up your mind and go in there, come on,

07:30 move it along" but you could have lots of fun with them, you know and we're pretty close like. It's only Pat that's given us a big worry. She's, cancer of the cervix and the doctor that did the surgery there, he botched it up a bit and the next one was breast cancer so she had a mastectomy and she

08:00 had quite a doing after it. She had a reconstruction done which made a big difference to her because I can only imagine what it would be like for a woman and she sees herself in the mirror of a morning and she has a shower and looks in the mirror and, you know, I mean one's missing. It must be a terrible thing to sort of see and after all, she's not designed that way and it's

08:30 terrible, but anyhow she had the reconstruction done and that was marvellous and that was done in the Mater Hospital in Brisbane and anyhow it was only a couple of days after, we were up to see her and she said, "Oh this is great". She said, "I'm a bit sore" she said, "but you feel here" and you could feel where they had done the reconstruction and

09:00 you could feel the warmth, the blood pressure. You could feel the pressure of blood through the veins and it was just amazing and the nerves, she said, "Even the little bit of a touch," she said, "that she just touched me there, I can feel it" and the surgery that was done was just absolutely wonderful, you know, terrific but it made a big difference to her. Once she could sort of get back into a bit of a normal shape, you know. Then she

09:30 had one more scare after that and they seemed to, they put her on a tablet and she was on it for quite a while and it seemed to have done the trick and that's about fifteen, sixteen years I suppose.

That's fantastic.

She's been very good. She had a very positive outlook and very determined and I think this is a lot to do with it. You've got to be prepared to, "I'm going to beat this" like, you know, like a lot of women have and some of them just sort of throw in

10:00 the sponge and lay down and die there and then, you know, but a lot of women do have a lot of determination to beat it, you know and that's ninety percent of the battle.

So Martin when you look back on your life, how significant are your memories from your war years?

Well it's good. I always, I've told these blokes down at our little pub of an afternoon once or twice, you know, that

10:30 I think I've lived in the best years of the best century anyway because when I came into the planet, our transport was horse and dray type of thing, you know. There were motorcars and there were pushbikes. The horse and dray did most of the lugging around and then you got up to faster cars and then there was aeroplanes that everybody was using and with the aerial ambulance

11:00 of course, well while I wasn't a pilot, although I'd dearly loved to have been but we used to fly these aeroplanes anyway. I mean pilot would be going along, "Oh" you know, "I've got to write this report up now" like, you know, "charts up" and, "righto you can have it" like, so we'd take it and we'd fly her along, you know and it was great and one of the pilots he said to me one day, he said, "You ever thought of getting a license?" and I said, "Yes I have many times,

11:30 I'd love to". He said, "Well why don't you?" and I said, "Well what's it cost?" and he said, "About five hundred pound". "Yeh" I said, "Well that sort of lets me out doesn't it?" and I said, "Well, I've got a new home". I said, "I'm paying twenty-seven and six a week rent". That, you know, that was big money in those days, get the loan paid back. I said, "Our furniture and white goods are all on HP [hire purchase]. I've got

12:00 three kids and wife to look after" I said, "and we're only on about five to seven quid a week" and I thought, "Crikey", you know, "where am I going to get money to sort of learn to fly?" but it's too late now. I mean, if I'd won some money I'd have gone and got my license yeh but I'd have dearly loved to have had my ticket but when I joined the aerial ambulance, whilst I didn't fly with the RAAF,

12:30 I did get my wing with the aerial ambulance like. I studied for it and I got that but it's only the half wing like, you know, for crew and so I've had…

So Martin what are you proudest of about your service in the air force?

In the air force? I don't know really. I've never thought of it in that line

13:00 but I think it's the knowledge that I've gained that's helped me through the rest of my life, you know, more or less how to get on with people and mix with them and more or less how to treat my job, you know. I think they're the significant things that have helped me through the rest of my life and with my married life, you know. I mean that was something good because I've seen

13:30 a lot of marriages break up through, well some of them are serious things, but silly things that either party have done and they've split and I think "Oh well", you know "Well what's", you know "if you'd stop and think about these things" and I think that.

Do you think the war changed you in any way?

14:00 Yes I think so. I grew up fast and had to, like all the other fellows do, all had to grow up fast and sort of fend for yourself a lot and I think that you've got to sort of look at your future and think, "Now what do I want to do, now I'll have to make success of this" and I feel that I made a success of my career and

14:30 more or less through what I'd learnt in the air force, trying to mix and do a job and all that sort of thing and I think it sort of sunk in that to do the job properly, near enough's not good enough. It's got to be spot on, you know and I had that theory all the way and I think it's helped considerably.

Do you ever dream about your time in the war?

Occasionally, not much now, not much these days, you know. I did in the early piece but I think

15:00 that was more or less just the changeover from service life to civvy life again, you know but no, not much now like, you know, no.

When you do dream, what kind of dreams are they?

Well I've had a couple of hideous dreams after doing duty in the morgue. One fellow, as a matter of fact it was the fellow that was in the aircraft that was under water for ten days

15:30 and we'd sewed him all up and I went down and told the surgeon that this fellow was all completed now. "Oh righto" he said "I'll come down". So he came down and as we walked in here's this bloke, he's got his blanket all undone down there and he's looking at me as I came in. I don't know what he said to me. He said something. I don't know what it was but here he is just sitting there looking at me and talking to me.

16:00 But I haven't had that dream for a long time now so I think that's gone past it, you know but I might even have some more dreams like that now that, some of the hideous things. I haven't dreamed of any of the funny things but it's more or less the hideous things. I suppose looking at it, it's something that I've sort of tucked away in my little computer up here and it's just something might have just triggered it off in conversation and

16:30 it just sort of brought it up again, you know, yeh.

So Martin are the memories that you have of the time during the war, are they your strongest memories?

Yes I think so yes. They'd be pretty strong. Quite often things will happen and we're talking about something here

17:00 and there's a chappie across, Charlie Brown, he was with 76 Squadron and that was in our same wing as what we were and while he was in different places and different events that he faced and we were facing too and we can all have a talk and I quite often think about it. I'll go to bed of a night and I'm thinking about these things, you know and it's

17:30 sort of really quite an indelible imprint onto the mind, you know that one's got, you know.

How important were the friendships that you made during that time?

Very good and the unfortunate part about them is that we haven't been able to continue at close contact cause I was the only Queenslander in the hospital unit. I don't know how many Queenslanders were in 77 Squadron,

18:00 quite a number I should think, and a lot of the hospital blokes were nearly all Victorians and we had, when we formed our unit up, we went to a place called Werribee, outside of, you've probably heard of it down there at Melbourne. I think they trained a lot of racehorses and everything there and they put us into a beautiful big mansion. It was called The Manor, I believe

18:30 it was a couple of Scotsmen owned it in the first place, built it and it was a beautiful old building and we slept in the billiard room, and a massive big room there and a big fireplace and it was cold. Gee, we had a nice fire going every night for that and it was beautiful and we had this great big shed, like a big barn it was, where we had all our stuff and we're putting it into its panniers and labelling it and

19:00 getting it ready to go but Werribee was a beautiful place. It had a big orchard down one side and there were a few WAAAF's there that looked after the place, that did the cooking and the cleaning and all that sort of thing and it was really looked after, that place. I believe it's quite a museum now and we were down on holidays in the car and I said

19:30 to Haze "We'll go down and have a look at this Manor at Werribee. I'd like to go back and have a look and" I said, "I'll show you where we were when we got our camp together" and we went down and it's still the same old Manor and as you walked into the lobby, it's a massive big lobby, and just as you walked in and on your left hand side of the door there was this great big sideboard thing, beautiful great big mirror in it and up on the top was a huge carved eagle

20:00 with its wings spread out and it's absolutely beautiful and I've often thought about it and I've looked at the size of our lounge room. It'd be too big for in there but I'd love it in there. It'd be beautiful but it was just something that, and of course being the carved eagle in this particular piece of furniture, cause I liked working with a bit of wood, not so much in cabinet making but I did a lot of woodturning before I started

20:30 to, well before I had this accident and it got that way that I couldn't sort of stand too well and of course all up the left side was damaged considerably and it got to the stage where I was getting scared of my chainsaw and I'd seen a few accidents with chainsaws and I thought, "Well I'm not going to have one of them" so I finished up having to sell the lathe because the vibration, trying

21:00 to work, the vibration, it used to upset me quite a bit, cause me irritation and pain and all the rest of it.

Martin did you ever, on your overseas trips, did you ever go back to any of the places that you worked in during the war?

Yeh we went back to Port Moresby. I didn't go to, I wasn't based at, goodness me, I said it earlier too, the place but

21:30 I'll think of it in a minute.

Are you talking about Guadalcanal?

No, after we left Port Moresby and we came down to Madang. Madang, yeh and anyhow I didn't, I wasn't based there.

How did it feel to go back to New Guinea?

Well I thought it was going to be quite good but it upset me in so far as it hasn't changed in the sixty odd years that I was there. The villages are still the same.

22:00 The native population are still, I don't know, just a rabble. That's the best way to, because they haven't changed in style of clothing. They haven't done anything. The humpies are still the same. It was very disappointing and I said to Haze, "Well I'm sorry I came back to see, I thought it might have been a lot different"

22:30 but it wasn't. It was quite distressing to a point, you know, to see that nothing, no achievements had been done with what they do and of course they've got this, what do they call them now? The rebels is it, the rebels they call them up there now? No, not the rebels [means 'rascols', pidgin for criminals]. Anyhow they're causing a lot of trouble up there too but then we

23:00 left but then I don't know, they just don't seem to want to progress. They don't want to sort of improve their own way of living and that, you know. It's just not good.

So Martin what does Anzac Day mean to you?

A great deal. It's got a lot of meaning for me. Course it's been strengthened because of Hazel's father being a World War I veteran and we used to get

23:30 pretty thick on Anzac Day, you know. I mean we were good mates too apart from that fact and then of course Hazel was very loyal to her father's Anzac business and then with mine sort of thing, you know, and she was a rose between two prickles type of thing, you know and between the three of us we had a good thing going and of course her brother, he didn't get away to the war.

24:00 He was an apprentice electrician in a sugar mill and he was stopped from going, a reserved occupation they put it down as and that broke his heart but he joined the CMF [Citizen Military Forces] and he finished up as a sergeant in that, sort of thing, so he did have some military expertise in the finish and so this last Anzac Day, we went up to Gordonvale where he's got a

24:30 farm there, just out of Gordonvale. We went up to there and we had Anzac Day with him. Well, dawn service and the mid morning service and it was all very good, you know. We had quite a nice Anzac Day and it'd been quite a while since I'd marched with him and it was good but Hazel, she'd have marched with me because she wears her Dad's medals and she marches with me and

25:00 she joins in everything and she has her rum and milk too of a morning at dawn service and now of course I've joined the, well I've been in the RAAF Association at Sandgate for a while now, quite a while and we go over there for Anzac Day as a rule when we can and we've also got there,

25:30 we've built a monument over at Sandgate and it's built in the location of where the old guardhouse used to be on the Sandgate airbase like, you know, and it's right at the front gate and right beside where the guardhouse was and we have an evening service, sunset service and I don't know of any of the others. I think there could be one other RSL group has an evening service too,

26:00 but it's not advertised a lot but we're getting quite a crowd now of an afternoon for our Anzac service, sunset service. It's quite good.

Why do you think it's important to maintain that tradition of Anzac?

Well it's tradition I suppose through and through. We see a lot of our friends that have had a similar

26:30 experience and we're more, can talk about the same thing and know what each other's on about and Haze is that way now that she's got a pretty fair idea too of what our life was in the services and I think it's really very important to me and

27:00 it's one way, it only happens once a year but at least we remember our mates then that we had to leave behind us and yes, it can be a sad day and it can be a joyous day and we do look forward to Anzac Day each year like, you know and I have had the good fortune

27:30 to have marched in Brisbane and I didn't march in Sydney but we marched in Melbourne and Adelaide, Canberra of course. Well, Canberra we went to dawn service at the War Memorial. Thank goodness they had their service at half past six in the morning

28:00 and not at half past four in the morning like it normally would be and it's a very moving service at the War Memorial dawn service. Well then I marched then in the mid-morning service at the Memorial and it was very impressive. I was very impressed with the whole running of the show there. It was really good and no, it was.

Martin, we see a lot of war depicted on

28:30 **television and in films but you were there for a couple of years and really in the front line in the thick of things. What would you say to people who haven't had that experience about how the reality of war compares with the way we see it?**

Yeh well of course the scriptwriters change so much, particularly the American scriptwriter

29:00 and how many of these films do you see, it's always the American uniform that's up front and they're the ones that won the damn show. I mean it's all very well. I mean I appreciate the fact that we'd have been down the tube too if we hadn't had the Yanks come over and help us and I don't lose sight of that fact but they're the big winners all

29:30 the time and they sort of boost their own thing. I suppose if we had same film capabilities as what they've had and experience, we'd probably have something similar too but I'd like to see them stick to the real script as to what it really is. I mean certainly they put a fair bit of drama into a lot of things and there is a lot of drama in it too, believe me,

30:00 but I think that the scriptwriters get it all out of kilter and they give people the wrong impressions, "Oh it was great to go there and shoot this bloke and shoot that bloke". Well that wasn't the case at all like, you know. It's more or less just stopping them landing on our country and sort of changing our way of life. We didn't want that.

30:30 **So Martin do you have a final comment that you would like to put on the record about your experience in the war or your life experience that you'd like to leave for people in the future?**

Yeh well it's been one big experience for me right through my whole life really and I think that with the war, as I said earlier, it sort of made me grow up very smartly, very quick, made me

31:00 think a lot clearer about what I was going to do with my future life and then thinking, "Now" when I did get married, "and what's our future life going to be, what's our family going to be and do?" and we've got to look after them, provide for them pretty well and I think that it gives you, it's a great country. Now being over to Gallipoli and seeing these countries there and gee

31:30 it was good to get back to Aussie, you know. It was great and I think that this is a thing that we've got to look at, is keep our future and our feet solid on our ground and keep our traditions the way they are, like our lifestyles and sure, look at the other cultures and everything, yeh, I don't mind. I mean I don't mind eating some other culture's type of food. I mean some of it's very nice. Some of it I wouldn't come back for a second helping

32:00 but most of it is very nice and we find that it's something that you can really build your own life on and if you're determined enough you can really attain that and your family and when I look around me and look at my wife and family, the kids, well I think we've done something very good between the two of us.

32:30 We've given the kids a good start in their life anyway and the grandkids are all doing well so I think that's the way it is and just keep looking to the future and trying to build a better one, that's all, yeh.

Fantastic, that sounds great. Thank you so much Martin for your time today. It's been a real pleasure talking with you and hearing your story. Thank you very much.

I hope I've given you what you wanted anyway and it's been nice to

33:00 rehash things again.

No it's been great for us, thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS