

# Australians at War Film Archive

## William O'Connor - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 11th March 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1511>

### Tape 1

00:41 **Of your life?**

Yeah I'll give you an overview of my life. I was born in Wynnum. I'm essentially a Wynnum boy. Born at Wynnum, educated in Wynnum, and spent my life in Wynnum. My name's O'Connor.

01:00 My mother's name was O'Connor. My father's name was O'Connor. Fortunately my grandfather William O'Connor, the same name as myself, owned the Waterloo Bay Hotel and he was able to fund me to Nudgee College. Now Nudgee College I was there met some very good friends between 1937-38-39-40-41, part '41, and I did reasonably well scholastically.

01:30 I got what is called a senior pass. I don't know what it's called now but I could go no further at Nudgee College. Rightly or wrongly I came out of the college in 1941 and was offered a place with the Commonwealth. It was the customs. I enrolled for duty there. I would be a youngish man. I thought a little bit unfairly I found myself very quickly

02:00 sent to Darwin on the Marella M-A-R-E-L-L-A around Cape York, so in that year 1941 I saw Darwin before Pearl Harbor and as I look back now I don't regret it at all because I saw it with all it's sights and smells and features of Eastern Asia and met some good friends there. Saw some fights amongst ex-servicemen

02:30 wanting to go overseas and it came as a rude shock to us all. Incidentally my work was interesting on the flying boats measuring oil dealing with passengers going overseas. It came as a shock to me, Pearl Harbor, as it did to everyone up there and on the 27th of December 1941 I went down to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] section down there and tried to

03:00 enlist for overseas. And I notice in my records 27/12/1941 it reads attested for service in Australia and overseas and the person interviewing me said, "Well O'Connor you're not 19, we can't sent you to Ambon or to Timor." And I thought, I look back now, the good Lord must've been looking after me. So I went back to the office

03:30 but very quickly I was grabbed for the militia and I became proudly D-196, and embodied in those forces in the [Northern] Territory then came the intense raid on Darwin and it was an intense raid, the 19th of February 1942, Zeros, Kittyhawks, the USS Peary getting bombed in the harbour

04:00 all that, but I was a soldier. I saw the exodus of civilian population, a situation that's been described as - the former Governor General Sir Paul Hasluck - as Australia's day of shame. In fact I saw some Australians getting down the road escaping on a sanitary cart. But I was a soldier, I stayed there and I have a date. I could give

04:30 a date. But I was down the road I think, Adelaide River, Katherine in the Army D-169, I became DX-839 and I was seconded probably because of my education to a radiologist at the 119th Australian General Hospital. And got a little bit bored, and they came recruiting for air crew and I was selected 437628,

05:00 and that's a source a pride. The two army numbers and the air force numbers are Northern Territory and I say I'm a Territorian. But I found myself interestingly down to Adelaide on the train and on the army vehicles. Around to Brisbane. Attested in Brisbane and then became my short quick service. I could have been accepted for pilot navigator or gunner but here again

05:30 I think my I don't say it boastfully my good education in Nudgee designated me for the navigation, and then followed a series of quick movements from Kingaroy to Ballarat to do my wireless, then to Mt Gambier to do my navigation, and I found myself a navigator/wireless with a half wing with the N -

06:00 not an O - an N. And then I transferred up to Sydney and I s'pose you'd called me a sprog. You know just recently of course. I found myself at Richmond Aerodrome with 38 Squadron doing very little but suddenly importantly transferred to 22 Squadron. Which was a famous squadron of Bostons, which had a VC [Victoria Cross] winner Bill Newton and

- 06:30 I was sent down to an OTU, Operational Training Unit, Number 5 at Tocumwal. I got my photo on the wall there with a group. I linked up with a very competent pilot called Jim McMillan, M-C-M-I-L-L-A-N and I found myself on a jungle airstrip at Noemfoor in 22 Squadron and as I got out of that hot
- 07:00 steaming aircraft onto the hot steaming ground, I thought, "Well what the hell am I doing here?" I could be bludging back in the Northern Territory. But be that as it may, I did my service with 22 Squadron, very active very nerve racking too. Low level height on what they call the Vogelkop, which is the turtle's neck at the top of New Guinea. But one day I should've died. That was the 10th of October 1944.
- 07:30 Jimmy McMillan and I with 7 others attacked Ambon which I call the Rabaul of the Dutch East Indies. Low level height, Jimmy broke away from the formation, attacked the north shore of the harbour and dropped a stick of bombs on what was very close to an Australian POW [prisoner of war] camp. Unfortunately we lost the motor was shot out and a very bright brilliant day we were faced with the situation of
- 08:00 a fun 500-mile trip to home on one motor. And I wasn't too fussed about that, but the long haul over the island of Ceram, and around the Vogelkop but we'd landed at, the Yanks had landed at a place called Sansapor S-A-N-S-A-P-O-R, a metal strip and I felt there was a class system in the air force. I was a lowly sergeant I think I was enlisted
- 08:30 at 18 years and 7 months and as I've already said here couldn't get into the AIF, so I saw a young bloke. Jimmy was a nice fella but I think permanent air force in his mid-thirties and I never discussed the situation with him, but I wasn't a fool and there was a stick of bombs dropped near a POW camp, and I rankled over this
- 09:00 I became tell ya in due course a crown prosecutor and public defender, but when I retired I wrote down to the POW Association about it and sure enough there was a chap called Walter Hicks. The Secretary said, "hello, here's a letter from an idiot." And Walter picked it up and said, "No, this is no idiot." He said, "I was there in the Jap cookhouse that day and I saw the bombs come across." Walter and I linked up we've talked. He was here the other day from
- 09:30 Victoria and I said to him, "Walter tell me where the bombs landed." And he said they skip bombed the prisoner of war camp and landed in the vegetable garden. So that was a comfort. Anyhow I saw my service out with 22 Squadron. Chaps were dying. It was the end of the war in late '44-45 and you know the Yanks had landed at Iwo Jima and Okinawa and
- 10:00 we were beating up around the Dutch East Indies but chaps were dying and I often wondered about the worth of it all. But then be that as it may I finished my course, and the CO [Commanding Officer] said, "You've finished now," and I thought I was going home. But he said, "Take your gear to the end of the strip and go with 34 Squadron," which were flying DC-3s, Douglasses from the Philippines to Australia and then
- 10:30 I'm very happy about that, and so I've got the Philippines Liberation Medal which is not for bravery or anything like that, it's a campaign ribbon. But it's amongst my gear there and I was discharged on the 18th of September 1945. Little bit regretful. Still a bit cranky because I put my uniform and my gear in a kit bag at Richmond to be sent to my home in Wynnum. It arrived
- 11:00 full of stones. So that still rankles with me. But be that as it may we had a very good government, I thought, Prime Minister Chifley and I was able to do on top of my Nudgee experience a law course at the university, became an LLB [Bachelor of Laws]. Served in the Commonwealth Crown Law. Transferred wonderfully to the state which was the if I could use the term the
- 11:30 guts of the administration of law where you're in court and I became a crown prosecutor, travelled all over Queensland senior crown prosecutor and then in the last 5 years of my life, I was made public defender for the state and I had a staff of 79 and then retired in the year 1983. So that briefly, if that may be so, is a summary of my life.

**Fantastic.**

- 12:00 **OK, what is your earliest memory?**

My earliest memory is - and wonderfully so - of Wynnum. Wynnum is a bay side resort not far from where I sit here. As a matter of fact I'm a member of two RSLs [Returned and Services League clubs]. A member of Redlands here and I'm an associate member at Wynnum. I know a few there after many years. Born on the main street, Bay Terrace. Lived in Bride Street, a street which runs

- 12:30 down to the RSL and always had strong ties. Went to school at the Guardian Angels' Convent up there in Wynnum central, and not blowing my own trumpet but got a good pass in scholarship and my old Irish grandfather, my folks didn't have the money but he sent me to Nudgee College. And then I worked hard and played football there and
- 13:00 so I'd say really my first memories are of life in Wynnum. Knowing the people and seeing the Wynnum of that day how different it is to the Wynnum of today.

**Can you tell us a bit more about what Wynnum was like back then?**

Yeah. Wynnum was called the pensioner's paradise. It was thing that strikes me, very few people seemed to own their own homes. I think there was a Mr Sargeant that owned a hundred homes or something like that, and a lot of

13:30 them were wheat workers and frankly it doesn't seem to have changed. It's certainly expanded, there's no doubt about that. But the nuns taught me. The nuns were the teachers in those days and they taught me and they taught me well. They taught me the fundamentals and my people were very, very poor. My mother O'Connor was the daughter of Bill O'Connor

14:00 the publican and as I say I had 6, I think, 6 or 7 sisters, and one of the great memories of Wynnum you mention is we all went down one Sunday in 1933, down to the bottom of the street, just walked off and the little girl disappeared. Our attention was distracted by horses and a body was recovered I'm pleased

14:30 to say by lads in fishing nets at Wynnum Creek. So that was the most significant thing and I didn't get to know my sisters too well. Four years at Nudgee, probably 4 or 5 in the services. Back to the Northern Territory. I'll explain that later after the war. You can recall that's a fair bit out of my life. And they didn't get to know me too

15:00 well.

#### **What about primary school?**

The nuns you know and they seemed to be competent. Sour ladies called the Sisters of Mercy. We called them Sisters of No Mercy, but competent ladies and the priest had is presbytery very close by, Father Kenny. No complaints about them. I was an altar boy. And I just have

15:30 no complaints. They gave me a good education as did my country. I'm very rapt in my country. I'm an Australian by virtue of my birth, I've got an Australian citizenship but I love my country and I'm not boasting because it's added to my education after the war. It gave me a job. It enabled me to practice as a lawyer. I've had two knee replacements which are done by my country. Transport

16:00 was provided to and fro. I've got no complaints. But that's the memory of Wynnum.

#### **What sort of things did you get up to outside of school in your spare hours?**

I loved football and they used to play football at Wynnum. And I think my people thought it would be a little bit incorrect for a Nudgee chap with rugby union to be scooting off playing rugby league on Kitchener Park. But be that as it may, that's what I did and yesterday I went for a trip with the Wynnum RSL up to

16:30 Caloundra and there's some people of my age that I knew which is very good. But you know there again I've got no complaints about Nudgee. Very good football school, played footy there. Made some very good mates and you know I've just got no complaints at all. Always a good student and put that as a priority but played a lot a

17:00 football and that's why I probably got the knees.

#### **What about the family home at Wynnum?**

Yeah. That's a little but upsetting. Do you know Wynnum at all? I've got 3 sisters that live in the family home on the corner of Bay Terrace and Bride Street. Now if you go down to Wynnum Bay Terrace is the main street and for the life of me I think that that home

17:30 would be the only home in that Long Bay Terrace. My sisters are estranged from me, they don't talk to me much. I'll elaborate on that. I'd like to advise them and talk to em I'd like them to move out to Wynnum West or somewhere. There must be a high property for the family home. But I would not be welcome in the family home. I s'pose they didn't like my wife. They mightn't have liked me. So I pass the family home but

18:00 don't go in.

#### **What are your memories of it but from a child's perspective?**

Very wonderful. You know it was on Bay Terrace and close to the football field and you know lot a people. Wynnum Creek and there was a very vibrant society in Wynnum in those days. So different football teams. Waterloos. Wynnum Fishermen. Manly and Hemmant. Seemed to know everybody. I never got it out of my bones.

18:30 **Did you go fishing down there as a young lad?**

No. No, that never appealed to me. No, I liked the - rather liked the football. But I'd say my life was Nudgee College. And I'm thankful to my old grandfather who was not everyone's cup a tea, but let's face it he funded me four and a half years at Nudgee. Which was not a bad effort. And

19:00 he might a been prevailed upon by the brothers to send me back, but when I did leave in 1941 the war was on and I couldn't see any point in repeating senior to get a scholarship to the university. Maybe there might a been a regret there. Maybe if I'd a done that, if I'd a shirked the war and gone to the

university, I might a been a professional man today.

**Can you tell us a little about your mum?**

Yeah, dear little lady. Name O'Connor.

19:30 Her father was former Mayor of South Brisbane. Good background, but very reticent about her forebears and I did research this and I noticed that they've got convict background, you know, as many Australians have. So but she was a good little woman, very quiet. My father was a dominating man, but he died at 50 which was very

20:00 early.

**What was your dad like?**

Overbearing you know. But I think life was too much for him.

**What did he do for a living?**

A bar attendant.

**At the Waterloo or?**

No no. He had nothing to do with his father-in-law, that's old Bill O'Connor. So it was an unhappy sort of an experience but then again I was

20:30 cosseted from it by being at Nudgee College and that's the point I made earlier on that you know with Nudgee College you know that's in my early life, a fair bit of my life gone, and then up to Darwin and into the services and so disappearing.

**How did your mum and dad manage with so many kids during the Depression?**

Helped by my grandfather for the daughter. He gave the home rent free to my

21:00 people on Bay Terrace that would've been a big thing. And I don't think he was sufficiently thanked for it when I look back. That's a big thing, you know, a rent free home on Bay Terrace. And it was a large family grouping. I don't know how many sisters I had, probably 7 or 8 you know. The great tragedy was that little girl disappearing off the

21:30 side of the beach, if you can call it a beach at Wynnum and her body being caught. I think that set them back.

**What sort of impact did that have on you?**

Not much. 1933 I'd a been about 10 then. I remember running like hell that Sunday afternoon. There was a jetty at Wynnum running right to the end of the jetty telling boaters there could they come and tread the water and try and find the little girl. Never forgot it. But didn't affect me in my studies or anything like that

22:00 I didn't become a recluse. Was sheer bad luck.

**But you feel that affected your other sisters?**

Probably. Probably. Quite a remarkable thing you know. Do you know Wynnum? You know there's Bride Street there and it goes down. You wouldn't call it a beach, it's a what was about a foot high they're just paddling around and some horses were bathing. Distracted, looked across and

22:30 there's no little girl. Now if the body hadn't a been found to this day I'd a been very concerned as an old lawyer that she'd been taken away. Very concerned. But the word got around quickly and as I say some very decent fishermen from Wynnum cast their nets out and brought the body in.

**Did they ever establish what happened to her?**

No. Show ya isn't it?

23:00 But there again that was it. There are some people that still remember the incident.

**So what do you remember of the Depression years in Wynnum?**

Pretty tough. Very hard you know. I think my father at one stage had to work on the relief and I remember the nuns used to get us to buy the Catholic Leader on a Friday I think sometimes I think it was threepence

23:30 to get the lessons and that to work out and I had to tell the nun I haven't got it this week. I can't afford it. So you know very mindful of the fact there was a Depression. But always had enough to eat and my grandfather

24:00 I knew him well and I used to go looking for the cows for him at night time and well I thought it was a great effort to send me to Nudgee College. Don't know where I'd a finished elsewhere. S'pose at the

meatworks.

**Before we get onto Nudgee, can you do you remember the sort of food that you would eat and that mum would cook for you?**

Yeah, well my father was a good cook. I can't remember the food but we were never hungry. And

24:30 I really can't recall you know. But he was a cook. There was nothing effeminate about him but he'd do fancy work and he'd help my mother. She'd had a growth and had to have an operation so I s'pose he excelled himself you know by doing that. I don't think many men could do it today.

**So when you were first told that you'd be off to Nudgee what did you know of Nudgee at that time?**

Very

25:00 little. I think the old priest was involved. He was a Nudgee old boy and he'd been close to my grandfather and my mother and father wouldn't have had anything to. I don't know whether it was in my grandfather's name. I say he was William O'Connor born in Ireland and I was William O'Connor, he might've had something that I might actually succeed him. Be that as it may he funded me and funding meant providing gear down there and everything you know.

25:30 I was never made to feel second class.

**So that involved living at Nudgee College?**

Yeah, definitely.

**Can you tell us about that?**

Well, it was very very good. One hears a lot these days about sexual advances made by the men in black towards students but I found them very manly people. Very football minded and I got nothing but respect for them you know.

26:00 Good lads. No thieves. I've got no complaints really. They used to change over a time and I've got to know them now, they've become doctors and lawyers and all sorts of things and battlers, but I know them which is very good. I don't know where I would have been but for Nudgee.

**What about when suddenly you're told you're off to Nudgee College you're going to be taken out of your family home at Wynnum where you love, and taken the other side of the river,**

26:30 **that must've been a huge upheaval for you? How did you face that?**

Well I might have been sick of home. I loved study. I thought it was a challenge. Nudgee even in those days was well regarded and I thought it was a privilege. And I think the old Grandfather even provided a taxi to take me there. So I had it easy.

**And when you first went there, how was settling in to like this whole**

27:00 **new environment?**

Very, very hard. I, the first night I wept, and was sobbing in my bed and the bloke next to me I hadn't met, said hop in my bed and I'll comfort you. Well I wasn't a numbskull and he might've been well motivated but I ceased crying and stayed in my own bed. They're little things down at Nudgee such as they called splashing you out. They had long toilets and there was a water run underneath them

27:30 and sometimes they'd get a stone and be in the next toilet and throw it in and splash you. Or other times they'd get on the other side and set fire to paper to burn you out. So that's about the only things that I can recall there. But I play footy and was a fair footballer. Captain of the second 15 and I liked it. I liked study and I liked footy. Never played cricket and never swam.

28:00 Maybe that had an effect on me. Maybe the death of my little sister turned me against the water.

**Has that water thing remained throughout your life?**

Yeah, it has really.

**And were they the two other main things besides rugby at Nudgee?**

Yeah, about that, yeah. I always had misgivings. On that 500 flight from Ambon without one motor if we'd have belly landed in

28:30 the water and it's not easy to belly land because the plane could sink right down and you both drown but if it belly land and get out you know I wasn't too fussed about remaining around with water. And then the Japs would've had our heads you know. So I've always had a pretty healthy respect for water. I still can't swim. Never taken the effort to do it.

29:00 **What subjects did you study there?**

Subjects I think were unsuitable. Maybe if I were gonna be a doctor. Physics and Chemistry. English.

Always loved History and always got As in History, you know, loved it. Still love it today. But the traditional subjects I can't see the point in them. French for 4 years, you know, and I know I never

29:30 served in overseas at all.

**Was that - when you say history was it modern history or ancient history or was it?**

Definitely not ancient. No modern and even today you know I s'pose I'm saying it now I'm a Republican but I've got no great fuss in about certain traditional things but I know all the details from, you know,

30:00 right through from William the Conqueror to Prince Charles.

**Can you remember at school did they teach you fellas much about Australia's involvement in World War 1?**

No, too. The only thing I thought was that foolishly have you seen Nudgee? It's got a tower. Thought it might have been the subject for Japanese submarines, you know, out at sea. But no, never. No.

30:30 **So did they try and encourage you to set goals as to what you want to be when you leave Nudgee?**

Not really. Not really. Maybe they had in secret. See 1940, I got 3 As and 6 Bs in the senior and I reckoned that was good and I reckoned I'd done my work senior but then the

31:00 brothers had prevailed on the priest in Wynnum and Father Kenny and my old grandfather to send me again to get a scholarship and I thought that was a bit tough. I'd done what I'd set out to do. Why repeat it to get a scholarship?

**So can you explain it for us and for people that don't know the system back there what the difference between senior and scholarship?**

Well put it this way I think

31:30 20-places were given by the University of Queensland as a scholarship each year to the top 20. I had a good pass in 1940, that was the end of my scholastic year. I suppose the idea was that I repeated it in 1941 and become the top 20 and get a scholarship to the university. That didn't go down well with me, because I thought I'd done what I'd set out to do.

**So you weren't interested at that stage at doing university studies or?**

32:00 I think I might a been a little bit shrewd, might have thought I mightn't have got one. A year gone for nothing, 1941.

**So at that stage what were you thinking about what you might like to do once you'd left school?**

The Commonwealth Public Service. In those days, Peter [interviewer], I don't know whether you realise it to be a member of the Commonwealth Public Service permanent was quite an effort and they were quite respectable people and it was a career service and

32:30 much sought after and I went back to Nudgee reluctantly but I got a letter to say that I'd been accepted in the customs service and my father did stand up for me and we agreed to leave Nudgee. Never spoke to my grandfather about it. He died not long after. Don't know he felt about it. Don't know how the brothers felt about it.

33:00 But I left Nudgee.

**How did you come to know about the Commonwealth Public Service?**

Well spoken about and much sought after. I dunno what things are like now but it was really an effort to get there and it was a career and there was an appeal system in there. And I conducted appeals there you know. I quite like the idea and I've got no regrets about the customs,

33:30 except my feet barely touched the ground and I found myself on an interstate boat to Darwin which I thought was a little bit unfair, if I might use the term with brackets plenty of bludgers back in the Customs House. Why couldn't a young lad from college be sent there? But I have no regrets.

**Can you remember the actual application to the public service?**

Can't remember it at all. Can't remember the background, anything except the letter.

**So would you've actually made that**

34:00 **application or would your father made it?**

I would have done it. Dunno how it come, Peter. Honestly. But I was very pleased to get it. And I had no regrets about leaving home.

**So weekends when you were at Nudgee, what would you do?**

There was always sport there. Be it summer or winter you'd hang around you know.

34:30 Very church orientated you know. It was like a home. I had no regrets, the tucker was good you know and it was very good very placid. I become a prefect.

**Did you go home on weekends?**

No definitely not. I used to look across from Wynnum to Wynnum and I'd weren't so many houses there and I could see Nazareth House.

35:00 You heard of Nazareth House? It's stuck up on a high hill and I thought I don't live very far across from there. But that's the only thing. I slept well at night. Made some good friends. Matter of fact that Hugh O'Dwyer that's got the MM [Military Medal], I gave you the name, we often talk you know. My friends are dying. But I want to made the point I've got no regrets about

35:30 going to Darwin in retrospect. Did at the time but not now.

**So when you got that first letter of acceptance to say yes, come aboard, did they mention in that letter that you'd be off to Darwin or?**

No. No they did not.

**So what did the whole process involve? Once you got that letter to say yes you're in?**

Well, acceptance. I rang my father and

36:00 although the poor bugger died of alcoholism, he had pretty sane moments and he's a bit of a good stick and he got right behind me and he stood up and I dunno. As I say I dunno how it went with anyone else but mind you it was war years and before Pearl Harbor.

**You would've been at Nudgee when war was declared?**

No.

36:30 No. I was not. I went to Nudgee in - Hey! My word I was. Yeah I went there in '37. '38-39 I was definitely.

**So can you remember war being declared or?**

Yep. Yeah I can. Had a chap, a master from Nudgee called Martin Kirby has written a book on - Dying Echoes - about the contribution made by

37:00 Nudgee boys to the wars from World War on so I get a mention there and there's the memories of chaps about what their feelings were when war was declared. And they all seem to be wanting to get away to it you know. A big adventure. Not that I felt that way. Just fairly neutral about it.

**Can you remember how you actually heard?**

Just in the quadrangle, people talking.

37:30 You know, talk, talk, talk. Yeah.

**And at that stage it didn't mean much to you?**

No. Mind you the Japs weren't in the war. No Pearl Harbor. It was overseas.

**Did you notice blokes going away from Brisbane to fight?**

Yeah. Yeah definitely. And it's all in the book you know. In the Nudgee

38:00 book. But I got a heck of a shock, you know, to be sent to Darwin.

**So when were you told that that you were going to go to Darwin?**

Well I was in the Customs House only a short time. The bloody old collector said to me, you're off to Darwin. You know, pickin' on the Marella, you know the Northern Territory used to be under the Queensland Customs. Bit of an adventure for me. You know the Marella up round Cape

38:30 York and across the gulf right there and I had no didn't keep me awake at night. Got to Darwin, strange sort of a place. Do you want me to talk about Darwin?

**Yeah. Actually before you do, I'm interested just to find out what sort of preparations you made before you left?**

Very little. Honestly very little. Poor old Mum, I dunno. Dunno how I even got

39:00 to the boat. Really honestly, memory's very fickle.

**Do you remember what you took with you?**

No I don't honestly. But I you know not an old chap either. Not used to travelling. But I got on that

Marella and there were ferry passengers there and struck people that I knew in Darwin there. Sandy McNabb, a detective and buffalo shooter and I could see it was gonna

39:30 be a new way of life.

**Where did the Marella leave from?**

I think Bretts Wharf. I think. And I don't know where she called at. Haven't got any memory of that. Chinese crew. But Darwin was an eye opener. That bought me down to earth.

**What did you expect from Darwin before you got there?**

Didn't know honestly.

40:00 I dunno why I was sent there. You know you thought a bloke with 40 years' experience or that might be up there. Pretty important place then the flying boats coming in and going out. Vessels coming from the east.

**We'll just get you to stop there. The tape's -**

40:30 **End of tape**

## Tape 2

00:30 **Okay, so you're heading up to Darwin?**

Heading up to Darwin, you know, the land of the buffaloes and the crocodiles and got a hell of a shock when I got there. I was put in a big compound with a lot of s'pose single blokes, and blokes living apart from their wives, you know, but it was a real rough and ready town and looking back in retrospect I quite admired it. You know the brothels, the smoke

01:00 you know the dingy quarters, the Chinese the whole atmosphere. The flying boats coming in and having to get down there. The planes landing and what not and towards the end in late '41 toward going up to Pearl Harbor, before Pearl Harbor, refugee boats coming from the Dutch East Indies as they were then. Very, very good. Well, good for me cause I saw it.

01:30 Knew every bit of cranny. Liked walking, loved the place and got wonderful memories. All that's changed now. Very few people have got those memories. I've got them.

**What was your very first impression of Darwin when you got off the boat?**

A grub of a town, you know shocker. But I've read a lot about it and how South Australia mismanaged for half a century and it was Commonwealth in those days,

02:00 South Australia in 1911, and turned it over to the Commonwealth. But there's only the old Puffing Billy railway train that came up and the roads were bad and but the population you know there were lot a soldiers there and they were wanting to go overseas and they were squabbling. There were riots on the street. Altogether something I hadn't seen before. Fascinated by it all you know. It wasn't that

02:30 what - from it was - from I got there about say March or April only till about Pearl Harbor. So that's about 9 months but a 9 jam packed period you know.

**If I can backtrack a little bit when you went into Customs House in Brisbane, what were they teaching you there? Was that just the learning stage?**

Yeah, yeah, what I s'pose. I dunno what. I

03:00 was put on the wharves. Newstead and places like that. I dunno it might a been good reports. It mightn't a been tirin' to shove me out you know because and the staff up in Darwin were very good. There was a chap called Prez, P-R-E-Z, a local fella of the Prez family up there. Spanish background and George Carr and the customs officers, very competent men.

03:30 And it was a significant place in the community, Customs House, and I got to know the Chinaman that later become Mayor of Darwin. But bear in mind that I'd be a comparatively young bloke. I'd be very junior there. So but there was always the threat of war even before Pearl Harbor. And

04:00 I remember the troops remember the convoy. Getting ahead of myself now. I don't know when but they set out for Timor. This'd be after Pearl Harbor and they were bombed on the way across and they came back. They escorted their troops thankfully and they were bombed next day. So really an atmosphere of war, even before Pearl Harbor.

04:30 Plenty of troops. Plenty of activity you know. The native population.

**So when you first when into the Commonwealth Public Service, did they slot you into customs**



**or did you choose that?**

Yeah, they slotted me.

**And you were happy with that?**

Yeah, quite happy.

**So what exactly was your role up in Darwin as a Customs Officer?**

I really can't understand it, you know. In retrospect I go out with the shell boys on their boats

05:00 to the boats the big flying boats the big four engines. Dunno even whether they were four engined but big huge flying boats going to overseas and civilian and checking the fuel consumption there and then out to the airport passengers coming in, computing, you know. But there were other things. There was a bloke called Roy Lawrence he was a locker as they call him, L-O-C-K-E-R, and he had to dip the oil tanks.

05:30 I suppose I could have made a career out of the customs. I dunno, all they got was a raw chap. But I tried to fit in.

**How many other blokes were working in the Customs Office up there?**

'Bout 4 or 5. Very important. Now can I take you ahead to the enlistment?

06:00 I dunno what happens. It would have been after Pearl Harbor. What Pearl Harbor was about early December '41 and on the 27th of December '41 I fell I went down to be accepted in the AIF because my papers read attested for service in Australia and overseas. I was examined and he said to me, the sergeant, "What's your age?" and I said, "I think

06:30 18." He said, "Go back home." He said, "We can't use you in Timor or Ambon," he said, "because you're not 19, even if you were AIF." And in retrospect the good Lord must have been lookin' after me because what a thing that'd be. Untrained, going away. Dear. Very shortly afterwards on the 16th of January '42, still before the raid

07:00 I s'pose I use the term, they grabbed me. They said, "you're now D169." Away from the Customs House down to Larrakeyah Barracks which was down the road and I was a soldier. And pretty proud of it too, Peter, cause you know D169 is pretty low number and I incidentally looked for it on the computer down the RSL the other day and I'm

07:30 a bit cranky and I've written away, nothing shows and I wrote to them about it and I'm a bit annoyed. I said I could be accused of being a false pretender. But they say it's been absorbed into your AIF number. I s'pose that means just put in on a manila folder. But they - for \$16.20 - they're going to give me a full blow out of my army service and I accepted that.

08:00 Anyhow, Larrakeyah Barracks a soldier. Very nice blokes. Headquarters job. Just very near the town and until that terrible day. You know the 19th of February '42. More bombs there than on Pearl Harbor. Shocking. Unprepared. And I recall shooting out the barracks into a slit trench near

08:30 Larrakeyah Barracks and the Kahlin Hospital and I can actually see a Kittyhawk being pursued by a Zero just over my head. Looked up I could see the USS Peary, P-E-A-R-Y, 4-funnel destroyer blasting and blowing. And then I saw oil stained people coming up the cliffs and I thought they might have been Japs but they were just victims of the submerged

09:00 shipping and then came the great exodus from Darwin that much has been written about and I'm very ashamed of it because the people did flee. And I told you about the thing on the toilet cart down that road. There was only one road going to Adelaide River and they were off. Even servicemen went and some RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] chaps reached Melbourne. Which is a pretty fair effort when

09:30 you look at it to get down there. But I kept to the services I had too. And we were sent down the road to about the 20 mile. But Darwin I thought would have been wide open for invasion.

**Can you recall the day that you heard that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?**

Yeah. I'm in yeah. That's what prompted me I recall

10:00 to go down and join up.

**How did you hear about it?**

Radio. Radio and it was a shock and altered the whole atmosphere and important gap between there early December I think it's the 9th of December '41 and the 19th of February '42 was the big raid, and it was a huge raid

10:30 and there were 2 raids. And I lost all my property. When I'd gone in as a soldier, left all my gear in the Customs House never got any of it back. Records and everything and no question of compensation. So I was just a soldier in my khaki.

**So what did you think now that the Japs had entered the war?**

I thought we'd be gone because

11:00 there was nothing to defend us. But apparently they made a deliberate effort not to invade Australia. But they did a lot of damage that day in Darwin. Ships were sunk. People were killed. And there was panic.

**With the announcement when you heard the news of Pearl Harbor, was there any consolation in that the Americans were then brought into the war?**

Yep, there would have been, yep. I think I struck a bit of that in

11:30 1940 at Nudgee. I think the American fleet had come out here on a training exercise and people were overjoyed ecstatic.

**So what sort of build up of American forces in Darwin did you see in that period of time?**

Very little. Very little it was just the Puffing Billy railway line and a

12:00 disused sort of a road and. But from reading, American Kittyhawks were destroyed on the you know up there but the thing that irks me and I'm very annoyed about it still is there was a Father McGrath on either Bathurst or Melville Island north west the raid on Darwin was 10am he saw a huge fleet of aircraft coming from the Indies

12:30 9:30am, wirelessly Darwin. Nothing was ever done. Matter of fact people could see the beautiful thing from the sky and said, look at them. The Yanks have come. And there was another raid at 10 o'clock.

**But all the American ships that were in the harbour, had they how long had they been there?**

Some considerable time, I'd say. I don't know their names.

13:00 The Mauna Loa and the Meigs, you know them, you know.

**So what how did things change on the ground in Darwin after Pearl Harbor between Pearl Harbor and Darwin being bombed?**

Well there was a tightening up I suppose. Looting of private homes by Australian servicemen. That's in the books, you know.

**But that's after the bombing of Darwin?**

After the bombing.

**Yeah, no. But were looking at the time between Pearl Harbor and Darwin being bombed?**

13:30 **What sort of changes happened in Darwin in that period?**

Oh well we had an administrator that I'm not too fussed about called Abbott, A-B-B-O-T-T. I don't think he did enough but there was a real sense or urgency in the place. They knew there was something on. They didn't know they were gonna be hit by planes from an aircraft carrier.

**So when you were grabbed by the army what sort of training did you do?**

14:00 None. There again because of Nudgee, I suppose, pencil and paper. Victoria Barracks. Got tucker. Got a uniform, got khaki and I was there. And there'd be no question I couldn't have been down that road with those people on the day of the raid nor did I want to be. But even then our unit moved out of town down to about the 20 mile

14:30 allegedly guarding you know, but expecting a paratroop attack on Darwin but totally inadequately prepared. A sorry story.

**How much more can you fill us in on that actual day the 19th of Feb?**

Shocking day you know. The raid at 10 o'clock and the running to the slit trenches.

**Can you remember seeing the planes before the bombs fell?**

Yeah.

15:00 **What did you**

Silver things in the sky coming from the south east. Saw them.

**And what was your first thought?**

Yanks. They were quite high silver things then the bombs begin to fall. Good bombing. They bombed the Post Office and killed people there. Ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] ineffective. But as I say close to home in that slit trench I see that bloody Jap Zero on the tail of a Kittyhawk, very low height.

- 15:30 I could see the USS Peary, the 4-funnel thing she was later sunk in the harbour, going, I could see the smoke. But I wasn't a customs officer. I wasn't down at the wharf. Because there'd be panic at the quarters and there'd be decisions about moving our unit down the road and cause Darwin's like a promontory, I don't know whether you know
- 16:00 that, Peter, and the idea was that the Japs would land at the base at 20 mile of that they get down there.

**What about the barracks? Was it targeted?**

No. No panicky people said, "The Japs'll land shortly and they'd need the barracks for their troops." So it was wide open.

**So once the first raid was over. Did you spend all that time in your slit**

- 16:30 **trench?**

Not all the time but the second raid at 10 o'clock was more to the strip the 4 mile on the main strip they did a hell of a lot of damage there and the bombs weren't anywhere near me then.

**So what sort of organisation was going on at the barracks at this stage?**

Very little just planning to deploy. I wouldn't have been privy to the decisions you know.

**But what were**

- 17:00 **you being told?**

Just that we were going to move. Cause we'd have been flush in the centre near Larrakeyah Barracks.

**So you had your weapon with you?**

Yep.

**What was that?**

The old rifle, you know. The old rifle.

**303?**

Yeah, that's it.

**How much ammunition did they have then?**

I dunno I can't recall that, no. But and then I say

- 17:30 we found ourselves under canvas down near the I think it'd be the 20 mile, down the road. And then being with them and I thought well I'll do what I set out to be. I would have been 19 by then. 9 and 3 are 12, yeah I would have been just 19, so I joined the AIF then on paper and became DX839. DX839. Still a low number. Blokes
- 18:00 when they hear the number and not know me, they hear it's in the D's they you must have joined up at the start of the war. No such thing. There was just so very few people there. And I there again it might have been my Nudgee background but a radiologist in 119th Australian General Hospital at Adelaide River selected me to go
- 18:30 with him to I s'pose act as his clerk and he used to have a tin hut on the north side of Adelaide River and do his x-rays there. So I was on the staff of the 119th AGH [Australian General Hospital] assisting a radiologist. Which wasn't a bad life you know. I dearly even today I dearly love my own company. It was very good in those
- 19:00 days. You know you'd be in this tin hut and he'd go back to the hospital at night and you know I think I stayed there and looked after gear near the Adelaide River. So that was my DX839 and I could give you dates, but you don't want them, do you. And I got a little I went down. Sometime I was
- 19:30 was down at Mambaloo Station near Katherine and it wouldn't have been with Captain Nelson. It must have been before I went to him. But I got very, very bored with the Northern Territory, you know. Not frightened but bored and I thought well how the hell do I get out of here? Sent up by the customs. Caught here by this. But I
- 20:00 wouldn't desert. But they came recruiting for air crew. Strange and they selected me amongst others and even enlisted me there, I think. 437628, so Peter that's the significant thing. D169, DX839, 437628 all in the Northern Territory. Which is not a bad effort is it? And the memorable thing
- 20:30 of course, the thing that does stick in the memory is my journey down to King William Street in Adelaide. The other blokes.

**Before you go there Bill. Before you're heading south from Larrakeyah Barracks, did you go back into Darwin and see the damage that had been done?**

No. I'd be under orders you know. I couldn't wander. Realise there would have been a lot a damage and

realise I had my gear in the Customs House. Not valuable,

21:00 but you know, my gear, and probably looted.

**So the immediate after effects of the raid what were they just seeing people going south?**

Yeah, saw them going south and bit disgusted with them because they feared an invasion and bear in mind, I hadn't been given any

21:30 army training you know and if I'd a been accepted for the AIF on the 27th of the 12th and sent to Ambon and Timor wouldn't I have been a pathetic individual without any training at all there. I feel the services were in my case inadequate in their training.

**How about when you went into the**

22:00 **RAAF?**

Bit inadequate there. I'll take myself a bit forward. I became what's called Nav-W which is a half wing with is the end and I certainly did radio at Ballarat. I certainly did navigation at Mount Gambier. Happy memories but I never did any gunnery and gunnery was tried at.

22:30 Some of the boys had done gunnery at Evans Head up in an aircraft shooting at a drogue in the sky and this is the thing when I lobbed in the at Noemfoor, N-O-E-M-F-O-O-R, at Geelvink Bay to take up with my squadron I and others were assigned to the new Boston G with a turret. I'd never been in a turret. Never fired it.

23:00 Now what. Talk about training or lack of it. Disgraceful.

**So when the RAAF fellas first came round doing recruiting, what sparked your interest?**

Getting out of the Territory. Not any great desire to be in the RAAF, but you know I'd had a bit of a gutful, as they say in the vernacular. I'd been a customs officer there. I'd failed to get in the AIF, thank God in retrospect

23:30 and been grabbed in the army and lost my all my gear and but I can't say the army was very crook to me. They were very decent blokes and made some good mates you know and with Captain Nelson he was a good bloke. I dunno whether he's still alive but he was a radiologist in those days and I used to - I remember I used to know - photographer.

24:00 What do ya call it when you get a photograph and a raw photograph and develop it. Used to develop it for troops nearby and get paid for it. It was a good life. But Captain Nelson wouldn't have known you know. But I had no objections. But to sum it up a bit bored and blokes and I'd heard about those blokes from the bloody RAAF who after

24:30 the second raid had mistaken an order, so they say, and bolted for their life and got to Melbourne. I thought well I'm not going to come into that sort a business but I'll see it out but I couldn't see any future, Peter. 119th AGH.

**How long were you there for?**

About 6 months I'd say.

**You must have seen blokes coming through there that had gone through the raids did you doing x-ray sort of work?**

25:00 Yeah saw a Yank who was in a Flying Fortress who's dead in a morgue, you know, with a bullet in the stomach things like that you know.

**What sort of impact did that have on you?**

Not much at all. Not much. But I really didn't know what I was getting in for in the RAAF and even now I'm a little bit cranky about things when I think back you know to. You know I did wireless, I did Morse code and I could operate a set and I did navigation

25:30 but then I to think that I you know would have told us some gunnery even on the ground and particularly at Evans Head where there's a gunnery school to put us up in an aircraft and shoot at a drogue. But got up there with others and landed on the strip and told well you're in the turret. I'd never seen a turret before.

26:00 Unbelievable isn't it?

**You mentioned actually that when you joined the RAAF it was a means to get out of the Territory?**

Yeah.

**Where did you think the RAAF would take you?**

Well there again a little bit of brains I didn't want to go to the European theatre where there's cold

weather and blackouts and night fighters and searchlights. I dunno where it would be. I honestly didn't know. I knew it'd be no picnic

26:30 but I knew I'd be going from the Territory.

**So did you do a basic rookies training?**

Yeah I did.

**Where was that?**

Kingaroy. And quite liked it.

**How'd you get from?**

From King William Street in Adelaide? By train and become 437628.

**But first of all you went from the Territory down to Adelaide?**

Yeah definitely.

**How was that?**

That was pretty eventful,

27:00 Peter, you know for me as an Australian, you know on that Puffing Billy down to - it wasn't called Birdam, it was called Larrimah, L-A-R-R-I-M-A-H - and then by trucks in a staging camp. Shows you how the bond between servicemen were, we were milling about wondering whether we'd get on the backs of the trucks to take us to Adelaide and a chap I'd served with in the barracks said to me,

27:30 "Bill, I'll put your name on the top of the list." I did. I got in there and down there I went and then Alice Springs a train. But the surprising thing for me as an Australian when the train went down the Ghan it must've taken a different route to what it does now because I found myself in country high. It was Proper Reed near the Flinders Ranges where the old Ghan must've gone. Does that make any sense to you?

28:00 **Yeah I'm not sure if it's changed**

I think it must've. I think because of flooding the change as been made. But anyhow it was a part of Australia I hadn't seen and went down there and King William Street in Adelaide.

**What was the mix Bill just before you get onto that. The mix of blokes that were heading from the Territory down to Adelaide to join the RAAF, were there civvy blokes as well as army blokes?**

No no civilians at all. No, all army, yeah, all army.

28:30 They must have been a bit hard up to go recruiting hey? But anyhow we got there and then I found myself at Kingaroy and quite liked it. Queensland you know and then we were assessed and I think in the papers there I was assessed for a pilot or a navigator or a gunner and old Kempson, K-E-M-P-S-O-N, I think he was a poultry farmer in the Wynnum area. Knew my

29:00 grandfather and I liked to think that in retrospect that he put me down as a navigator because of the Nudgee background. I'd have lined up as pilot if need be, you know. I was quite easy about it and there quite a few ex-servicemen at Kingaroy in their course, quite a few. And some of the blokes when we did written work I used to pass my work over across so they could copy

29:30 it you know so you know I met some extra good fellas.

**So what did you actually do in Adelaide before you went up to Kingaroy?**

Buggered if I know. Blowed if I know. I dunno where we went to. I do wish I'd a seen my - my father was a South Australian and my grandmother, poor thing, whom I'd never met. Father came up from Adelaide, she died in 1944 and it's one of my regrets

30:00 that somehow I didn't find time to call on the dear old lady. But I can't place what we did except we would've come by train from Adelaide to Kingaroy. That was the initial training and I got no regrets about it at all. Then we suddenly found ourselves you know it was pretty fair dinkum down to Ballarat

30:30 Number 1 WAGS, Wireless Air Gunnery School, one there and it was a part of the year in which you know I got the records there the weather was unkind. I saw snow for the first time or what was sleet and I think I got pneumonia and I didn't care for the posting there. And the next one was to Mount Gambier which I loved very much.

31:00 Some dear old ladies the Kennedy sisters had a farm there and they used to invite Jimmy McNamara and I there and the roaring fire in Adelaide and lovely meals and very, very good indeed. But you know we trained there and I remember in Adelaide rather in Mount Gambier the two lakes there and the fact that we went down to a

31:30 place, rugged sea down the bottom there, but really good training. And did flights at night and a bit pretty hair raising. You know, a semi-circular flight like that at night time training and you know with the blackout you could not afford to miss your points and you know you'd be in trouble. But would've liked to have done some gunnery. Never complained about it, because I never thought

32:00 I was gonna finish in a turret.

**So was Kingaroy the first place that you'd flown?**

Yeah.

**Ever in your life?**

Yeah, that's right.

**What was that like?**

Hair raising, you know. They'd be only small aircraft you know. Ballarat would have been a bit bigger. Bigger type aircraft and also at Mount Gambier, bigger type aircraft.

**Can you go through for us and just explain a little bit**

32:30 **about what training you did in each of these locations?**

Yeah. You know Morse code would have been the very important thing. Very important and that was at Ballarat and playing around with radio sets.

33:00 I'm no radio buff, but playing around with them so as to fix them up in there. The most realistic thing was at Mount Gambier which was navigation, and we had to do flights and they were significant flights too. And we had to do tests and I remember one of the crews went over

33:30 on the Lady Julie on Percy Island were killed, but it was all in that south eastern part of South Australia. Some at night time too. So you know I felt myself as far as the wireless and the navigation was concerned, I felt reasonably competent and I would've been then admitted as a navigator/wireless.

34:00 Half wing N not O.

**Did you ever get time off during your training?**

Yeah. Yeah and in on my memory I seem to think that we only got Saturday's off one day. I dunno if that accords with what you know but there wasn't any long periods off and the greatest

34:30 memory was those dear little Kennedy sister ladies that had the roaring fire you know at Cadzow, C-A-D-Z-O-W, near Ballarat that gave Jimmy McNamara and I a feed and you know sent some home.

**When did your father die?**

1950.

**So did you keep in contact with your dad while you were away?**

Very little. But I do want to make that point that

35:00 not self praise but although I was a single man I made an allotment to my mother. You heard of that wartime hero Audie Murphy? Audie made an allotment to his brothers and sisters. I made one to Mum. I dunno what it was she thought about it, but that's what it was.

**Was there any other correspondence between you and your mother?**

Very little. And I dunno why that would be so.

35:30 I s'pose I can't give a reason and my sisters don't look too kindly on me today. I've got 4 sisters in Wynnun and they don't have anything to do with me. Now it could have been separation in those years, they didn't get to know me. It could have been my own personality but the family group is not very strong. I've got a sister

36:00 at Hammond with a family and she's very close to me. And I had a sister who died, elder sister close to me in age, Warfarin, W-A-R-F-A-R-I-N, bashed into her brain one day and she became a vegetable and at Silver and Woods Nursing Home. I used to visit her. My four sisters never went near her at all. I buried her at Hammond Cemetery.

36:30 My four sisters never went there. And yet to a solicitor, they ask the family solicitor did she leave any money to them. And the answer they got back I think was perfect. You're not getting a copy of the will but I assure you your beneficiaries are not mentioned. So that's I s'pose one effect of the service. It might be myself but I think the long distances from home I didn't think much a home honestly.

37:00 **What would you have explained your personality as being when you were first joined up?**

Well very, very immature. You'd call me a sprog. You ever heard that term? S-P-R-O-G. You know,

- Catholic school boy. Reared by the nuns or educated by the nuns. Nudgee College very quickly. I hadn't
- 37:30 seen much a life. I've seen it now at 80 and you know up to the law you know I've been in criminal law all my life. I just want to make the point as someone said, does that mean you're a criminal that's gone to law? I said no, it doesn't. But and I believe a lot in body language but in those days, terrifically raw, Peter. Might never communicated much with home.
- 38:00 **So Darwin must've had a huge effect on you?**
- What must?
- Darwin just must have had a huge effect?**
- I think so. I think so and it tends to draw me back a bit. I've been there several times and it's a different place but I now every nook and cranny and when the Ghan went there the other day I was very interested to know where its terminus was. Do you know where it is? I think it's what they call East Arm or somewhere like that. But
- 38:30 you know as I say I don't think I had strong ties with home. I think life was more concerned with the RAAF.
- Did you find a family in the services that you didn't feel like you had at home?**
- The Kennedy's of Cadzow. You know it was something like, you know Jimmy McNamara, I think he got killed in service. He was a trainee. We used to go there and put our feet up and as I say
- 39:00 it was like a home. You know. Matter of fact when I look back, Peter, I didn't have much home at home. I'm not playing down my home, but I didn't seem to be part of it.
- What about did you maintain correspondence with the Kennedy sisters?**
- No. I went back and looked for them after the war but I think they've gone. They were much older than Jimmy
- 39:30 and no. I'd like to see their relatives one day if they've got them and they would have them and thank them for their courtesy to ex-servicemen you know. But then I want to make this point that after Mount Gambier I'd have been with a Navigator/Wireless so what do you do with O'Connor? So you send him up to Richmond Aerodrome and he becomes part of 38 Squadron
- 40:00 which is DC-3s. I don't I think it must've been a formal posting because I didn't do anything on the 'drome. But the really crunch came when I was sent down as that photograph indicates to 5 OTU to Beaufighters and I knew the fat was in the fire and I linked up to McMillan. Totally different man to me. I was a bloody sprog, a boy. He was
- 40:30 a flight and a sergeant He was a flight lieutenant probably mid-30s. Not a bad bloke, but not much in common with us but he flew with me and it was pretty. Tocumwal in Victoria and it was pretty solid going and you know a low level flight over Bass Strait to Northern Tasmania,
- 41:00 and you know, over the Gippsland area amongst the mountains there, preparing for New Guinea on the Beaufighters.
- Rightio.**

## Tape 3

- 00:30 **Bill you mentioned when you were first with customs in Brisbane they had you down on Newstead Wharf?**
- That's right.
- Can you describe what that was like back then for us?**
- Fair bit over my head you know, customs can be very technical with their rates and what not and I can remember that playing football I s'pose it's not so much customs work I used to ride a bike from Wynnum to the Apollo Ferry
- 01:00 and then come across there and then ride to Newstead. But you know I'd be the lowly member of the team there. I didn't have to make cups of tea or anything but it was very complicated work. I s'pose when you look back, it's some credit to the customs that they sent me to Darwin as a young bloke hey and sent me to there at Newstead.
- What about a physical description of Newstead Wharf, what else was around there?**
- 01:30 Honestly can't recall, no.

**All right, cool. I'll just ask you a couple of other things about Darwin. Can we just, can you tell us about some of the - in a bit more detail - some of the different groups that were in Darwin?**

Oh yes.

**Like the Chinese?**

Oh yes. There were a heck of a lot of Chinese and

02:00 I made myself conversant with the history of Darwin. The Chinese had come there in it's early stages and I hear a recent compliment to them. Fella called, is it Russ Eagan or Cec Eagan, the administrator of the Northern Territory? Now he was an entertainer and he paid a compliment recently to them and I can understand them some of them their great-great grandfathers came with the gold rushes and they're excellent people. And I found them very very law abiding

02:30 and very good people and quite a number of them too.

**Was it very segregated? Did the Chinese community sort of keep to themselves?**

Really I s'pose they did, yes. Their women-folk very in the background, yes. We saw the men folk. Great gamblers. There were gambling dens and things like that. But altogether very good people. And as I say that chap that worked with me in the customs, a fine looking bloke Perez that when to Nudgee College

03:00 P-E-R-E-Z he's in the book I just showed you about Nudgee he was of a Spanish background. A Spaniard married a Filipino woman. Quite a diversity of people all types.

**Were the Chinese involved in a particular industry?**

No. Not that I can recall. Except the menfolk were great gamblers. But no I can't think of it all no.

03:30 In the customs one of my jobs was I think the White Australia Policy was rampant then and the very great interest in tabulating the Australian born Chinese and some would come go away to Hong Kong for a holiday and come back with a child in tow and things like that had to be followed up. Great emphasis on

04:00 immigration.

**Where there any Japanese civilians in Darwin at that time?**

Can't recall any. Can't definitely can't recall any although I've seen material that there was a chap signalling to the aircraft at night time in the raids. But I see, no I know no evidence of that.

**What about the natives in Darwin?**

Very complaisant,

04:30 very good. They were everywhere and they had a Bagot Compound and we had a chap on the customs staff. Make the tea and go the messages, Tommy, but very good people. But when the raids come they separated quite a distance by the authorities. But there was a great mix of races. Greeks were there. All types.

05:00 It was a melting pot.

**So the natives that were there, they generally lived in a compound?**

Yeah Bagot Compound. B-A-G-O-T.

**And that was out of town or -?**

Yeah, near the airport out of town a bit yeah.

**Did many of them have jobs in town?**

I think so, you know, like tending gardens and going for messages and things like that. But

05:30 you saw a lot of them, there were a heck of a lot of them. After all it was their country, the Larrakeyah Tribe you know it gave its name to the Larrakeyah Barracks and. But as I say Greeks and a fella called Paspali P-A-S-P-A-L-I, he was probably a millionaire Greek background. And it was altogether a different

06:00 part of Australia to the one I would imaged.

**What would the population roughly have been?**

Very very low. 3 or 4,000 and we chaps single, what do you call us? Caucasians we'd be segregated in little communities. You know we wouldn't be adopted out by families at all just make our own way in communities.

**Where**

06:30 **abouts did you live in Darwin?**



In a place called Knuckey Street K-N-U-C-K-E-Y Street.

**And who did you live with?**

I forget her name now, but there were quite a few of us in this boarding house yeah. I had no complaints at all. I didn't bombard the collector with desire for a transfer at all. Just but must emphasise that things leading up to the Pearl Harbor

07:00 things were a little bit toey you know. You could see that things were a bit bleak on the horizon and I do believe the great thing is that there were boats that evacuated the woman and kiddies from Darwin which was good.

**Prior to the bombing?**

Yeah prior to the bombing, which was good.

**Do you know where they got sent?**

You hear stories about them and the names of the vessels. Some to West Australia, some to the east coast. Conditions mightn't have been good but at least

07:30 they got out of harms way.

**What sort of rumours were going through Darwin before the bombing?**

Quite real, you know. Bombing 19th of February '42 Pearl Harbor say 8th or 9th of December beforehand. We knew we and particularly with the Japs coming down all the time we knew we were going to get it. We didn't think we were going to get aircraft carriers that had been used in Pearl Harbor and all those planes in two raids we didn't think that.

08:00 We thought in fact that there'd be a landing. And that's why the controversial great exodus of civilians down the road. I s'pose in fairness to them what could they've done if there'd been a landing? They weren't trained to use weapons. They didn't have weapons.

**After Pearl Harbor when there was obviously a threat of invasion what kind of defensive preparations were underway?**

Slit trenches and even then that was mucked up a bit.

**How so?**

08:30 I think the ARP, Air Raid Precautions, had a bit of a 'didn't see' on the same line as the administrator. He wasn't the most popular man. Former National Party cabinet minister in the Federal Government.

**And sorry what was his title?**

A-B-B-O-T-T. He was administrator of the Northern Territory.

**Is that equivalent to -?**

Governor.

**Right.**

But as I see it

09:00 now, there was too much reliance on Canberra. It was a Commonwealth responsibility, federal department, everything went there. Nowadays the Northern Territory's got its own administration. I don't think it's a state yet, but it's got a fair degree of independence.

**Who were the ARPs?**

Air Raid Precaution, civilians volunteers.

09:30 But not adequate preparation. I don't think the anti-aircraft were very effective up there.

**You mentioned that part of their precautions were slit trenches. Where were they putting the slit trenches?**

Any available place you know. Any available place. But the big thing I want to convey is Father McGrath 10:30am saw those vast number of planes coming over, and he radioed Darwin.

10:00 Nothing was done. They attacked Darwin at 10am. That sticks with me.

**How long after the raid did you hear about that?**

Read it in books. It's well documented. Then there was a second raid at 10am attacking not the town but the airport. And then as I said the desertion by a lot of RAAF people who say they got a

10:30 garbled message and they fled. Sorry day. As I say administrator, well not administrator but Governor-

General Hasluck described it as Australia's day of shame. Nothing to be proud of.

**When you were saying that they were putting slit trenches in any available area was that right in the town they were putting them?**

No not really. I jumped into a slit trench. You know Darwin at all? No, well you, Peter?

- 11:00 Barracks called Larrakeyah Barracks and down towards that way which is in the town area it's not miles out that's the slit trench I ran to because I was a soldier. If I'd a been a civilian I might a been on that dunny cart mightn't I? But I was a soldier subject to discipline.

**Can you describe a slit trench for us?**

Yeah.

- 11:30 I had to get in one later when our squadron was destroyed in Morotai and very effective. It's a hole dug in the ground rectangular fair bit a length not much breadth and you dive into it. You don't cover the thing with tin or anything, and I s'pose shrapnel could come on ya but it was very, very effective. You felt very safe in a slit trench.

**Is there anything in the trench?**

No except if

- 12:00 it been a rainy night but you'd be jumping into water, you know, so but it gave us great comfort to be there. The only comfort we had.

**Just back to before the bombing. The different groups that you were talking about, the Chinese, the Greeks, the Aborigines did they all did they intermingle in sort of day to day life was it?**

They seemed to. The biggest thing I noticed as a young man was and I was a civilian was walking up there

- 12:30 there was one very, very nasty riot one night with AIF servicemen wanting to go overseas and being disgruntled with being in Darwin. Smashing windows and doing things like that. It was very significant and there's a lot of discontent with AIF men being sent up to Darwin, hot Darwin, but you know I've got a friend called Walter Hicks I'll elaborate on him later, H-I-C-K-S, who was in the 2/21st I think it was in
- 13:00 Darwin and later went to Ambon. You know they might have been yelling out to get out of Darwin, but goodness me they only walked into imprisonment. My idea would be all those outlying strips troops should've been brought in to Darwin to protect my country. It was defenceless and why the Japs didn't land there, I don't know. It was wide open.

**Can you give us a**

- 13:30 **bit of a description of Darwin at that time where things were?**

Yeah know it pretty well. It's changed terrifically today. There were the wharves there and there was a ship I think the Neptuna N-E-P-T-U-N-A, who was blasted at the wharf by the Japs and then up the hill there was the administrators building and it was hit by must have been very good bombing part of it, was hit by the Japanese.

- 14:00 Then the elevated town there and there was a very flash hotel called the Hotel Darwin and a lot a humpies. Some of the unemployed lived in what the place called I think called Doctors Gully. No I've got it wrong. But they lived in a gully because Doctors Gully was an insert in the ground down towards Larrakeyah

- 14:30 Barracks, where definite insert, where later Catalinas in the better part of the war were refuelled. But all in all it was really an area and even the railway line. The old railway line came straight right into Darwin and there was a little I call it a suburb called Parap P-A-R-A-P, that was just outside the place and an airstrip and that was the Northern Territory. And down the road

- 15:00 70-mile was Adelaide River and a little bit further Katherine and that's the Northern Territory.

**I've heard that there were a lot of gambling dens and opium dens?**

Yep.

**Can you tell us about those?**

Yeah. I got no personal knowledge of the opium but you know that was widely known and gambling was rife. I s'pose to relieve boredom. I think the only thing I

- 15:30 interested me was the Star Theatre. It was a bit of a ramshackle old place and it was when you went in there it had the 'coloureds at the front', segregated, and then the open air at the ceiling you know and the knobs would be right at the back you know elevated. So that was my life and you know the Star Theatre and that was very close to the Victoria Hotel and the rioting that took

16:00 place. It was a very vibrant town.

**The gambling and the opium, was that illegal activity?**

Yeah and it would be segregated by the with the Chinese population in Cavenagh Street. C-A-V-E-N-A-G-H, and I s'pose tolerated. But there'd be white population of public servants

16:30 they had a good police force and of course a hell of a lot of ex-servicemen. Some sent up there to Darwin, force to protect Darwin. Been there several times, but in the main AIF people who were to go overseas but were biding their time and hating the place. But I s'pose they finished up in Singapore in jail or in Ambon.

**17:00 The gambling dens and the opium smoking dens did they tend to be in one area?**

Oh yeah. Yeah, in Cavenagh Street yeah. And I s'pose you can relate it to the poor old Chinese. You know they were quite a number of them there and their grandfathers had come out half a century before, they were well spoken. A lot of betting. Betting on horses

17:30 and altogether a different part of Australia. I'm pleased to have experienced it.

**Were there a lot of brothels?**

Not to my knowledge. I'd heard that there were some, but not to my knowledge. I heard more or less that the native women were just as likely to knock on the doors of houses and - That's what I'd heard you know. But I don't want to be critical of them, but that's what I heard. Yeah.

**18:00 Just back to your day to day role in customs in Darwin you mentioned before that part of your job was to go out and check fuel consumption?**

Yeah.

**Why was that?**

Well I s'pose there might've been a rebate paid by paid to Shell. It might a been related to Customs, cause were bit launches go out there and the big flying boats'd be at anchor there and you'd check the readings on the pumps on the boats.

18:30 I knew the chaps very well. It must have been a large part of my duties, because I got a good physical memory of them now. I don't know their names, but do remember them after all these years.

**How did you actually check the fuel consumption?**

Gauges on the boat on the launch. There'd be overtime employed. I s'pose I can't say with certainty but I would be in a monetary sense very well off. I'd

19:00 be sending money to my mother, not by allotment I wasn't a serviceman but sending it to her cause I knew she had the young girls coming along you know. So that was life. A good memory.

**When you were talking before about part of customs was checking immigrations, did there seem to be a lot of illegal immigrants coming through?**

I dunno if there whether a lot but the sensitivity. You know the

19:30 Chinese were looked upon and there was a record kept in customs, not secret but who they were and you know who was born in the country and what not and noting when they went to Hong Kong, you know. And it was a real thing you know, it's no enmity at all but I s'pose some of the customs officers were like policemen, you

20:00 know, they were regarded in that way you know. Taking an interest in the population.

**Were there a lot of immigrants other than Chinese coming through?**

Well I'd say so, yeah. I'd say so all types. You know all types and the book seemed to relate that to it. But I particularly remember the Greeks they were up there you know and I can't think of any other nationalities but it was a polyglot, it was a

20:30 whole community. As I say like nothing I'd seen on earth before. Far removed from Wynnum.

**Was there anything in particular that stood out for you about the Greeks?**

Just that they seemed to be good Australians. They talked the language. Name that I can call on Kafcaloudes K-A-F-C-A-L-O-U-D-E-S. Well regarded. As I say Paspali P-A-S-P-A-L-I the - what did I say he was?

21:00 Probably Greek, you know, owned a big casino or big area. A great lot of gambling taking place up there you know.

**Who were the main passengers coming in on the flying boats?**

All sorts. All sorts. When I got sent back to Darwin in the war and I'll come to that later I thought that was a bit raw.

- 21:30 But I got sent back there then in 1947 on one of the flying boats going out there was all sorts of people but a fella that I played football with at South's Rugby League called Teddy Verrenkamp. Do you know that name? V-E-R-R-E-N-K-A-M-P, all sorts. I think it was the day of the flying boats up there. There seemed to be a lot lighting on the water.

**What can you tell us about your journey on the Puffing**

- 22:00 **Billy?**

Pretty ordinary thing, you know, just had to get down south and that north south road was pot holed and early days and a lot a work had to go into it and the old Puffing Billy was funny old thing but I just got on it. I dunno how we were fed but down through Katherine and you know all those places and

- 22:30 I thought we'd finish Birdam but a place called Larrimah and taken off there and camped and I think that's where I met this chap who had served with me in Larrakeyah Barracks and he said "Bill, I'll put your name on the top a the list," and he did which was good. And I found myself on the back of a truck with others going down that crook old road but it would've been very bad if I'd gone down earlier.

**Were there civilian passengers on the Puffing Billy when you -?**

- 23:00 No, no, definitely not. I don't think. That'd been after the raid and I'm pretty sure there wouldn't have been any civilians in the Northern Territory. I think the blacks would have been taken out of the town area and civilians had all gone and there was a, I think there was a military governor or military commandant.

**You briefly touched on before that there was mayhem after the raid that there was looting going on ?**

Yeah shocking. It's in the books.

- 23:30 And I saw part of it and I lost something too. I lost my own gear. See I was a soldier, D169 militia, taken from the community to serve but my gear wasn't protected. There was looting and as I understand it from the books I never saw it, our own servicemen engaged in looting too.

**What did you see of the looting?**

Nothing at all, except I felt it with the loss of my gear.

- 24:00 But I did see the fleeing from the town which I thought was pretty poor because I thought there'd be a landing. But then again I've got to look in retrospect and think what did the poor devils have to offer? But I do make the point the Australian Government did make a good thing in that they provided ships to take the civilian population away before the raid.

**Did you ever get you mentioned that you weren't down on the wharf at the time, did you**

- 24:30 **ever get to speak to any of the blokes in customs that would've been down there?**

No. No, we all disappeared. I dunno what happened to us but I was a soldier subject to military discipline. And I think George Carr went to Broome and he might have been at Broome. There was a big raid at Broome did you ever know that? Yeah, flying boats were machine gunned on the water and Perez as I said the good looking Spaniard he went somewhere and I dunno

- 25:00 whether there was any need for the customs there. I was a soldier and I went down with my Unit down to the 20-mile.

**You mentioned before that in Brisbane you had some interaction with a Chinaman that later became the Mayor of Darwin?**

Yeah not in Brisbane in Darwin. Yeah as a young bloke in Darwin. I think his name was Harry Chan C-H-A-N fine type of bloke and I believe

- 25:30 in body language and I reckon I could see some good work in him and he used to come to the counter. He's a very well known bloke in Darwin now. He's dead, of course, Harry Chan, Mayor of Darwin.

**Was he Mayor when you were there?**

No. Definitely might a been a customs clerk. Yeah bring his stuff in. You got a lot a questions there?

**I do. The**

- 26:00 **outlying islands like Bathurst and the other one that you mentioned was there much interaction with them?**

No, they were occupied by the Tiwi people T-I-W-I and very well regarded people you know I dunno if I had any relation to Australian natives but there were Catholic missions there and I know I'm being repetitive but Father McGrath was there that day and you know he saw the planes coming over and that

mongrel that took the

26:30 message from him nothing was ever done. Been a wondering thing if at 9:30 the air raid alarms had sounded wouldn't it? People that would have been killed at the post office, the balls. The ships would have dispersed in the harbour. Nothing was done. They were all sitting ducks at 10-o'clock.

**Do you know if there were any sirens sounded before the second raid?**

I think so. Cause they're all awake up.

**Can you actually describe the Larrakeyah Barracks for us?**

27:00 Yeah beautiful big place. Yeah, not a humpy. Well constructed and the headquarters of the Northern Territory district, yeah. I hesitate whether they were brick, but they were very extensive.

**What were your thoughts when you actually got told that you were leaving Darwin that you had to go south?**

Quite happy, you know. People

27:30 around me servicemen I was in a unit I belonged to a show and I did what I was told.

**Was there ever a thought that you wanted to stay on in Darwin?**

Never. Never we got such a posting, that, and it was so vulnerable. It's the end of a peninsula and I thought the best place was where the army were going, 20-mile down the road at the base of the peninsula.

28:00 **Did you ever have thoughts straight away after the bombing of Darwin whether other places in Australia might come under similar fire?**

Yeah, I did, I thought, you know, poor old Australia. You know the Japanese had made wonderful advances tremendous advances right down in on the 19th of February '42 just after Pearl Harbor in early December they were at the door steps of Australia

28:30 and I could see then you know even a young man that we had army groups in Timor, army groups in Ambon, army groups in Rabaul that later all suffered. I myself thought that they should've all come back to Mother Australia, to Darwin to defend her Australia. They didn't. They were captured.

**Bill, can we talk some more about your wireless and**

29:00 **Morse code training?**

Yeah.

**What actually happened in your wireless training?**

Well it's hard to remember but seemed to be competent enough. You know, I had to master the Morse code and were given sets to work on and to repair. Not complicated. But enough to operate a set in an aircraft.

**What did the sets look like?**

29:30 They were mobile as shown. They weren't set in an aircraft at all but they you know seemed to be. I had no knowledge of radio, nor have I now. I just got one out there that's click on but I just felt that you know I certainly learnt Morse code at a good speed and I think I could've repaired a not complicated - repaired something on the radio.

30:00 I did that.

**I don't know what the radios look like, can you describe one for me?**

You know just an oblong thing, you know the one's we were shown. But I want to make the emphasis that the most I got out of the air force was at the navigation school at Mount Gambier. That's where I was taught navigation and up in the aircraft

30:30 and have to navigate round. As I told Peter, you know, a bit worrying at night time the three points A B C without lights. So you had to be spot on.

**How do you navigate?**

Well had to forget what it was. Direct navigation you know with in the cabin of the aircraft.

31:00 I'd heard that stories that for instance that one plane was lost one night and it circled what it though would be a town. Didn't know the name. Happened to be Casterton C-A-S-T-E-R-T-O-N and the town spelt its name out in Morse code with the lights. I didn't want that to ever happen. But you know that's what I - and then we had flights to Tasmania and what not and

31:30 and had to do the navigation and you know as I say after those two schools I was admitted as a

navigator wireless. But I repeat, no gunnery exercises. And there was a gunnery school at Evans Head and they shot at drogues. You know what a drogue is? D-R-O-G-U-E. Well you go up in an aircraft and there's a kite or something tied behind an aircraft that's in front of you and you have to shoot at it. I never operated a

32:00 a gun and here I was in Noemfoor Island told that's your aircraft that's your gunnery. Bit much.

**When you're navigating what equipment are you using?**

The map and the ruler and pen and pencil and you get a drift over a white cap to tell ya how the aircraft

32:30 is drifting, you know. But even then on the Bostons when I was a. That was a crook thing. On the Bostons I was, there was no interconnection with the pilot. In the Beaufighter you could if he was hit, you could walk along a passageway, but on the Boston you couldn't and you had a turret there. I seemed to be occupied. By gee I was occupied. I was looking at the sky

33:00 watching that. I was throwing leaflets over the Vogelkop. I was taking weather reports you know. Listening to the radio you know I seemed to be occupied. But the very important thing the gunnery what if I'd been jumped by a Zero? I thought that was pretty poor.

**When you were learning to navigate how challenging is it to do all that in a moving aircraft?**

Pretty much. Pretty

33:30 much indeed. But gee night time you know that's a bit much. At least I s'pose you can look out. I think in the war years the railway station names were taken down, so no good lookin' down to the railway station but at night time see if I was aiming for that there and I finished up there and turned and I finished up there instead of there, I'm lost.

34:00 So, you know.

**You mentioned earlier a crew that overshot where they were going and crashed?**

Yeah and the town spelt its name out.

**Were there many crashes in training?**

Could have been, I was never told. Could have been. Yeah could have been indeed and it's a bit worrying.

**How did you get put together with the**

34:30 **crew?**

Strange, it was an Operational Training Unit at Camooweal at. Not Camooweal. What's that town on the Murray? Goodness me. It was 5 OTU before we went to New Guinea and you just as it were I suppose you

35:00 just mixed navigators and pilots and you selected each other. And I had a high class pilot. He saved my life. He, Jim McMillan, he later became he what they called married well. He married Chippendall's daughter. He was Knight of the Crown and he become a Flight Commander in Qantas and I didn't mind him at all but I wasn't too fussed about him when he dropped those bombs

35:30 on Ambon. And I felt it was a class distinction in the RAAF and some people believe me now 22 Squadron. No we'll take 30 Squadron Beaufighters. There was what they call an air crew mess where air crew pilots navigators sat and eat together and I believe their bunked together in their tents

36:00 and what not air crew and that. They got to know each other. In 22 Squadron it was more class, there was no air crew mess. We chaps just ate with the other sergeants. We chaps just bunked in the tents with other sergeants. In short I would've only seen my flight lieutenant at briefings before take off. I barely knew the man. Yet he wasn't a bad man. He got to

36:30 know my - I think he might a got into a bit a trouble down here. Excellent pilot and he followed me to the squadron, I got there first and he called on my sisters and my mother at Wynnum. A Victorian, so you know he - not a bad bloke really. But wasn't too fussed about him on that 4th of October '44 when he dropped those bombs near the POW camp and interesting enough when

37:00 I wrote down there to the after I retired because of the Crown Prosecutor, you know, putting people in for pinching a loaf of bread and what not I thought this is if we'd of killed a lot of POWs and so I wrote down on me retirement as I was telling you the letter was picked up by Walter Hicks, H-I-C-K-S, a very intelligent bloke. An Australian who worked in the been here the other day worked in the Japanese mess and he was in the cookhouse and

37:30 saw the bombs come down and saw me the frightened face in the turret as he said. And I said to him, "Walter where did the bombs go?" And he said, "skipped over into a vegetable garden." But I wasn't too fussed about Jimmy on that one. As I say I was only a young bloke but I dunno why he did it and motor shot out broad daylight and Walter Hicks tells me in the letter

- 38:00 there's some high powered Japanese fighters, Kawasakis had just landed the day before and taken off for New Guinea. We'd have been easy meat for them. But he saved my life but he saved his own. 500-mile across that Ceram Sea around Ceram over there around the Turtleneck we'd a never got home. But he landed at Sansapor on a metal strip that the Yanks had put down months beforehand.
- 38:30 **So the day that you got put in the mess to sort out who was gonna be in what air crew, how did that actually what actually happened?**
- Just I dunno I s'pose the pilots were. I dunno I can't get in their mind. I s'pose they'd be blasé about it. What would they say? They're the blokes that control the flying, aren't they? What help is the navigator is the gunner? Navigator? He's there to shoot, but
- 39:00 he's not to provide company particularly if he's not the same rank.
- So they just put all the blokes in a room though and?**
- No. Just mingle. You know, mingle around and you know how they have these trips across to Tasmania fast trips and just how are you going to link up you know and they just decide. Some blokes gravitate towards each other.
- Do you remember Jimmy picking you out or you picking him out?**
- No no. Yeah
- 39:30 but Jimmy was a very good pilot and people after the war say he was too, and I knew he was and you know that was not a bad effort. One engine an engine on one engine. Aircraft on one engine 500-mile was a good effort.
- Do you think did you ever hear stories of blokes getting partnered with a pilot that they didn't get along with?**
- Yep. Yep I've heard stories that one bloke said to his pilot, "I don't want to
- 40:00 go on a flight. I don't want to go airborne." And the pilot said, "Well, what the hell. Why didn't you say this when you're down south?" He said, "I just don't want to do it." Well I s'pose in the old days that would have been a shooting but he just got sent down south, you know. Yeah they're chaps that weren't up to it. Nothing said about them. In England they were classified LMF. Have you heard that term? Lack of moral fibre,
- 40:30 and they were treated like scum. Dirty jobs around the kitchen and what not. I feel sorry for them. Although you think they would've said something early in the piece wouldn't you? But I never, I dunno what happened. I never had poor sleep at all or anything like that. Nothing like that and when I finished in 22 Squadron the CO said to me, "You're finished," and I thought I'd be going home. He said, "No take your gear down to
- 41:00 34 Squadron. Looked at him. Took it down. Flew Douglasses between the Philippines and Australia and I was happy, happy all along the line. We flew from the Philippines across New Guinea and I was surprised to see that in the middle of New Guinea, up in the Dutch part, there was snow capped peaks. Does that surprise ya? In New Guinea. I think up there
- 41:30 and saw it and landed at Townsville and you know I had no regrets and because I'd served in the Philippines as very few people have. I got that Liberation Medal I showed you. And then I was discharged on the 14th of September '45. So all in all I was I can't think I was unhappy at all.
- We'll just stop you there. We're about to run out.**

## Tape 4

- 00:30 **Bill, when you originally signed up for the RAAF, did the army blokes around you have anything to say about it?**
- Yeah, my friends thought I was mad. They wondered why I was doing it and I don't say condescendingly but they were less educated than me and probably that's why I was selected because I had a senior pass. But they just wondered why I was doing it.
- Did any of the other blokes from the army go across with you?**
- No.
- 01:00 I don't know, they would've got some recruits but I don't know from where. No.
- Did you find much of a difference between the RAAF and army?**
- Yeah I did really. I liked the army very much and as I mentioned before I feel maybe contradicted that there was a class system in the air force. For instance we did a course, I told you, at Ballarat and Mount

Gambier

01:30 suppose there were 30. Five might've been commissioned off course. Become pilot officers off course. The rest become sergeants. I think commissions should be given after action. I think it was a relic of a class system.

**Do you know how they chose who was going to be navigators and who was going to be pilots?**

No I'd like to know that, you know, someone the writer of that book on

02:00 Nudgee made the point that we seemed to have a terrific lot of navigators amongst our old boys. I like to think that rightly or wrongly that's maybe because of our educational qualifications. Maybe they looked to us for there. You know that's what I think.

**Was there an opportunity at all that you could put you hand up and say you wanted to do one or the other?**

No. The board I remember it well today, just talking to us you know,

02:30 even remember the name of the Wing Commander Kempson K-E-M-P-S-O-N think he's an old poultry farmer from Wynnum. You know, he just nominated me you know. But there are a lot of navigators in the old boys.

**So once you finished your training, how did you come to be assigned to 22 Squadron?**

Yeah, I s'pose well being expendable I s'pose you know and

03:00 I can't understand why I was sent up to New Guinea without doing a gunnery course. And as soon as we went to 5 OTU Tocumwal is the name T-O-C-U-M-W-A-L on the Murray River, I knew things were serious because - operational training unit - and that's where the Beaufighters were and that's where we met our pilots and that's where we did the training for OTU and we knew

03:30 that meant next trip was overseas.

**So when you were assigned to 22 Squadron, was it already in operation or -?**

Yeah, a famous squadron. Plenty of sausage about it. Prior to World War 11 it was a squadron. It was a squadron long after the war. Citizen Air Force. Famous.

**Was that hard to slot in with a squadron that was already in operation?**

04:00 Not really, but I knew things were fair dinkum you know that we'd be going to New Guinea. We wouldn't be going to Richmond or Laverton or anything like that.

**How were the new boys treated by the rest of the squadron?**

All right. All right, you know. Didn't have much to do with the officers you know. There was no enmity at all about it but as I say as the thing from 30 Squadron, we dined separately, we slept separately.

04:30 As I say I think we met our skippers just on briefing. Not a really way to get together, is it?

**When you say your skipper, do you mean the pilot or?**

Yeah, McMillan.

**So once you and he were assigned to each other, what happened then?**

Well I think he might a played up a bit, not in a serious fashion, but he was kept down here for a while and I found myself going to 22 Squadron by myself and my log book shows

05:00 that I did some missions with pilots already in 22 and they weren't necessarily officers. There was for instance a WO Dobson, Warrant Officer, and then McMillan came up and we got together and we were in a Boston Squadron. B-O-S-T-O-N Number 22, the only Boston Squadron in the RAAF in the South West Pacific.

05:30 **So where was the squadron first sent outside of Australia?**

Well before my time Port Moresby, Kiriwina, Noemfoor. Before they went up there they were stationed I think at Richmond, yeah, and old squadron.

**And where was your first operation with them?**

Noemfoor Island N-O-E-M-F-F-O-R-F-F. No, N-O-E-M-F-O-O-R

06:00 and if you can picture the map of New Guinea have you got a memory of it. There's a big at the end there's a turtleneck as I call it called the Vogelkop V-O-G-E-L-K-O-P, and there's a big bay called Geelvink G-E-E-L-V-I-N-K and Noemfoor Island is flush in the middle N-O-E-M-F-O-O-R.

**And how long were you at Noemfoor for?**



6 to 8 months and did the operations

06:30 westwards to the Dutch East and Dutch East Indies and can I touch upon Ambon?

**We might save it, we'll just we'll get through a bit more of this other stuff first. So when you first landed at Noemfoor what were your impressions of the base?**

Shocker. You know, sun scorched. Close to the equator. Tents. Gravel strips you know, and no great beauty about the place.

07:00 And you know we were there not long after the Yanks had captured it and not too fussed about it, you know. But I can't be critical it was wartime.

**And how many squadrons were based there?**

Quite a few. I can't picture them now you know but the airstrips were always full you know and the Japs had been recently attacked by the Americans there and they were in the jungle

07:30 some of them probably starving, you know, and my tent was near the edge of the jungle and someone had said the Japs had come into the cookhouse at night time and taken food and I can't say I was very fussed about sleeping near the jungle you know and but we did silly things. We used to go for a walk on our day off. We had a day off and walk in the jungle but the main thing was the operations.

**Do you remember the first operation you were sent on?**

08:00 Yeah. Pretty simple thing. WO Dobson I think in the log book before McMillan got there and across to the islands I think Ceram Sea. Our main thing there the battle lines had gone right up in the Pacific. The Japanese were on the run. This was late '44 and our chief work was what they called low level

08:30 intercepting barges. Japanese use barge traffic and were very good at camouflage and we'd have to shoot along but the Japs were good gunners. Who wouldn't be with an aircraft coming over at tree top height? But we lost men. People were dying. We were a bit disgruntled with the airlines in front being up well up towards the Philippines and further you know. We thought what are we doing here? There were no

09:00 airstrips. Well there were airstrips but I saw no aircraft Japanese aircraft and from time to time plenty of ack-ack anti-aircraft fire but I would think that they were all bypassed. And that's the great story of Australia why in '44 and '45 were we in Bougainville, Wewak and in the operations in Borneo, when the battle lines were up at Okinawa and

09:30 what's the other word? Okinawa. Okinawa's one word but almost near the Japanese mainland. But I repeat, chaps were dying.

**Can you give me a description of a Boston?**

Yeah. Could I hold up to the light. Could I just excuse myself?

**Yeah.**

(interruption). You ask about the Boston. This is the Boston,

10:00 my Boston drawn by Walter Hicks who was the prisoner of war who saw it over Ambon from his prison camp on the 4th of October '44. Beautiful aircraft, Boston. Twin engined with you can see the turret at the back. That's where I'd be positioned. But the I thought the disadvantage was there was no

10:30 intercommunication between physically between gunner and navigator as there was in the Boston - Beaufighter. If the pilot had got a flesh wound or something in the Beaufighter, you could crawl up to assist him and I has been done. But not in the Boston. So that is it. (interruption).

11:00 Now you ask about the Boston. Walter Hicks, the prisoner of war who saw my aircraft over the prison camp at Ambon on the 4th of October 1944 has drawn me a copy of the aircraft which I have in my possession and framed. It was a beautiful aircraft, well regarded by crew and the most significant thing to my mind, twin engined. It had the

11:30 swivelling turret at the back and the only disadvantage I saw of it was that there was no intercommunication tunnel between gunner and pilot as there would have been in the Beaufighter.

**Just because I've obviously never seen one in person, how do you actually get into it?**

Underneath there's a panel. Open the panel and climb

12:00 up into it. The pilot as it were gets assisted up into the cockpit. Different entries for each.

**Can you walk me through a day when you're going out on a sortie?**

Yeah. Pretty well, pretty well. We'd assemble at the briefing room and I have a photo. Not the briefing room briefing and I have a photo of it and pilots and navigators would be down and we'd

12:30 shown the ack-ack pits to expect and incidentally sometimes the briefing would be the night before, if it was an early take off, and you would think really that I wouldn't get much sleep at night when shown the ack-ack pits of the Japanese, but frankly we'd go to the local outdoor theatre. Didn't seem to worry about it. Then down to the strip in jeeps for the take off and aircraft warmed up took off

13:00 and in the main, a pretty long journey you know, but on strafing. Tree top height. Never any high elevation.

**Who would be at the briefing?**

Pilots and navigators and probably the flight leader and the engineering officer and the wireless operator, wireless officer.

**Can you explain those roles to me the flight leader and - ?**

Oh yeah, the flight leader would be pointing out

13:30 the track and the positions of interest there and aerial photographs and the two ground crew officers, the signals officer and the engineering officer would be present and listening. And I suppose if they had any contribution to make they'd make it.

**What would be a typical operation that you'd get briefed on?**

Every operation.

14:00 Shown points of interest suggested escape routes in northern New Guinea and particularly ack-ack positions known enemy positions. But of course if you go to Ambon which you know pretty solid effort crossing New Guinea across the Ceram Sea C-E-R-A-M to Ambon which would be I call it the Rabaul R-A-B-A-U-L of the Dutch East Indies. Bristling with guns.

**14:30 When you're getting a briefing how do they describe to you what your mission is?**

Very bluntly. You know they say take off time so and so. You know with Ambon. Attack Ambon. Take this route. Enter it by this way. You know your target will be crossing Ambon Harbour to

15:00 Laha L-A-H-A or such and such a way. Giving you plenty of detail and having aerial photographs that had been taken some time before. I don't think we were ever told. I had great faith in what they call the Catalina flying boat. It's done great work in the Pacific. Very slow moving old thing, but it didn't hesitate to land beside a stricken plane and pick up the crew. And, you know, I had great faith that

15:30 if that was needed. And of course there were suggestions that there were undercover people in the jungles there, that where they were but by no means mark your maps about those positions. That'd be putting the lives of the people in jeopardy. You understand what I mean? Yeah.

**When you would go out on an operation, how many planes would go out on the one?**

On the day we went to Ambon,

16:00 eight. But if it was a sweep of the New Guinea coastline for barges and islands just the two of us and chaps tell me that on one occasion they were sweeping the lead aircraft just blew up. Japanese gunners had got it. Nothing could be done. See and I make the point no great deal for them because an aircraft at tree top height, you know.

**What sort of formation would you fly in?**

16:30 V, but if there were 2 together one above and one below.

**And how was that decided who flew where in the formation?**

At the briefing.

**And was that always the same or did it rotate?**

Could vary. Could one follow the other. Just a bit of variation. But that's I say you didn't expect to see fighters Zeros in the sky. It was barge traffic. Those Japanese had been bypassed. They were

17:00 starving or we suspected so. But my word, their ground fire was heavy.

**Did it make a difference to you where in the formation you flew?**

No. No definitely not. But certainly not no great height. Tree top height.

**Can you describe what's inside the turret?**

Yeah, you had to clamber up into it and

17:30 it had, you know, space was very limited and you had to worm your way round the guns and set your guns. Be terrible if you shot down one of your own aircraft, wouldn't it? That always worried me you know. Although I'd never done a gunnery course I thought well I won't be accused of shooting. I s'pose

that could happen. I've never heard of it happen but you imagine eight aircraft in formation if they all start firing together. But I've never heard of it happening, you know.

- 18:00 But then sometimes you'd get out a the turret on the way home and if you're over Papua New Guinea you'd kick out leaflets propaganda leaflets down below. I'd be writing weather reports and keeping the eye open for aircraft. I seemed to be occupied.

**So can you just sort of be a camera for me inside the turret so from where you're sitting what's in front of you and around you?**

Just two big guns. That's all

- 18:30 I saw. You could swivel them and I think I'm speaking after many years you could never blow your tail off which was good. I believe that they were so synchronised that that would never happen.

**How did the guns actually move?**

Pressure.

**You said you'd never done a gunnery course, how did you figure out what to do?**

Pretty simple. Ask you know.

- 19:00 Ask the fitters. I thought it was a weak effort myself, you know. Thought I know if we'd been jumped by a Zero Japanese fighter I'd have handled myself all right I'd have fired at him. But I would have thought in gunnery school, you would've learnt and particularly with drogues in the sky in gunnery school you'd of learnt how to handle the guns.

**When was the first time then that you fired the guns?**

When we were low level attacking. You know when the

- 19:30 skippper'd turn, you'd press them down you know depress them.

**How did they fire, like a button that you pressed?**

A button, yeah, yeah. But they were a later model of the Boston and I think they were pretty effective, you know.

**What sort of gun was it?**

I don't know, honestly, now. I honestly don't know. But don't forget the pilot

- 20:00 had guns operating from in front of his aircraft also.

**What about ammunition?**

Yeah, it was belted up ready. The fitters had done that. But I found the Beaufighter I reach that when we transferred to Beaufighters they were known as 'Whispering Death'. Have you ever heard that term? They were low level but very silent and it's often I've come across Japanese in the open

- 20:30 or barges you know. Known by the Japs as Whispering Death and that was great comfort because the Boston would have made a fair bit of noise.

**So when you were out on a sortie you never had to reload the ammunition?**

No. Pretty simple.

**On the day of an operation, did you have a particular routine that you followed in the morning or at night or if it was directly before you?**

- 21:00 No, I as I say I slept all right. Probably went to the open air picture show by the Yanks and had a sleep. I dunno I think I woke myself up. Down to the cookhouse for some sort of a breakfast. Parachute pistol brought down. I see some mongrel apparently when we landed one day, I see in the log book I was fined \$5 for the forfeiture of the

- 21:30 parachute. When we'd landed someone had pinched the parachute out while I was doing something. So there were thieves in those days.

**Did you have any superstitions?**

Never. Never thought about death. Never really concerned. It was like a big adventure.

**Did you know if any of the other blokes in your squadron had superstitions?**

No I just worried I'd be. You know I mentioned about the fella that refused to fly and an officer in another squadron, I

- 22:00 believe a navigator, who was commissioned, of course he was sent back home. I suppose Adolf Hitler would've shot them you know. Pretty serious thing you know because it was defence of our country.

**How tense were those drives out to the airstrip in the jeep?**

Pretty fair. You know we didn't say much at all. The warm up was very significant. You could see,

22:30 particularly on Ambon, 8 Bostons warming up, and it was really like a panorama, you know the engines were turning over and I'd have my head stuck out over the an area where you could look down and look out and our CO had been upset by the fact that we were wearing American baseball caps. But I dunno I thought they were the best thing to wear

23:00 because I'd hesitate to wear one a those forage caps. You know what I mean by a forage cap? A blue cap you might have seen the photograph of me in that photograph there. I think they were the - I thought - put it this way, I thought the American baseball cap was ideal.

**Why?**

Close fitting. Not likely to fly off, you know, you stuck your head out as I did before take off. It was a

23:30 majestic sight there warming up at the end of the strip. You might be third or fourth in line to see the others take off, then you take off then form up in the sky in a group and off.

**So when you get to the airstrip, you get out of the jeep, what happens then?**

Open up underneath, pretty easily done. Toss your parachute in. Your revolver. Incidentally

24:00 I can't ever recall wearing a parachute, probably that's why it was pinched. Because what's the use of wearing a parachute if you're tree top height? So then get assemble. Well I say assemble. Get into your turret. Have a look around. Swivel your guns. Turn them around. And as I say I pretty well occupied. I'd propaganda leaflets and weather reports and radio to monitor and look at the sky.

24:30 I seemed to be occupied.

**What did you wear?**

Well we were told to wear to bump up our rank. Someone told us one day that if you were captured it'd be very good if you had a few bars on your shoulder. So I was a lowly as a sergeant, but I left the sergeant's shirt, used to put up pilot officer. I dunno whether that'd have an effect on

25:00 the Japs if we're taken prisoner, but I'd a told 'em a few lies. I dunno whether it'd save my head. I'd have told them I had very important news to give them about a big bomb. I knew nothing about the atom bomb and I might have got a ride to Tokyo.

**So what was the extra thing that you put on your uniform?**

Well if you were a commissioned officer, you have a bar and I put that on.

**Where did you get that from?**

Borrowed it, you know. It's a wonder I didn't put two and a half

25:30 on, squadron leader. But you had to I'm told the Japs had, you wouldn't call it a respect for officers but I've sets in my reading that they didn't require Australian prisoners of war officers to work. Does that surprise you? Yeah well that's what it's so, and yeah I'd a spun them a yarn. Whether it save my life, I don't know, but it didn't concern me much.

**So wearing the bar, was that frowned upon at all or?**

26:00 No I dunno whether the old CO knew about it. Didn't talk to him about it. I whacked it on, you know.

**And what was the rest of your uniform?**

Just the shorts and you know, we thought we'd come down in the jungle. We had flying boots on, had a knife stuck in the flying boot.

**What's a flying boot?**

Comes up to about here. Sheepskin inside, and

26:30 pretty fundamental stuff you know.

**And so what equipment would you have with you?**

Nothing like the UK, you know. Certainly not overalls or anything like that. Just shirt, shorts flying boot with a knife stuck in and revolver round here in case we were brought down.

**And the parachute before it was stolen generally did that**

Toss there.

27:00 **You kept that with you?**

Yeah, I suppose if the skipper had said on the way back from Ambon that day, "Bill, I've got to get up to 4,000 feet to go through the mountains of Ceram," I s'pose I'd a put it on in case he said the motor's faltering. You'd better jump. There again I did no parachute training.

**Who packed the parachute for you?**

There'd be a staff at the squadron who'd do that. But they're the two things I think

27:30 of you know when I you know no gunnery training and no parachute training. We're expendable.

**What interaction did you have with ground crew?**

Pretty good. Didn't have much to say to them but they were pretty good. I had a couple a good mates of my own rank amongst the navigators. Still communicate with them today. The young pilot

28:00 Officer called Keith Collett, a pilot he was a good mate you know but things were very tense up in the islands in those days. It's a little known fact, although it's publicised, that some high ranking fighter pilots carried out a mutiny, Australians. They call it a mutiny. They were to going to hand in their commissions because it was thought that they said

28:30 that it was a backwater and they should be doing more favourable work. If anything that was the big thing. It was a backwater. It was a slight you know although you could get killed, but I don't think we were altering the course of the war. The Yanks were doing that up in the Philippines and places like that. Yet Australians were dying at Tarakan and Weipa and Bougainville, well behind the lines.

29:00 The Japs could have been left there to starve.

**So when you were in the Boston, it was just the pilot and yourself in the aircraft who else worked on the...?**

No, I tell ya there was a very nice bloke. We used to have an army liaison officer. He was a soldier. He wore greens. Green uniform and he may have made out reports to army, you know, but I

29:30 remember one day we had a pretty soft mission tossing out leaflets over the Vogelkop Peninsula and I remember that he was in the Boston with me that day helping to toss out. Whatever good that would've done. But the leaflets were tossed out.

**So he only flew with you ?**

Once.

**Right.**

He's still alive, survived the war.

**Where would he be in the aircraft where you were flying?**

Sitting down in the area where I got in. Certainly not up in the turret.

30:00 **So what kind of what were the jobs of the various air crew, like ground crew?**

There were Fitters 2A that looked after airframes. Fitters 2E that looked after engines. Clock repairers, men like that, you know. Competent blokes. There'd be intelligence officers that would debrief you when you came back. Ground crew,

30:30 you know. Quite a few ground staff.

**I was gonna ask you another question about that.**

About Ambon?

**Yep. We'll get to that in a second. Can you describe the first time when you were actually overseas, your first take off from Noemfoor?**

Yeah, that wasn't so

31:00 eventful. As I say, my pilot McMillan hadn't reached the island, and I was assigned I think with WO Warrant Officer Dobson on a mission. Was a few days after I arrived there and you know I'd done plenty a takeoffs and landings at OTU Operational Training Unit at Tocumwal, so it was no big deal.

**How often would you be flying on sorties?**

31:30 Twice a week.

**And how long were they generally?**

I keep coming back to Ambon but normally if you look at Geelvink Bay on the map it's pretty close to Japanese bases in what is now West Irian, Dutch New Guinea and that's what we'd be poking around. Sorong. Manokwari. Nabire.

32:00 Places like that.

**When you were actually flying, how did you communicate to the pilot?**

Intercommunication, but you know I make the point that in the Beaufighters a Pilot Officer Wilson has received I think it might be a decoration or a commendation for he was a navigator for when his pilot, WO Hart

32:30 was hit by something he went up and helped steer the Beaufighter. I could never do that as I understand it in the Boston.

**In the Boston could you move around the plane though?**

No. No it was cut off from the front. Blocked off.

**What about when you were coming back from a sortie what was the procedure?**

Pretty good. Eyes have to be watched

33:00 out very carefully. Although we never saw any Zeros but scanning that sky all the time and no sleeping or any nonsense like that and always have the guns ready. But quite thankfully you know, very little. Now when I went to Morotai M-O-R-O-T-A-I, that is very much near

33:30 Halmahera Island, H-A-L-M-A-H-E-R-A Island, which was studded with Japanese airfields and they'd be within half an hour flying time you know. Remember being over them one day and I saw the black puffs you know the anti-aircraft shells coming. I thought God almighty this is it, they're getting close you know. But they might have been starving and the battle lines might have been up near Japan but they were

34:00 still down there and give you an example. Word of mouth, four Kittyhawks pilots flying a plane from Noemfoor to Morotai. But apparently in bad weather overshot Morotai and landed on an island, I forget it's name on a strip there. Japanese occupied. They suffered with their heads off. I'd have thought they'd been taken

34:30 prisoner of war and survived the war. But no, their heads came off.

**What did it do to you when you were hearing stories like that?**

Anger. Anger when I read about the Japanese at Nanking. 200,000 people killed. Anger when I read about a Japanese using a bayonet to slit open a pregnant woman's stomach putting the bayonet in and holding the foetus aloft. Anger.

35:00 And I'd heard a rumour rightly or wrongly that two blokes from our squadron at Noemfoor, I think were out for a walk and the sick Japanese under a tree and they just smashed his head in with a rock. See, he might've had a grenade under his body to take anyone out. They couldn't be trusted. They were like animals. Inhumane, because they believed the Emperor was God and it was a privilege to die.

35:30 We hated them with a bitter hatred.

**How were you getting news of things like that?**

Word of mouth. Yeah.

**Did it motivate you to want to do more sorties?**

No just hatred. Just inhumane and I think if I'd seen that Jap I'd have smashed his head in with a brick because he might have killed me.

36:00 He might have been feigning death or if not feigning death, prepared to go. So we had a very cruel enemy.

**When you were flying so low, were you getting a really good view of - ?**

Wonderful view and when you say when we were always flying low. Everywhere treetop height. I dunno why there were any parachutes

36:30 around, because I s'pose the only thing would have been a belly landing in the water and you see the Bostons are big heavy aircraft it's not perfection if you land in the water. You know you could go in at an angle and hit your head and what not. It doesn't mean to say you're gonna be rescued. But we had great faith in the Catalina flying boat.

**Did you and Jimmy always fly the same aircraft?**

Yep.

**What was your**

37:00 **relationship to the aeroplane?**

Quite liked it, quite fond of it you know. I didn't mind old Jimmy but I didn't have anything to do with him because that's the way things were in those days. It's age difference. Rank difference. But I don't

say he was a monster but we just had nothing to do with each other.

**What about your relationship to the actual plane? A lot of navy guys that we've spoken to for instance the way they regard**

37:30 **their ship is you know they just love it and they're so proud of it. Is that a similar thing in the RAAF?**

No, she's just an old Boston to me you know. And no great big deal you know. But you know I find sleep hard to get here because I s'pose I'm 80. But honestly I make the point that I never had a sleepless night up there you know. The food was all right.

38:00 The company was all right. I like my own company. I'm a great one for walking. I'd shoot out near the coral and have a swim and you know almost under the equator and you know I've got no complaints. Except that the brass in the air force that didn't give me a gunnery course or a parachute course. I can't understand their mentality.

38:30 They might've said O'Connor and the others just shoot them up all they have to do is operate a turret. But why give us a wireless course? Why give us an observer's course? Took up time.

**The training that you had with the wireless and the Morse code, did you ever get to put that into practice?**

No. No never. It might've come later and I'll tell you about that later.

**What about when you were flying in the**

39:00 **Bostons, you mentioned that part of your duty was to do weather reports?**

Yeah, used to, yeah.

**How did you do that?**

Pencil and paper writing down and jotting down observations. I dunno who used them but I used to give them to the Intelligence Officer when I got home. But the big thing was watch that sky. The other day I was yesterday, I went down to Wynnum Central to go with the Wynnum RSL on a trip and I just walked up

39:30 the street there, Florence Street and I just at the corner of my eye I saw my sister my good sister there eating. She lives at Hemmant and I just stood in front of her and I thought she was gonna choke on her food. But that's my training you know. She says you're always good to observe, Billy. That's the big thing keeping and watching. Make sure you don't get jumped.

**And a navy guy that we spoke to the other day said**

40:00 **after being in the navy, it's just instinct for him always to be watching the water. Are you the same with watching the sky?**

Sky. All the time.

**Even now?**

Yeah, watching around all the time. And my sister got a hell of a shock to see me stand in front of her. "What are you doing Billy? You should be in Cleveland. How'd you happen to see me?" Well I said, "I just - I look around." I like people.

40:30 **Okay, we're just end of the tape there so.**

## Tape 5

00:30 **Right to go?**

Yep.

**Yeah, you're rolling already. Can you tell us about 10th of October?**

Yeah, willingly. I that's the day was an important day in our lives. Ambon was the Rabaul of the Dutch East Indies. It's an island. It's in the Dutch East Indies, quite removed from Noemfoor

01:00 and 8 planes took off that day to bomb and strafe it. We crossed the turtleneck and we were very low on the water to defeat radar. Some said that the COs leading propellers were almost touching the water. He allegedly said he saw a whale on the way across. Anyhow we shot up the bay and

01:30 seven of them went across to Waia across the harbour like Sydney Harbour, Ambon Harbour and they got a hell of a pasting too got back home. But McMillan, I've never spoken to him about it shot away to his left on the north side of harbour. Bombing and blasting as he went and I was firing myself and then

suddenly the he drop a stick a bombs near the

- 02:00 POW camp and I knew it was an Aussie POW camp and I was quite cranky about it. Didn't have long to be cranky because they shot out one of our motors and you know we were faced with the problem of you know 500-mile back to base across the turtleneck and the CO with his seven outside the harbour designated
- 02:30 FO Ford and a Boston to accompany us. What good that'd do, I don't know and you know we took. Mid morning beautiful day if there'd have been a Japanese Zero in the sky we'd have been shot down. But McMillan flew across that Ceram Sea C-E-R-A-M across the island of Ceram up past a place called Sorong. I thought I'd have to toss stuff out the aircraft but I didn't.
- 03:00 And McMillan thank God would never have got home, but we landed at Sansapor where the Yanks had put down a metal strip. And I apparently had just about a cup full of juice left in the engine and FO Ford landed behind us and I see by the log book I went home with Ford that night. So he must've taken Jim McMillan and I home and left the Yanks to repair the
- 03:30 Boston. But it rankled with me you know I did law later on and saw the ramifications and I didn't want to be responsible for the death of any prisoners of war. And when I retired from the law, 1983, I wrote down to the Gulf Force Association, it was of prisoners of war, about some
- 04:00 ramifications some details and I might have told you that the secretary saw it and said, "Oh this is a rat bag." But Walter Hicks, an intelligent prisoner of war whom I met the other day recently come up from Victoria said, "No, I know that day." He said, "I'll write to O'Connor." And he wrote and we've come up and we're very close and I've said to him "Walter," I said "I want to know
- 04:30 what you were doing and where did the bombs land? That's all I want to know." He said, "I was down in the cook house with a Jap," he said "and I saw the bombs skip over and they landed in the vegetable patch." I said, "How many were killed?" He said, "No one," he said, "thank goodness." He said, "If there had been the Japs would have taken it out on the POWs." And pity I haven't got it. Walter's done a well
- 05:00 he drew that and he's done a 8-page summary of the raid and the lack of necessity for it and I never spoke to Jim McMillan about it. Hicks is quite disappointed because he lived next door to an airline employee in Victoria and McMillan used to often come there to functions and Hicks said, "I wished I'd have known he was McMillan,"
- 05:30 he said, "I'd a spoken to him." He said, "I can recognise the face." He said "I'd have asked him about the raid, you know, and what prompted him." And I said to the CO Woodman, later in years he was in our association, "Colin, I'm not too fussed about being in that Boston that dropped the bloody bombs near the POW camp." He said, "You've got nothin' to worry about Bill," he said, "you didn't pull the lever."
- 06:00 I said, "That's all right you know. Okay." But it's rankled with me, and I well lucky to be alive frankly, and that was the highlight of my trip. We never went. Yes, went back to Ambon later, shooting up villages around the island. And I later went back to Ambon
- 06:30 with Hicks as a member of a POW association. Not that I was a POW and we went to a village called Waia W-A-I-A and saw kindly people there, lovable people washing their clothes in the running water and I was a bit ashamed because my log book shows that I blasted them you know on one of these things you know and Hicks
- 07:00 says you know that there were Japanese guns positioned above the village. But I kept my identity a very close secret. I was only there for a few days and I never said anything about having been over the island at all. There was a bit of tension now. I'll just add this in, it's got nothing to do with the war. But there was a beautiful war cemetery if you can call it beautiful. It's of allied prisoners of war,
- 07:30 very big and I've attended it and Walter Hicks tells me that the Muslims on the island have blown it up with dynamite, the crucifix. And they've said to the prisoner of war association don't come back. Don't replace it. We'll blow it up again. It's a sad commentary on things but that's my knowledge of Ambon. But the other 7 aircraft that went across the harbour to attack Laha L-A-H-A,
- 08:00 they were badly battered but they got all back home.

**Can you take us through that day from the brief?**

Yeah. You know as I mentioned earlier there'd definitely be a briefing where we all assemble and details with the maps and that's fine. I knew there was a prisoner of war camp there. We all knew there, prisoners of war there, Aussies.

- 08:30 And you know the usual thing, they being briefed about what our targets were and I can't remember I would have thought we were told to attack 8 across the harbour. I dunno why, Jimmy. It's a pity he's not alive, you know, I'd certainly ask him now why Jimmy McMillan broke away. I thought that'd been a court martial offence.

**In the V-formation that you were flying**



09:00 **in, where was your aircraft?**

Extreme left and he didn't lack guts, there's no doubt about that. I don't know whether he was trying to get a gong but he went blasting along that south shore of the harbour north shore which was heavily fortified and he wasn't chastised to my knowledge at all about it. It may have been we were told so little, didn't hear it at the briefing

09:30 that was his function to draw fire away to go alone. I wished he'd a told me if that'd been so.

**Were the orders ever given targets of opportunity?**

Yeah, but not on Ambon that day. But particularly that barge track, Peter, barge traffic, that was very important.

**So the fire that you received, that the plane received, do you know where that came from?**

Don't know where.

10:00 But the north shore was heavily fortified and Walter Hicks assures me that it came after the bombs were dropped. Whether Walter can be believed but he says he was there. I don't know whether he exaggerates. He said he saw my startled face in the turret. There might be startle there, but dunno how he'd see it because it was so low, you know

10:30 and he bit a sympathetic towards the Japs, old Walter. He sees their point of view. He worked in the dining room of the establishment up there. He had red hair and apparently his red hair was a source of interest to the Japanese, and they made the point to him. He said, "You know about the Bostons," he said, "well, they're very cranky because in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea - " You've heard of the Battle of Bismarck?

11:00 The Beaufighters went in and the Boston's were in it 22 was there they shot up the troop ships a lot a Japs were left floundering in the water and the Beaufighters shot them up in the water. And Walter says to me that you know from he's talking to the Japs at Ambon that they were very cranky about that. They reckoned that was despicable. But I said to Walter why didn't you mention to them about the 200,000 they killed in

11:30 Nanking or the people that they bayoneted in their beds in Singapore Harbour. I said if those Japs had got to the mainland they'd have killed our blokes. But that's the way he was. He said that after the surrender they got around his bed and started talking to him about what's going to happen to them and what not and he seems to see points of view in the war crimes trial, that you know there's a Jap who heard his

12:00 brother had been shot down somewhere or sunk on a Japanese boat, that wasn't mitigation in punishment when he slapped an Australian though. You know just very interesting to listen to, cause he took me behind the Japanese line there and we talk a lot about it. But that was the Ambon raid.

**Can you remember being hit, like what was the impact like?**

No. Can't remember it at all. Only one bullet hole

12:30 underneath. No shattering nothing like that. And I dunno what the fate of the Boston was at Sansapor. It certainly couldn't take off again. But I dunno what happened. My log book says FO Ford return to our base which wasn't far away just across the bay.

**On that particular sortie were you actually firing your guns as well on**

13:00 **that run?**

Yeah, yeah. Walter says and I think that's where he exaggerated tells me the other day for the first time, Bill, your guns were positions fore and aft. Not sideways. How the hell he'd know that, I don't know and he never told me that before. You know. But he professes to have seen our aircraft at very low height. Drew a sketch for me. I wished I had it

13:30 at the moment of where the bombs, the track of the bombs and -

**So when did it become clear to you that something was up with the aircraft?**

When we passed over, after having done the bombs. The motor had stopped and I thought, "How the hell are we gonna get home?" We didn't get home we got to Sansapor.

14:00 So everything after that faded into insignificance. Things all seemed to be uneventful after that.

**What did you think when the prop stopped?**

What's gonna happen now? We're right over the island, bristling with Japs. But Mac got it out to sea a bit and the

14:30 CO was in charge of a Boston, the other seven and radio communication he delegated FO Ford to accompany us. But as I say, I dunno for what purpose. What was he to do shoot down a Zero? And

Walter Hicks tells me and whether he's right or wrong that the day before, some

15:00 very fast flying Japanese fighters, Kawasaki K-A-W-A-S-A-K-I planes, had landed in Ambon on their way to New Guinea but they'd gone that morning to New Guinea. So pretty lucky, weren't we.

**Did Jim climb in the aircraft to or did he stay at that level the low level?**

Pretty well, except when he got to the island of Ceram

15:30 C-E-R-A-M he did raise it but no tremendous height but certainly did raise it which was a good effort then around the turtleneck going towards Sansapor.

**Did you know at the time the flying capabilities of the Boston, whether or not it was able to fly on one plane?**

No but had great confidence. Well regarded. And you know

16:00 we were the only squadron in the Pacific, Australians that had Bostons. Number 22.

**Where they brand new Bostons?**

Somewhere. They called them the Boston G with the new turret what we had, yeah.

**How was the new turret different to the previous turret?**

It was open firing guns, you know this, but this was a real turret.

**Was part of your job**

16:30 **in the turret to do damage assessment?**

No I don't recall that. I don't recall that.

**Did you ever have to fly follow up sorties to do damage assessment on previous sorties?**

Never. Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge at all.

**So can you recall your debrief at the end of that day?**

No, I dunno what happened the end of that day.

17:00 It would've been late in the day we'd a got like with FO Ford back from Sansapor to Noemfoor Island. I dunno what happened. There were no more attacks on Ambon town itself. Certainly on the island on the outskirts.

**Generally speaking, you'd normally do a debrief the end of a sortie?**

Yeah, you would, yeah, but maybe the

17:30 other seven did it.

**Can you tell us just what sort of general things are covered in the debrief?**

Yeah, particularly firing the ack-ack pits. That's the important thing.

**And who would conduct those debriefs?**

A chap, a ground staff officer called the intelligence officer.

**How did you feel when you finished a**

18:00 **sortie, when you got out of the aircraft what sort of mood were you in?**

Pretty good. May have been my youth. Not upset at all. No churned up stomach. Very cranky when my parachute was pinched, you know, and I see in the log book last night that I was fined you know and deducted from my pay book. But some mongrel just like the mongrel that had put stones in my kit bag when I got back

18:30 you know and didn't make any reference to the fact that I'd you know put my bloody life out. It made me a bit cynical about my fellow man. Particularly when I was told about the waterside workers that weren't loading boats for the relief of their Australian soldiers in New Guinea. Have you heard about that?

**How did you get news of that?**

Word of mouth.

**How did that make you blokes feel?**

Very cranky.

19:00 Very irritable.

**Do you know if any blokes took it up with blokes like that after the war?**

I dunno. I thought of that and the thing I didn't get Peter was the fact that why didn't prisoners of war from Ambon and these places take it out on the Japs? What they had suffered at their hands. I believe they were probably ill nourished and not in a condition to do so.

- 19:30 But the Japs were very placid after the Emperor had said finish. And what I'm cranky about too is that in mid-August the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima a fortnight later the former peace surrender went up on the Missouri in that fortnight the bonfires were burning and a lot of papers were being destroyed. I'm cranky on that.
- 20:00 I'm cranky on the fact that if I can deviate a bit, because there was an island called Tarakan, you ever heard of it? T-A-R-A-K-A-N. It was going to be captured to provide air cover for Balikpapan and we were to go there but take another significant loss of life in fact 'Diver' Derrick, a VC [Victoria Cross] winner got killed there and the water table was such that it couldn't
- 20:30 take aircraft. What a shocking thing. Faulty intelligence. And yet another thing that's dear to my heart is not far across the way in Borneo is a place called Sandakan S-A-N-D-A-K-A-N and it could have been easily taken. And I'd left the squadron when they moved to Tawi Tawi T-A-W-I T-A-W-I in the Philippines and they used to fly
- 21:00 from there to Labuin [Labuan] L-A-B-U-I-N but were strictly instructed not to go anywhere near Sandakan. Why? I dunno. But there are the things but I wasn't in the squadron then. When I'd done my tour, the old CO said - I thought I was goin' home. He said, "Take your gear down to 34 Squadron." Class society,
- 21:30 you never ask him why. Got my gear went down there and I flew Douglasses, DC-3s and I was pretty happy when I got there. You know flew up to I think Leyte Gulf, Mendora not harassed by Zeros but and then on the long haul back to Townsville. And as I think I mentioned I've always been interested in countryside
- 22:00 and as we passed across New Guinea I was amazed to find white capped mountains in the centre of New Guinea that I didn't know existed. So you know I was very happy and also it gave me the benefit of that liberation. Philippines Liberation Medal.

**The first sortie you flew after the 10th of October, how were the nerves going up on that one?**

Pretty all right. I can refer to my log book, but you don't want that do ya?

- 22:30 I can do it.

**You can't recall being a little -**

Nah.

**- bit worried after what you'd just gone through?**

No.

**What was the drinking situation like for air crew?**

They were accused of smuggling, and we the RAAF were accused of being great thieves, Australians. And I recall I think at

- 23:00 Noemfoor or Morotai we were camped next to a Yankee camp and the Yanks said to me, "We don't mind you pinching our stuff but for God's sake leave our telephone wires alone." Now that's fair enough isn't it? And they were smelling around with liquor and all and exchanging cigarettes and what not. I felt myself things had dissipated a bit towards the end a the
- 23:30 war. Blokes were just marking time.

**Would it common for blokes to get home from a sortie and have a stiff drink?**

Not to my knowledge. The officers might have.

**So what was your impression of the Americans that you saw up there?**

Loved them. Thought they were great. They had plenty of Bostons. They flew on missions. They died. Their submarines were very good. They sunk vessels.

- 24:00 I like their Nimitz and coming across the Pacific with his American Marines. I was very rapt. In short I'm one of those who say they saved my country. I quite like them.

**What about personal interaction, how often did you actually get to mix with them speak to them?**

You know, they used to hang round, you know, come round and wanting to trade liquor, you know, cigarettes and I found 'em all right, you know. But

24:30 I preferred the blokes that came directly from the States. You know one bloke said to me he said, "Here Bill," he said, "this is my girlfriend I met in Brisbane." And he said, "Have a look." I said, "She's naked." I said, "Where'd you meet her?" He said, "In the Grand Hotel." I said, "Enough said." But I found 'em good fellas.

25:00 Loved their air force, at one stage we were part of the 13th Air Force, our squadron. And rumour has there were three. I haven't told you about the loss of our three Bostons. Do you want me to go onto that?

**Can I just ask you about the Americans? What was your impression of a lot of air force blokes have cast aspersions on the American's ability to navigate.**

Yeah, I've heard a lot of talk about that and the poor devils were, you know,

25:30 it'd be very hard to fly from Townsville to Port Moresby across the Coral Sea and they had a bad reputation for that, but I s'pose they had to churn out people quickly.

**Well that's one of the other things is that was their opinion of the American flyers hadn't had the same level of training that our guys had had. Did you ever - ?**

Yeah, that could be so but you know you have to be pragmatic. You know while we were mucking around at in

26:00 Dutch New Guinea and Wewak, these places, they were up there in the Philippines. They were facing and particularly the American Marine - that's from the US Navy. They were very good. I felt a little bit ashamed of ourselves towards the end, I thought we weren't doing enough.

**What'd you think of Blamey?**

A mongrel. You know, he was the bloke that studied him very carefully. He's a good staff officer in the Dardenelles

26:30 in the Western Front, but I think he had a lot a good friends amongst the hierarchy. I remember a Yank saying to me, you know, saw Blamey in shorts the way the fat fella. Hey do you blokes get your men from the Boy Scouts? You know, but didn't care for him at all.

**What about MacArthur?**

Figure I didn't know much about. Worried about him. I'd heard see when we became Beaufighters

27:00 there were three Beaufighter Squadrons in the RAAF in the Pacific 22 30 and 31. Well regarded low flying Whispering Death. Rumour has it that old 'Dug Out Doug' [MacArthur] would've taken us to the Philippines but he didn't want the baggage that ensured. He just wanted the aircraft and the crews. And of course we dug our toes in, or they did, and we didn't go. But it'd have been great to be with him. He may have been a degree of

27:30 selfishness there. He didn't want our troops there, he wanted to take the Philippines themselves. But I wasn't to fussed, it irks me and Peter yourself, just to think fellas slaving away in 1945 in Wewak and in Bougainville and landing as they did in Balikpapan and Labuan. Why?

28:00 What was the point of it all? The battle lines were right up there. That's the thing that bugged us. As I said it led to what they called the mutiny. Which wasn't a mutiny, it was just a refusal by senior fighter pilots to hand in their commission, because they weren't properly used.

**Did you know of that mutiny at the time?**

Yep. We weren't part of it or considered to be

28:30 part of it. It was higher ranking. I think Killer Caldwell was one such bloke, and a bloke called Group Captain Arthur. I'm relying on memory now. A big thing you know.

**Did you ever see any of those Australian fighter pilots in the course of your travels?**

Never. Never at all. No, we were in the twin-engined stuff.

**And none of the twin engines were ever escorted by fighters?**

29:00 No the later part of the war we did mass raids on Jap bases if you can call them that. Kittyhawks and Beaufighters and such you know.

**Can you tell us about the Bostons being wiped out?**

Yeah I'd like to tell ya that very much indeed. We found ourselves on Morotai Island and there were a huge number of aircraft there jam packed side by

29:30 side and the Japs came over one night not in any great force but dropped some eggs. I was in got quickly into this slit trench outside my tent some way from it and watched them and a significant number of Bostons were destroyed and hit and we had no parts. We were the only squadron in the RAAF

Squadron.

30:00 So the decision was made to. I dunno what they did with the remaining Boston's not many but to put them over to Beaufighters, put us to the Beaufighters. So that's the significant thing I've got to be proud of today I'm a surviving member of Boston 22 and a survivor of Boston Beaufighter. And I'm Vice President of my Boston Beaufighter Association of Queensland and I'm proud of it and

30:30 I did my operations this time a little bit closer to the Philippines. If you know your geography there's an island called the Celebes C-E-L-E-B-E-S, and we used to attack it from Morotai. Still over a significant amount of water and also did some attacks on the Philippines down the south part of the island.

**How did they bring the Beaufighters in, what sort of -?**

31:00 From the south, you know, ferry pilots I think. We certainly didn't go down for them.

**And was there any conversion training required?**

Yep. But I can't recall much about it. But we certainly did missions.

**Would Jim have done that sort of without you?**

I don't think so. They were little bit hard to handle on take off,

31:30 and they could swing and what not and you had to be on your toes but we at that time Morotai island is well up towards the north. Not extra far from the Philippines and we found ourselves on a base called Tawi Tawi T-A-W-I T-A-W-I, which is a Philippine island up past Borneo up past Sandakan. But that to me

32:00 was the biggest regret that I know of amongst others that we didn't do more to help our poor devils in Sandakan. Whether we would have done it by paratroops or what. But then there was apparently. Japanese are mongrels. There was an edict that if there'd been any attempt to take them, they'd have been shot as they would've been if we'd attempted to land in Japan. That all POWs were to be shot.

32:30 But I know people in BCOF B-C-O-F [British Commonwealth Occupation Force] who went to Japan after the war found the Japanese the most docile people in the world. That they were proper mongrels. Apparently it was all concerned with the Emperor. He said to cease things and they ceased things. They were obsequious, they'd bow.

**Before you got the Beaufighters, had you seen the Beaufighters before?**

Yeah. Because 30 was

33:00 pretty famous and 31 was operating from Darwin and we'd heard about them and you know we'd have transfers from the squadron, you know, we were pretty well akin to them although we were in Bostons and I think we were a flight consists of three squadrons I think in New Guinea, I think we were in our flight with 30, pretty famous. Had an air crew mess and

33:30 crew bivouacked together.

**So what were your feelings in losing the Boston and going to the new Beaufighters?**

34:00 A bit cranky you know because they were so good to us you know they were good aircraft. But you know the old Beaufighter Whispering Death, so called by the Japanese. The Boston'd create a bit a noise. But the

34:30 Beaufighter would take the Japs by surprise.

**Still quite loud in your position, in the aircraft?**

Yeah, definitely. And I you know I when I went to 34 Squadron I found altogether different you know with you know from the Philippines down to Townsville.

**You mentioned earlier just the tents when the Bostons were hit diving from your tent into the pit. What was the inside of a tent like, like what sort of living conditions were you in there?**

Pretty poor. Four of us there. Just the tarpaulin across and home made saplings and what not you know. Pretty basic. And I never complained about the food. I suppose it was

35:00 basic too, but I never complained. Matter of fact I didn't have many whinges. I wasn't urging to get out all the time. I must've been a moron you know something must've been wrong with me. But I never seemed to be worried about things.

**Did you notice the RAAF food being any different or the air crew food being different to what you got in the army?**

Yeah because at that time we'd be getting supplies from the Yanks and I like that thing, I

35:30 still get it today when I look at myself, a thing called Spam. S-P-A-M. You ever heard of it? Plenty of that you know.

**So you actually liked that, did you?**

Yeah I did. But you know I got no complaints I'm a republican by nature and I'm very cranky on English class system. I hope it doesn't offend you people, because I can't understand English tolerating a House of Lords part of the decision-making process staffed

- 36:00 by grandsons and great sons of the Duke of Wellington, others. I think that's pathetic and I can't appreciate fox hunting and I can't appreciate Prince Charles and I hate the English class system and I thought our efforts in north Western Australia from Darwin in a clandestine operation was pathetic. We're always getting captured, put in by the Japanese and tortured like that. Operation Rimau was a disgrace. Not
- 36:30 J-week, you know the attack on Singapore and how they were captured and two of them went by pole boat or prow from the Philippines escaped right down to Port Timor. Did you know that? You know these things. They were put in at the last minute. So I haven't got much faith in clandestine operations in the north west area
- 37:00 and I make the point that although I was in Darwin with the numbers I had nothing to do with the north west territory. My areas were always north east up around that way.

**So people would say OK what was your motivation to joining up World War 11?**

Well I dunno I bit of a set back. I after Pearl Harbor I must've had a rush of blood to the head, but yeah and I went down to the

- 37:30 AIF to enlist. As I say, God must've been looking after me, cause he said you're not 19 yet we can't send you to Timor or Ambon. Famous words weren't they? I think I got cranky then. Because grab D169 and

**Cause you've mentioned several times your love of Australia?**

Yeah.

**When you think back to you as a young bloke, do you think you had that same love of Australia?**

No.

- 38:00 No, definitely not. I've seen New Zealanders. I've seen people that come to our country that don't appreciate it. I hear the bad mouthing of our country. I take my own experiences how they've been good to me with an education based on Nudgee of course. Operation on my legs. Social Security benefits, how they look after their own. I cannot bad mouth my country and I speak up about it. And I don't believe in dual citizenship.
- 38:30 I might be a crank.

**You've spoken a lot about doing your low level sorties in the Bostons?**

Yeah Beaufighter too.

**Same? Is there any difference at all?**

No. Low level except one bloke said to me one a the old navigators said to me in the Beaufighter over Borneo one day low level come across the harbour well the Japs

- 39:00 were on the parade ground. They caught them on the parade ground. Terrifically quiet. You know the name Whispering Death. Wonderful things. But you know I'm pushing down here for the memory of this chap Perske that did I tell you about him? You know and that's what they wanted to see me about today, and you know the cruelty of the Japs you know great hatred.
- 39:30 But realistically knowing that if I got caught no mercy. And I say I wore those bars you know. But I dunno whether the CO knew about it.

**And a pistol you carried. Were you if were if you came down were you prepared to use it?**

Yeah, yeah definitely. But I think if she was going to be a belly landing in the water I'd of taken it off. Might've taken my shoes off. My flying boots. But

- 40:00 you know on the land, certainly the pistol and the flying boots.

**Cause a lot of the blokes we've spoken to, air crew we've spoken to, said that they were concerned as to how their having a pistol would be interpreted by the enemy if they were captured?**

Yeah. No, I was young. To me the enemy was the enemy. It wouldn't matter if you were naked, he'd kill ya. That's the way I viewed it rightly or wrongly. So I'd want

- 40:30 to take a few with me so that's -

**Rightio, we'll stop.**

## Tape 6

00:30 People praise their own country up like I do, or non committal?

**Some.**

That's good.

**Rolling. When you moved into the Beaufighters, how different was it for you?**

Well first of all very important thing. I sat at the back but I could see my skipper you know a tunnel very clear cut and that gave me a degree of confidence. Because I say PO Wilson

01:00 in a similar situation rendered assistance to pilot WO Hart, and was commended for it. Might a got a mention in dispatches. You felt you could do something.

**When you'd come back from an op [operation] would the other guys flying in the other planes would you all get together and - ?**

All get together, yep.

**And discuss what had happened?**

Yeah, yep. And as I say blokes were dying, and a bloke died on

01:30 test flight, things like that. Took a ground staff member with him. I often used to think how would the air board view the death of a ground staff member on a test flight as a volunteer?

**What sort of test flight?**

Well put it this way a pilots gonna test a Boston or a Beaufighter and a ground staff member says, "Can I have a bit of a ride with ya?" Skipper says yes. He gets in and the plane malfunctions and goes

02:00 into the sea and they're all drowned. What's the standing of the bloke that volunteered? It wasn't part of his duties was it to be flying? I've never worked that one out.

**When did test flights happen? Just when planes were new or - ?**

Yes. Sometimes yes after servicing. You'd take them around the island strip for a bit of a flight. As I said this one went completely in. Often strike old soldiers, I dunno whether this

02:30 is true but they tell me that hangin' round the ground strip and they'd see a Beaufighter there and say to the skipper, "Can I have a bit of a flight with you?" And he'd say, "Yes." Well I s'pose it might be true it might not be true but that did happen. But I can tell you of my own experience. I was told I was going from 22 Squadron to 34 down the other end of the island. It was a bit boring, so my mate

03:00 PO Collett and Sergeant Hall had to do a flight over the Celebes and I thought, "I'll go along for the ride." Bit silly isn't it? I couldn't have been worried too much could I? It's in the log book and you know I must've been terrifically bored you know to do it. But apparently that happened a lot if you can talk to old soldiers that they went.

**To be volunteering for extra flights**

03:30 **like that do you think you must've had an air of feeling some what invincible?**

No. Boredom. Just nothing else to do and I liked Collett and Hall and I thought go up with them you know low level on the Celebes. Interesting in the log book you know. Dunno whether it should have been in the log book but I put it there.

**Did you ever loose men on ops that you were flying in?**

04:00 No can't think of it. But men in the squadron did die, you know, low level attacking barges bit probably too low to the ground, but there were casualties.

**Did that affect you?**

Not really. Not really. Dunno why not, but that's very odd about my makeup too because I was bored. I went with Hall and Collet on a

04:30 an attack on the Celebes at night time, can't understand it even now.

**Tell me about your log book?**

Yeah. Got it handy. There it is. That's

**So what was the deal with the log book?**

The log book's terrifically important. You entered your missions in there at the end of the day. At the end of the – I think

05:00 the month the flight commander noted and the commanding officer noted down here.

**What sort of details do you write in your log book?**

Pretty brief. Although I did elaborate on the 4th of October '44. But see

05:30 4th of April '45, 'A Beaufighter. Flight Lieutenant Harris. Fraser duty to Harris, Langoan, Mapengit [?] Sidate, Tanamon airstrips. Remarks all strips covered nil sightings, nil ack-ack. Sunk a VBG [?] at Waia, a VBG at Cape Paso 700 by 20

06:00 mms. I s'pose expended 700 20milimetre flying times 4-hours 10-minutes.' That's just a sample, you know.

**Would you keep any kind of diary or journal apart from?**

I think that would've been forbidden I think. I'm a great one now because of my – as a Crown Prosecutor Association of the Police Force, my library out there is full of diaries. Every night I write one

06:30 up. Maybe cause the old police did it. They were very great on diaries albeit they might a written 'em up days after the event but they did write them up and they could be punished for it under the Police Act for failing to keep a diary. But I find it very good. You know, it helps me to my mind to recap the events of the day. You two good people today, events down there, you know it's good.

07:00 Makes me a little bit active.

**What were the leaflets that you were saying you used to drop out?**

Rubbish you know just to the in Papua New Guinean, Indonesian talk, you know along the escapes routes or trails of Papua New Guinea you know, namely that about Queen Wilhelmina, although I don't think the Dutch were well regarded

07:30 in Dutch New Guinea. I don't know what effect they had. I've never heard of any Japs turning themselves in with leaflets, and I dunno any natives who could read them. But still and all they were bundled out and floated down.

**Is that what they were for, for Japs to surrender with?**

Yeah yeah, which the Jap before the surrender wouldn't surrender as I understand it, you know, he's quite

08:00 detailed about it you know.

**Do you know what it would say on it?**

No, I dunno what I did with them, but you know just that Queen Wilhelmina expects her subjects you know to await the forthcoming surrender of the Japanese forces and if you take this into so and so you know just simple things you know. But some of them highlighted Queen Wilhelmina, because those islands had been Dutch territories.

**Were there Dutch**

08:30 **forces there?**

I never saw them. We didn't have much respect for them. There was one squadron on the RAAF in 18 Squadron, it was flying Mitchells with Dutch people in it and we didn't hear very good reports about the Dutch colonisers of the Dutch East Indies. We seemed to lose a lot of operatives there. And we know what Sukarno did after the war he gathered the

09:00 forces together under Japanese guidance and kept the Dutch out. I believe they were very brutal colonisers, that people had to bow to them and walk on the other side of the street and you know I can understand how we haven't got a very good record there. A lot of our operatives were put in, you know, the Dutch weren't popular at all.

**What interaction did you have with the other services?**

None at all. None at

09:30 all, I can't think of anything. We didn't see, no, it'd be more Yanks. You know they'd be round the camps you know and cigarettes and beer and what not and no I can't think of any Australian forces at all.

**Being in a low flying craft, could you see the enemy?**

In the Beaufighter you could, because as I say

10:00 Whispering Death. Just like to spring upon them. But certainly not the Boston.



**Was that different for you in the Beaufighter being able to see them?**

Yeah. Yeah. Particularly with barge traffic. See, they were starving, ill fed and they were sneaking food in with barges and the barges in the daytime were camouflaged. Camouflaged very well with trees and things like that on them. But I s'pose that

10:30 was our function, to cut off supplies to the Japanese in the rear.

**What was the sensation for you when you got to see that you'd sunk a barge?**

Extra good, you know made some contribution. You didn't hang around and just circle around watching what you'd done. You got you know we've gone, cause there could've been an

11:00 ack-ack pit nearby.

**Did you have a real sense that you were defending the homeland?**

Heck, yeah. Very important. Yeah, and that's even today you know the hairy armpit brigade or someone like that talk about the atom bomb and the brutality of us, I just say well I make no apologies. The Japanese were very close to our shores. I saw

11:30 them in Darwin, I saw the affects of them in Darwin. Apparently post-war history tells us they never had any intention to invade Australia but we never knew that at the time. And as far as we were concerned with our womenfolk and that, they were an anathema and no apologies are made.

**What did you do in the days between ops?**

12:00 I dunno, we all bludged around, spine bashing you know, I was a great walker. I'd go down the strip and there was a coral reef out not extra far, out I'd swim in the reef, swim in that area you know, and didn't seem to be bored. Not listening to any radio programs or anything like that.

**What was the area like in terms of physical beauty**

12:30 **out on the reef?**

Pretty good and the poor old natives would go by in their lakatoi or small craft around the reef and no one interfered with them, but you know we just felt that we were just play things of power. That we were direct A to B or so and so that that was it.

**Did you have duties on those days between ops?**

No no.

13:00 Not having patrolled anything or any duties around at all. I remember one day we had to swing a compass on an aircraft. I forget how we did it but the used a compass swing to move it to do that. I remember that. But other than that I know of nothing.

**A lot of the infantry guys that we've spoken to talk a lot about the sense of mateship that they had with the other guys?**

Yeah.

**Does that compare in the RAAF?**

13:30 Not much. The chaps in the tent. We had a WO pilot in the tent at one stage and forget his name, but he bought it. He was killed. Low flying mission. Missed him. But the two other blokes I with, Eric Pedlow and Ron Hall you know great mates and life seemed to revolve around them. Picture shows at night. Open air you know. Surprised me.

14:00 You know the Queen come on and clap and then they yell out, "Well what about Uncle Joe?" You know they'd start on the mob, a roar you know. He was very popular at the time because of the Russian offensives. Do you follow what I'm saying?

**Who was Uncle Joe?**

Joe Stalin, you know. His picture didn't appear on the screen. The Queen was there and mob a roar, "What about Uncle

14:30 Joe?" As if he should appear there. Russians were very popular with their offensive.

**Did you interact a lot with the Yanks like you've mentioned before, there used to be a lot of cigarette swapping and stuff like that what about actually going out on sorties?**

No. No although you know the books tell me we were part of the 13th our Squadron was part of the 13th American Air Force.

15:00 And but other than that I no I can't. We didn't. There were several strips on Noemfoor Island, airstrips and ours was Australian and there's was down the road I say that at Morotai was so jam packed with aircraft wingtip to wingtip

15:30 that we didn't have anything to do with them. Not on my level.

**You were telling us earlier that the 22 Squadron was the only squadron to ever be awarded a VC [Victoria Cross] do you want to tell us about that?**

Yeah, I wasn't with them. I came a bit later but they were with Bostons operating from Moresby and there was a Victorian called Bill Newton N-E-W-

16:00 T-O-N, a very brave pilot and the old Boston had a crew of 3 not 2 and he used to several times climb over the Owen Stanleys and come down on Salamaua. Have you ever heard of Salamaua? And blast the hell out of the place. I think shot to pieces and I think it was May the 16th shot to

16:30 pieces there but came around and back over the Owen Stanleys. Didn't land at Dobodura back over the Owen Stanley with his aircraft to land at Ward Strip and the aircraft was like a sieve. But the next day another aircraft with the same crew back over Salamaua but shot down into the sea. Two got out, not three, two Newton

17:00 and his offsider Lyons L-Y-O-N-S and captured by a Japanese patrol and taken into Salamaua. He and Lyons together and Lyons was executed at taken up to Lae from Salamaua, Lyons executed there and then I think in 1948,

17:30 Lyon's body was found by native workers putting stumps in an area in the Lae area. But Bill Newton was brought back to from Lae back to Salamaua and surrounded by a throng of Japanese. Why they'd have to have been

18:00 beheaded and I think the official story is one smart aleck with a bayonet just ripped as he lay on the ground, ripped open his stomach and he got the VC a lot later. Buried back at Lae, brought back to Lae and buried there and people often wonder what'd he get the VC for. For the day before or the day of his death.

**Was that a great sense of pride for the squadron?**

My word!

18:30 Still is today. And you know recently I, testing out my legs, a plaque was inserted in the grounds of War Memorial in Canberra for Bill Newton and I made my way down there to commemorate it be down there and an interesting aside, nothing to do with the war. As I came to get in the aircraft to come back the

19:00 the machine went haywire and they couldn't work it out and the people behind me were getting fidgety and the woman in charge of the machine said, "Have you got any metal in your body?" And thought I said, "Come to think of it I have," you know so I got in. But I can't think of any problems at all with the RAAF, except the class

19:30 distinction you know. But bear in mind they had rank and they were much older people than us the pilots. We were babies really, 18 or 19. Maybe 20. Pretty young isn't it?

**When you were saying that for a while there 22 Squadron sort of was considered a part of the US?**

Yeah, the 13th Air Force.

**Did you have that sense**

20:00 **that you were under their command?**

No, only after the war and some chaps have seen in on packing cases at the time. I never saw it and but I'm satisfied that after the war reading it was.

**So how many ops did you fly with 22 Squadron?**

About 25. No big deal. I s'pose the biggest one would have been the one on the 4th of October '44. The others were treetop height

20:30 above strips. Airstrips. Hunting barges. Flying up and down the trail looking for them you know but.

**It sounds like you were very calm about it? Did you ever notice any blokes around you experiencing fear or nerves?**

No and as I say that pilot officer was sent home, the navigator, because I dunno, because of what happened. And

21:00 I am told that McMillan had a bloke once to take him up for a flight and he said to McMillan, "I don't want to fly any more." So the story goes McMillan said, "Well why are you here? Why didn't you say this down home?" But they're the only two cases. And I was talking to Woodman, our commanding officer,

21:30 whose since died after the war I said to him, "Colin what did you think of," I think he's flight lieutenant. I won't mention his name. He was a flight commander with a very burnt face. He said, "He wasn't a bad

bloke," he said, "but," pilot. He said, but towards the end of the tour he said to me, "Colin, I'm not gonna fly tomorrow. I've had a fill of it." And Colin said -

22:00 Woodman said, "Do you realise what you're saying to me what the ramifications could be?" He said, "Yes." But McMillan must've had a very good nature about him. He spoke to the doctor and they found a reason why the flight lieutenant could go home. He'd done a lot, you know. But they're the only examples I know.

**When did you get word that your time with 22 Squadron was up?**

I think the CO told me.

22:30 Didn't give me any reason. See I got to the squadron before McMillan did and didn't give me any reason. Little bit cranky I wasn't going home but I went to 34 and you know it was a good a DC-3 was a Douglas, a transport plane, which was very good you know.

**Had you expected that it was about time for you to go home?**

23:00 Yeah I thought so, I thought so.

**Had you signed up for a particular time or for the duration of hostilities?**

Duration of hostilities, you know. I could have been kept there and that'd be about May '45 and things started to move quickly and the next 4-months I can't give you details, but I was discharged on the 18th of September '45.

23:30 **So what happened when you left 22 Squadron?**

Went to 34. Did my flights there that are in the log book to the Philippines to Townsville.

**Did any of the other blokes from 22 transfer across with you?**

Don't know of any. Don't know of any. But it's you know I'm pleased to have said that I was in the Philippines in World War 11. And but that part

24:00 from then till the end of the war is like a big blank. I don't know what happened. I know I went to Sandgate, it's an old people's home now, but it was a big RAAF place and I think I went down south to get discharged and then the story of the stones in the kit bag and that's all.

**Do you recall leaving 22**

24:30 **Squadron?**

No I don't. It'd be no great big deal. Probably a bloody jeep and I'd be off you know and no big deal. No celebrations or anything like that. But the post-war period was very good. I.

**What about saying goodbye to McMillan?**

No. No I didn't have anything to do with him because of that the bombs on. Maybe it's unfairly cause of the bombs.

25:00 He didn't take me into his confidence about droppin' those bombs into that POW camp. I repeat I wasn't a numbskull, I knew what had happened.

**Do you remember saying goodbye to anyone at all?**

No. No. I know I was a bloke that liked my own company and I still do but I didn't have any thing about anyone. I've still got mates and I'm vice president of the Boston Beaufighter Association

25:30 of Queensland.

**Were you sad to leave?**

Not really. All part a life. You know the Yanks were on the move almost near the Japanese homeland. So I knew I didn't have very far to go except that the old DC-3 hit a big mountain in New Guinea. That was a big shock. Looked out of the plane and did you know there were big mountains in New Guinea. 19,000-feet covered in snow on the Dutch side.

**Can you describe the**

26:00 **DC-3 for me?**

Yeah. Twin engine transport plane. Known as the Dakota. Known as the Douglas. Great for dropping paratroops off in the war. Great for dropping cargo over the Owen Stanleys. Great troop carrier.

**How many crew would it have?**

There'd be 2 pilots and there wouldn't be a navigator, but I'd be on the wireless.

26:30 **And how did you get assigned to a particular crew?**

Just went with the squadron and just told you were on a flight to so and so you know. No big deal. Not like the dramatic Tocumwal where on the OTU you're just part of the crew, you know.

**So when you were with the DC-3 were you always with the same crew?**

No. Little bit embarrassing to me, because

- 27:00 when I came out of the services that mongrel at the till had his eye on me at the customs place and he said to me, "O'Connor," he said, "you've got to go back to Darwin." I said "Hey," I said "I've spent 5 years of the war there." He said "Yeah but you've only done one year in Darwin and it's 3 year station." He said, "If you're not on that aircraft going back on Friday, you're out." I thought, you mongrel. But I was on that aircraft. And I spent another
- 27:30 year in Darwin in 1947 and the big embarrassment was when the old DC - I was at the airport and the old DC-3s from 34 Squadron were coming in you know. With a mob of my mates I was never too hard on them. They had a few packets of cigarettes, few cartons and what not. But I thought he was very hard to send me back. Dunno whether he disliked the O apostrophe in my name or what.
- 28:00 But I got sent back. So what I did was try and scheme to get out of the place. I tried to join the Diplomatic Corps. I came before the administrator and two of his staff. I didn't get to it someone must've had mates. But I wrote to Senator Brown kicked up a stink but I quietly did my work and what and eventually I got a promotion to the Department of the Army in Brisbane after 12-months and
- 28:30 I left. From there I determined to do some study under the CRTS [Commonwealth Reconstruction & Training Scheme].

**Before we get onto that. We will get to that. Did you enjoy your time on the DC-3?**

Wonderful you know and particularly that I could tell my mother and that that I'd been to the Philippines. Not many Aussies could.

**What sort of ops were you doing?**

You wouldn't call them ops I s'pose. Just I don't think we called them they're just running cargo.

- 29:00 Taking stuff up and bringing people back.

**What do you remember of the Philippines?**

The fields and the people and what not, you know. The war had left the Philippines by then and there was no danger. The only problem would be as I say over the open sea plenty of sea to go home, and those big mountains in New Guinea where you cut across country to get to Horn Island or that.

- 29:30 **So when you were flying people or troops back from the Philippines what was the route that you'd fly?**

The same old one and planes went down in the mountains of New Guinea. Planes did go down. But it cut off so much territory. If you can visualise it coming down cut across New Guinea Dutch New Guinea and to Thursday Island rather than going right around.

- 30:00 **Where you actually based in the Philippines?**

No. We're at Morotai. But I still rankle about the bloke that sent me back to Darwin. You know I done a lot in Darwin. I'd volunteered from Darwin to get out the place. The mongrels sent me up there when I was a boy and he sent me up again and threatened me. "If you're not on that aircraft on Friday, you're out."

- 30:30 These days you'd deal with him very severely. I don't mean fisticuffs, you'd take him ahead on something on some tribunal.

**Did the pilots in the DC-3s seem different to you in any way than the - ?**

Yeah, yeah, definitely. Yeah.

**How so?**

Got to know them better, you know, and more of a team. An embarrassing team

- 31:00 when I was a customs officer in Darwin when they were coming in.

**Can you tell me about the wireless work you were doing?**

No just receiving and sending out messages and helping to unload aircraft and load them. You know you're expected to do something, just not stand idly by.

**So where was your position in the aeroplane?**

Down the back a bit in front of the radio set. Didn't do any navigation.

31:30 They flew by direct observation.

**So the messages that you were getting in and sending out who were they from and to?**

Just base and weather like that. Nothing about code work at all, because the Japs would've had no interest in us. The battle lines had moved ahead.

**And what was the wireless set like, that you were working with?**

Quite a big thing. I can't give you much detail about it

32:00 but I was pleased I had done Morse. Morse code. The war was running. People were trying to get out of the services and maybe it might've been a good idea to release a lot of people to provide food for the forces and what not, but we were keeping on this war in the Bougainville and these places and that's the way it was.

**When you were coming back from the Philippines, you were bringing**

32:30 **Australian troops back?**

Yeah but not POWs. The war hadn't ended.

**Were they infantry or - ?**

They'd have been, I don't know but and there'd a been cargo too and probably letters and things like that you know.

**Do you remember any particular flights coming back with troops?**

No, only the mountains in New Guinea that shocked me. Gasping for oxygen at 20,000 feet,

33:00 that shocked me a little bit.

**Can you tell me about that, about gasping for oxygen?**

Well it was only once but you know with the mist and fog and the DC-3 had to go to 20,000 feet I think, and you know for a bloke like myself that had been treetop height it was a bit much and I was gasping for breath. We had an oxygen mask to put on us. This was New Guinea, the tropical island.

33:30 **Did your uniform differ on the DC-3?**

No, still the old shirt and shorts. Dunno what shoes I had.

**Did you still have the dagger and the pistol?**

No. No, definitely not.

**What about parachutes?**

No. And that's hurtful to find in my pay book that \$5 forfeiture for a parachute, you know, \$5 was my or it might a been 5 pounds.

34:00 Didn't break me you know, but the fact that someone pinched a parachute, that's a poor show. I could imagine the CO getting very angry. Not that he said it to me.

**Was there much of that stuff that went on?**

I think so. See, blokes used to cluster round the aircraft down the strip and you'd be engaged somewhere like this and you probably had your back turned and bang they'd off with it.

**Did any blokes ever get caught?**

No that I know of.

34:30 Same mentality that caused waterside workers not to load ships for New Guinea you know. They didn't care about the war.

**When did you get your discharge notice?**

August, September, very close to it. They're wanting to get blokes out. They didn't want to keep them in.

**It was before the war had ended?**

35:00 No. No I think that the atom bomb was mid-August and I think Hiroshima. Hiroshima was mid-August I think yeah and I think the peace on the Missouri was the first week in September. A fortnight after the surrender.

**Do you recall hearing the news of the atom bomb?**

Yeah.

35:30 Overjoyed. Overjoyed. The thing that overjoyed me more was in the months of February March and April big 4-engined American bombers were flying at 30,000-feet over those wooden constructions in Japan above the reach of Zeros dropping atom bombs. And that's when the damage was done.

36:00 Overjoyed. And still quietly happy about it because the Japanese had an injunction out that if we'd a landed there they were to kill all POWs. What a thing to say. Kill them all.

**Do you remember where you were when you heard the news about the atom bomb?**

I'd been down south here. I'd be close to discharge.

36:30 **What did you think when you got your discharge notice?**

What am I gonna do? Thought I'd go home to Mum and the family at Wynnum. I went home and went back to the customs for a while. Dunno whether customs thought I was a genius or whether he just hated me. But you know in 1947, I found myself the whole time back in the Northern Territory. And it was a ramshackle place

37:00 then, after the bomb raids and the Commonwealth had requisitioned all the land to make one compact town. And people were living in all sorts of accommodation. It was not the place that I wanted to be in.

**Tell me about actually coming home. Where did you come back to first?**

Wynnum. My mother, my family home. And

37:30 played football for Wynnum. Quickly got into civilian life. Represented Wynnum in football and probably laid the grounds for my knees and. But the big shock was I might have done medicine. I had a good pass. I might a done that but the bloody customs officer said you're back to Darwin. No, do you want to go, we're making allowances for ya. Back you go.

**Do you recall seeing your**

38:00 **family for the first time when you got back?**

Yeah, but they wouldn't have recognised me much, you know. All my sisters were much younger than myself and we had a personal tragedy in 1933 that at the bottom of Bride Street if you know Wynnum do you know Wynnum? It's a street that goes down to the water, that height, one of my little sisters distracted,

38:30 we were distracted by the sound of horses watering and she disappeared. Body recovered in a fishing net out near the mouth of Wynnum Creek. I think it had an effect on mother and father. I think they become very introspective and withdrawn. But the services ruined me. I, in the sense, I saw my fellow man in a different light. I

39:00 wouldn't say I became less religious but I saw religion in a different light. I'd been bought up to say Archbishop Duhig had said that cremation was wrong. That if you ate meat on Friday you would go to hell, and that if your mate's a Protestant had saved you in the air force saved your life and he invited you to his wedding, you'd have to slink like a dog outside the front gate.

39:30 With mixing with all the people that I'd mixed with I just couldn't accept it and became if you like to use the word in inverted commas ruined by the services and by meeting so many good fellow men. So I might that's and I played football in Wynnum I say met a lot of 'em down there and it was a bit of a blow, you know, to go back to Darwin.

**Did you ever feel that from being away**

40:00 **for such a long time with the RAAF that your life had been interrupted?**

Not so much my life had been interrupted, but the fact I didn't get to know my family too much. See bear in mind Nudgee 4 years and a bit. Then the services. Then 1947 in Darwin, that's a fair bit a time and those little girls had grown up didn't seem to know me too much,

40:30 and I think poor old Mum did, because I'd given the allotment to her from there time. She was always - we were always great mates. My father died in 1950, which was not extra long after the war.

**Had you kept in touch with your family while you were away in the war?**

Yeah, when I went to Darwin. I dunno what happened in 1947, but a Wynnum family that a couple that lived up there that knew me, said they got a letter from my family saying contact Bill and

41:00 get him to write home. So I must've been a bit careless about it you know. Just a bit withdrawn from them that's all. But very annoyed about going back. But aren't you gonna ask me about CRTS?

**Yes but we're just at the end of a tape.**

## Tape 7

00:30 **Do you know if the details of the Darwin bombing were supposed to be kept secret by you blokes at the time?**

Definitely not. But certainly by the government. There's a great pall of secrecy put over it but there was no injunction for us not to mention it. But there have been many books written about the Darwin raid after the even. And I think Mr Justice Barry conducted an investigation into the causes of it. But never forget

01:00 that the Catholic Priest at 9:30 wirelessly from Bathurst Island and it was ignored.

**Where was Customs House in Darwin?**

Right on the water opposite the administrator's house.

**Did you find out whether it had been damaged in the raid?**

Yeah I did, and I've looked since and it's still. The bomb hit the house across the road part of customs and killed a native maid.

01:30 **Did you see any casualties yourself while you were there?**

No. I was you know subject to military discipline and I couldn't hang around looking and what not, I had to go with my blokes.

**What did you see of the damage that was wrought on Darwin when you went back there after the war with Customs?**

Shocking, you know, it was in disarray. The federal government too had complicated things too by saying no private property. We're going to amalgamate it all and it's going to be a new city

02:00 and people were very cranky. That's all been changed. But I did my work as a customs officer there but I was putting in for Commonwealth department jobs and you'll notice emphasis on the Commonwealth department and I got one eventually, Department of the Army.

**In the north east where you were flying, what were flying conditions usually like?**

02:30 Pretty good. See you've got to remember Peter, I wasn't over the Owen Stanley Ranges. They were the real thing, you know where people could fly into snow cloud topped mountains and all that. I was further up well up. Well up past Wewak right around to Dutch New Guinea. Pretty good.

**Apart from the barge looking for barges to strafe and that what about the airfields?**

03:00 Yeah, yeah, shot across them looking for any tracks a course. Planes sneaking in. Looking for anything around the place. Looking for ack-ack pits. In short, immobilising the Japs in that part of the world.

**Did you ever catch any Japanese (UNCLEAR) up on the ground?**

We don't know. Come across quickly strafing.

**So on top of the machine gunning out of the front of the Boston**

03:30 **he would be dipping it, so you could use your guns as well?**

Yeah. Yeah.

**Would he normally have a preference as to which wing he would dip so you could do that?**

No definitely not. Nope. Nope.

**So you'd have to be ready to go either way would you?**

Yeah that's right yeah. But, Peter, I cannot understand why I didn't do a gunnery course. Cannot understand that. And there was a gunnery school called Evans Head.

**The**

04:00 **way the aircraft, the Bostons were parked on the strip at Morotai when they were taken out?**

Yeah, wingtip to wingtip.

**Was that a contributing factor in them being so many?**

Yeah definitely. Almost wiped out the whole squadron.

**Was that normal to park them like that?**

Had to be. Morotai was jam packed. I dunno what the names of the strips were. PT. PITOE and WIMA, I think. But jam packed wingtip

04:30 and I think after the war I've heard where. There again we weren't told 22 Squadron ground staff got a British Empire Medal for their heroic actions down the strip for moving the aircraft away from further damage. But you weren't told much, Pete.

**Was there any other names given to the Americans besides Yanks?**

Yanks. Cock suckers.

05:00 What else would we call them? Cock sucking sons of bitches, you know that's right, you know. But I quite liked them you know. We used to refer to the navy as - Have you seen the 'Cock-sucker navy' anywhere around or anything like that? That's the term we used about them and. Cause that's their own language.

**I've never heard that before?**

Hadn't ya? Yeah. Expression there you cock-sucking son of a bitch you know. And so.

05:30 **I imagine you wouldn't be able to say that to their face?**

No. No.

**Do you know what they called the Aussies?**

No I don't. I always thought rightly or wrongly we're held in high regard. Except when they said, "We know you're thieves, leave those telephone lines alone," you know. And we were thieves because we didn't have the proper supplies. I think we ought to be our convict ancestors.

06:00 **How about with getting the necessary things to keep aircraft flying, how were you looked after in that regard?**

We did it but always short staffed you know. That's not my field you know but that's what I feel about it you know. What'd we thought? We thought it was like flies on the backside of a horse. We were up there but we'd have about what 14 Bostons you know

06:30 serviceable the Yanks would have about 40 or 50 you know. We did our very best. We just were, we were poor relations. I thought they were quite good decent people and they saved my country. People will disagree with that. But I look at the submarines and Nimitz coming across the Pacific.

**Because we were the poorer cousin, do you think our aircraft were**

07:00 **actually looked after better than the Americans?**

Probably could be. Very dedicated ground staff. Yeah. I don't think there was much inter-relationship between ground staff and people like me. No enmity, but it was like a class, different class.

**And you've mentioned the thieving of or acquiring of beer and spirits off**

07:30 **the Yanks, what about jungle juice [home made spirits]?**

Yeah, well that happened, and you know we looked with tippity on those because apparently it could lead to bad results. Yeah so I never saw any evidence of it. But the Yanks were always swanning around for grog and they had stuff to that.

**Rightio. Can you tell us about CRTS at the end of the war?**

Yeah I'd like to tell you about that. Like to give it great credit.

08:00 I told you how I came back in 1947 from Darwin and the Department of Customs. Department of the Army at Vic [Victoria] Barracks and I had a big long mate called Tom Honer H-O-N-E-R and we were talking. I relieved Tom in 1947 to Darwin, he was a customs officer and he tells me that or I heard that he'd got on

08:30 the booze and he'd searched an interstate boat, not an overseas boat and they brought him back and maybe that's the reason I was sent there. Anyhow Tom said to me, "Bill are you gonna do a CRTS course?" I said, "I'd like to do dentistry." And I might add here my wife say's it's very good, because I'd a made a hell of a mess of it. I thought of physics and chemistry and I said, "Well

09:00 you know, honestly I said, "My physics and chem [chemistry] from Nudgee are a little bit out of date." Later I was told by dentist Di Martini that there was a refresher course I could have done that I didn't know at the time. But Tom and I agreed to do law and I think because I was an ex-serviceman I didn't have to do Latin, which was wonderful. And

**Why? Do you know why the distinction was made**

09:30 **in that regard?**

I dunno. I could do history and I was very good at history but old Tom I think he got booted out, you know, the law school. But I plugged on and I did it in I think 4 or 5 years the normal time. Got



assistance from my government. They gave me as they gave others, not only paid for the course but I think I got a working wage.

### **And for those**

#### **10:00 that don't know, can you just tell people what CRTS stands for?**

Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. There's a book been written on it and it's a wonderful thing. As I say, servicemen became plumbers, bricklayers, carpenters, judges, doctors and what not. Even former Chief Justice, I moved his son's admission as a barrister. We were talking recently Bob Andrews and he did it. He did law, said it was a wonderful

10:30 thing. And I finally got admitted. I don't know maybe 1954, admitted by a chap that later become a Supreme Court judge, Jim Douglas. A Nudgee old boy and then still being in the Commonwealth went down to the Deputy Crown Solicitor in Brisbane, a Commonwealth man.

11:00 And that irked me, because it was pedantic. You didn't get into court and most everything went to Canberra. So I looked around and my mate down there Jimmy Gibney who later become a Supreme Court Judge he said "Bill," he said "we'd better get out of this." So I resigned from the Commonwealth which was a big thing and went the state and it was the best thing I ever did. You know people'd say that's a demotion, but up in the Treasury

11:30 buildings I had a Solicitor General, a knockabout bloke Bill Ryan, waistcoat, cigarette smoking, doorway next to the minister, the Attorney General and they were all there and we were in court. It was a wonderful thing. And we had to find our own way and I married a woman who was very thoughtful. She's in a nursing home now. But she used to make allowances for the fact that I'd be late up at

12:00 night doing my briefs and I graduated through the ranks up there and become a Crown Prosecutor. And I think I've been to every court in Queensland. I've even been to Weipa. Haven't been to TI [Thursday Island], but been to most of them all. Known a tremendous number of judges and barristers particularly police officers whom I greatly admire. Some maybe

12:30 a little bit crooked, I dunno, didn't talk to em about it. But Merv Stephenson used to be very high. He's in the Stockman's Hall of Fame an old North Queensland police officer in the stock squad. I did a few cases with him we had a few wins. He said "Bill," he said "put your name down as a Northern Crown Prosecutor," he said "and I'll see you're a

13:00 judge within 6 months. Jesus I thought, that's good. So I did that. I brought Mavis up to have a taste of what it was like up there. She spent most of her time lying half naked under a fan in the hotel. It was terrifically hot. She said, "Bill, I can't tolerate this." So I had to pull it out. But life went on. Moved up and I become Acting Senior Crown Prosecutor, top in the state and

13:30 I could tell ya about a lot a cases I had hell of a lot. I told you about the no body case and things like that. And the last 5 years of my life I applied for and they promoted me too. I were supposed to get rid of me really as the Crown Prosecutor of the Public Defender for the State and I had a staff of 79. It was a big job and I had to go over the state to defend, this time, so

14:00 all my life was criminal law. Most of it was that side of the bar table. Last 5 years that side of the bar table. All criminal law. Knew a lot of policemen. Not so friendly with them as a public defender. Went to Mt Isa once as a crown prosecutor, used to be looked after what not as a public defender I went there at the airport, the policeman said, "Look Bill you're the enemy now. I can't give you a lift into town." So that was it.

14:30 But I had no regrets about it and I understood the way they felt. That's the way they looked at things and I did my cases over the state again and that's the way I retired. But did a mostly did all sorts of cases. Cattle. Fraud cases. The lot. Made a hell of a lot a friends. One particular bloke I ring regularly is

15:00 Noel Creevey C-R-E-E-V-E-Y. A very alert bloke. Stock squad. Fraud squad. I assisted him to become a barrister by helping him to study. Having become a barrister got into crown law. Much older than the blokes in crown law, wanted to go back to the police force. Assisted him to get back there and he become Assistant Commissioner of Police. So you can see Pete, it was much

15:30 better my leaving the Commonwealth crown solicitors, because it was a very earthy career.

#### **What are some of the cases that really stand out for you?**

No doubt about it. The no body case. The Queen v. Thomas. See I used to go up there at all cases, be it a road case that I'd go to the scene before it went to trial. Even if it happened at Everton Park and I went up to yeah to Cooktown

16:00 and we went down the beach and had a look at where the last scene there and then it come on for trial in Cairns and I say the lady with the little red hen, little red cap, we thought we had a winner. It was a good case. I brought the brother and sister of Joe Mosura from Pennsylvania to Australia, that'd cost a few bob and

16:30 we couldn't get a decision, because the little red hen and as I say I said, "Your honour, put it down for

the next sittings.” Went up again 3 weeks time and we got a decision. We got a conviction. Murder. He got life. Not very happy about it in the sense of have he did it, but there was no body found. They’re very hard. And

17:00 as I told you very relieved when I found out later that a police officer had down on the beach at Cooktown had found the bones. But did plenty of fraud cases. All manner of cases I don’t think. I didn’t care for rapes. Gave them a bit of a miss. It wasn’t hard to do but

17:30 there was plenty of other stuff to do but. I showed you my – I mentioned didn’t I about Ulun’s [?] book about myself, did I show you the reference there? Didn’t I show you that?

**Which book was that in?**

I thought I showed you this morning.

**I think I did.**

Did you see it? Yeah

**Yes, yes.**

You know I did a lot for the Abos [Aboriginal people], or the indigenous people as they called them, when I was a public defender

18:00 and kicked off cases for them and got a mention in Ulun’s book and altogether satisfied. I’d a been a mere cipher in the Commonwealth Crown I’d be doin’ bankruptcy notices for the Commissioner of Taxation and what not. But in the State Crown Law and it was earthy. Earthy policemen. Earthy defenders. Earthy judges. You were living life. I found it very

18:30 good.

**How have you seen the system change in all the years that you’ve been in it?**

Yeah. Policemen become very ineffectual. Poor devils. They were very earthy men in my day and you know they were pretty bloody good. As Frank Bischof said, “A lot of your detectives are drinking in pubs.” He said, “You wouldn’t expect ’em to be drinking with altar boys.” Which was, you know, they were earthy people and you know the Fitzgerald Inquiry showed that. But I

19:00 never had to do any crooked policemen. They didn’t ask me to distort information. I found them blokes I dealt with that were above average. You know, pillars of society and where they differ from today they weren’t afraid to make decisions. I think the poor devils of today are tied in with this what they call not gender public but politically correct. And in the shire here we got what I call a lot a

19:30 party ragers. You know people go to parties down here in the suburbs on the internet and a hundred or two hundred could turn up at a party and create a scene. And the police are expected to come down and break it down. Pretty hair raising stuff. I think the old blokes would have had their batons out you know. That’s the only thing I make. Very, very happy with it. Happy with my career. Only happy

20:00 unhappy that my life revolved around criminal law. I got to know criminal law but there’s many other features of law other than criminal law. But then again people specialise these days. So that’s the story, Peter. What do you think of it?

**Pretty unreal.**

Yeah.

**So when you look back on such a big career, you know, with your law and**

20:30 **the war, what stands out for you?**

How lucky I’ve been. Fortunate with a good government. Fortunately I didn’t buy it in Darwin. Fortunately the good lord look after me. I’m a lucky fella. I’ve got problems I’ve got the knees, a CT [computed tomography] scan the other day showed I got calcification of the arteries, but then again a little bit of native shrewdness has come into it you know

21:00 I showed my GP [general practitioner] this x-ray and he just, oh yeah, here it is, go. I thought, “That’s calcification of the arteries.” So I rang up my GP, my specialist cardiologist and the girl said he’d see him and he rang me on the answering machine yesterday and it says, “Bill I’ve looked at your X-ray. I want to talk to you.” And I rang her today and she’s going to fix a time and he’s gonna ring me. But it brought home to me

21:30 suppose there is something wrong with the calcification, my GP would have let it go. It’s medical negligence. I’m not gonna sue or anything like that, I’m not gonna do that. But it must happen a lot. Calcification of the arteries means calcification. So that’s just an example.

**When you look back on the time you spent in the war years, how’s that affected the rest of your life?**

22:00 Made me think World War 11's never ended. All the books about World War 11 down the RSL talks about it simple as that.

**When you were a kid before World War 11, did you ever see the Anzac Day marches?**

No. No never. But now I wouldn't be away from it. I lead my men on Anzac Day to march in town. I'm vice president of my association.

22:30 Talk to the old blokes down at the RSL down here. I'm in the Wynnum RSL. I'm in two RSLs and that's just my company, that's what I like these days. Not much to ask for, is it Peter?

**Have you always marched?**

No, because I was so tied up in law. I worked very hard. I'd go to Mt Isa as a Crown Prosecutor with twenty, thirty briefs for a fortnight's sitting.

23:00 Wasn't so serious. As often as not a lot of them were indigenous people and the poor devils would plead guilty properly, so because of grievous bodily harm or attempted murder not done on white people, but on their own womenfolk. So you know I can't complain about anything in life.

**That first year you were back when you went back up for Customs up to Darwin the first**

23:30 **Anzac Day you spent up there, that must've been fairly poignant for you?**

I can't recall it honestly. But it was a shell shocked town when I went there. '47 the war had ended in '45 and they had pock marks everywhere, and buildings down and no Chinese, you know, Cavenagh Street was a wreck and nothing of the glamour that I'd seen before the war.

24:00 **Have you been back since?**

Yeah and I'd like to do it this year. Mavis is in the nursing home, I've got a trip to the Blue Mountains 8 days with the RSL in May, in April. I've got in May I've got another trip to Innamincka to the Bourke and Wills Tree. But I would like to see Darwin in wintertime. I'd like to see where the Ghan stops, you know, things like that. I

24:30 know the place. I've traipsed over it. I'm a Territorian. So that's really the story and you know I've got no complaints.

**When did you first join the RSL?**

Very soon after the war at Wynnum but gave it a miss because well I had the law. But I've asked lately at the RSL in Wynnum

25:00 have they got the records. But they said you know they had none after fifty, 1950 or something. They'd been destroyed or something you know. But yeah that's my life the RSL. World War 11. Politics. Reading the paper, you know. And although I'm alone here you know life seems to be pretty full today. You know you take today. I had an appointment set aside for you, I could have been there till 2:30, which had have been wrong.

25:30 But life is full. The only thing is my good old mate, my wife, I had ideas that we'd see we've seen a lot of the world in my working days all except South Africa and. Africa and South America, but she's not well enough to do it and I'm not prepared even to drive to the airport you know with my legs. So there has been a change in my lifestyle. But I repeat,

26:00 I'm reasonably happy.

**Did you ever get a chance to go back up to New Guinea?**

Yeah I did. Battle of the Bismarck Sea reunion. Our squadron was involved in that. Not shooting down the troop ships or that but keeping Lae airfield under attack. And I liked very much what I saw in Madang. It's supposedly called the prettiest town in the South Pacific.

26:30 And it's I liked what I saw. But I make the point, Peter, that if things had been a bit different for me in the war I'd a been on the move all the time. That's what I liked.

**So at the end of the day, you're happy with your decision to have joined the RAAF?**

Yeah, I think so, because if I'd a stayed at DX 839 I'd just have traipsed the Northern Territory. It'd be one of those units up there. I'd have been down to Katherine.

27:00 or the river at all. I saw a whole new world took part in World War 11 and bear in mind I did enlist in the RAAF in the Northern Territory and you know I'm happy. Met a lot a people liked what I saw and particularly in the law. Particularly that movement from Commonwealth to state. That Commonwealth that I loved so much

27:30 I could see in the law no it was academic. It was like a branch office of Canberra. And the state that's where the action was. That's where you presented the indictments, that's where you had to front. And my hard stick Peter was that I tried to keep my breast myself abreast in the law, criminal law that if I'd had to have an argument with someone and had to get out that I could take my place at the private bar.

And I had a lot of support from my wife ,and that's why I see her

28:00 so regularly. She's been a good mate and she's never let me down and she's supported me in the law. And bear in mind, I had to do a lot in the country. As I say that every town that's got a court, a superior court and some that haven't I visited.

**Did you ever miss flying at the end of the war?**

No never at all. Not at all.

28:30 **How did your religion serve you while you were in the war?**

Pretty good. Pretty good, I was just talking to the vice president of the Wynnum RSL yesterday and he and I bumped into each other at Morotai Island going in about December going in before Monsignor Frawley's church to hear

29:00 Mass and we both agreed that we must have done it because we thought we were gonna die. But you know always. But I had a different attitude to my religion as I gave you the reasons you know with striking fellas with just complexities different attitudes and got a new look into it.

**What were the RAAF padres like?**

Never saw one.

29:30 No honestly, didn't see one.

**Did you see any of the Salvation Army fellas up there?**

Yeah, with the biscuits and you know they were very good. Had a lot of admiration for them, you know. Be down the airstrip.

**So were there church services held for the RAAF blokes?**

Can't remember any. But I wanted to convey

30:00 you know that in Darwin and in the services in the RAAF and the army, and particularly in the law struck some very decent people some good blokes you know.

**What one thing stands out when you think when someone mentions the words World War 11?**

30:30 Thank Christ those bloody Japs were beaten, they were mongrels.

**Post-war, what did you think of Japanese?**

Don't care for them because I was reading in the books rightly or wrongly that our Prime Minister at the time Menzies who had defeated Chifley in the election was so keen on trade with Japan that he hadn't gone ahead with proper war crimes trials. Whether

31:00 that's true or not I don't know. But I do not like that period that fortnight between Hiroshima and the Missouri whereby the Japs did a lot a burning. Burning papers and there was an injunction by the Japanese High Command that in the event of the invasion of the mainland every POW was to be killed. You ever heard such nonsense?

31:30 I hope you're hearing this talk from others just not from me.

**So what are your thoughts on Anzac Day now that you've got time to - ?**

Very wrapped in it. I think of it and I like the crowds there. I like the wearing of the ribbons on the right breast by people whose ancestors they are. A bit concerned myself. As I say Boston Beaufighters, I led the parade. I think we only had five in it. It could be a little bit embarrassing

32:00 in the future if there's only 2 or 3. A little bit wrong. Cause we're all getting old and I'll talk to our secretary and I'll think we'll try to amalgamate with one of the Catalina squadrons or something. But I like it. I like the little bit of a function afterwards and I like the parade and I just like everything.

**And where have you marched like Wynnum or**

32:30 **Cleveland or - ?**

No, in the city. I go up to town link up with my blokes and that then march. But we're getting smaller in numbers.

**So what do you say to young Australians that might see this, in you know, five, ten years time?**

It's a bit worrying. I can only speak for myself but the RSL has got to look toward Vietnam vets. And after that broaden their base to look

33:00 to National Service trainees, cause the RSL is big business now. That club down there is owned by the RSL, it's got a club as a tenant. The RSL club it's got to be kept going, it's a business. And there's a bit

decision going to be made at the RSL club'll be absorbed into the RSL, so all I say is that

33:30 happens which may be good the RSL must be prepared to have competent men in the committee running the business, not drunks. So as I say I thought I was going to be chastised today but I was welcomed down there and they wanted to talk about Perske. I'd like you to read a bit about Perske when you could. You hadn't heard the name before had you? Local hero down here. Attempting to put those limpet

34:00 mines on the Japs caught within a short space a time he and his partner were and they helped a brim[?] to escape by the lack of the code word. Saw a bar, jail heads came off, serum inserted into them experiments beforehand and the only thing known of Perske is his remains are known only to God. Just the skeletal remains of his fingers.

34:30 And a fella that's well known down here. And to the credit to the RSL, a Cliff Perske Drive. A Cliff Perske Oval and a Cliff Perske Bursary. I think that's something we should do and we've done.

**Can you talk about the importance of the Boston Beaufighter Association?**

Yeah. See 22 Squadron was a peacetime squadron too, City of Sydney,

35:00 and I was surprised when I went down to the maybe a year ago to the dedication to the Newton Plaque in Canberra that so many people were there you know much younger than myself, former members and you know we've got a list around and we've got people that communicate with us, but we are very worried about the drop in numbers. See I'd be the youngster, but I'm 80.

35:30 Blokes 85, 90, not gonna last long. What I'm concerned about now is another thing interest have you heard of RSL Care? They're gonna build a big complex down here at Thornlands and I've got my name down on it because you see the bars on the windows, I'm all right now. I love the place. Five years time if the good Lord keeps

36:00 me, could be different. I could be looking for somewhere. I don't dare to drive into town with my knees. Life's changed. I want to see my wife up the road.

**If you get into RSL Care down the road, will it be you and your wife?**

No I've talked about that. She requires intense care. This would be down at RSL Care

36:30 duplexes and I'd buy into one altogether against my nature because I'm a chap that's born up to fee simple. Do you know what fee simple is? Absolute title. Most people have it. If I go down there I get a license to occupy. Strange isn't it? And at the end of the time if I pass on and it's sold the fine print says to be sold at their discretion.

37:00 And a retired judge has told me that he's lost money over his mother's death because sold at their discretion means take your turn. He was fifth in line a long time and the fine print says keep your payments up. So I've got to look at it, haven't I?

**How do you think the care of the veterans of World War 11's been?**

Pretty good. I think our government's pretty generous with TPIs [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension]

37:30 and gold cards, I can't fault them.

**Is there anything that you'd like to say to the archive any last thing?**

Well I'd like to just convey to them that I'm very happy with my government and my country. The way it's treated us. And I'd just like to recap that things that've happened, I've got no complaints about

38:00 CRTS. They've made me comfortable, I can live here. Why would I whinge? See it's wonderful. That's all I'd like to say. What do you think?

**Beautiful.**