Australians at War Film Archive

Grace Sands (Patricia) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 I was born in Brisbane in a suburb called Taringa. There's Taringa, Toowong, St Lucia all sitting up on hills, you know, Brisbane's very hilly. So, Taringa is where we lived

01:00 and I went to the Taringa Primary School as did my brothers and sisters and my father, because he had grown up in Taringa. Then we moved on when we finished primary school we went to the Grammar School as my father did. He was at Brisbane Boys Grammar and all my brothers were there and

01:30 we girls went to Brisbane Girls Grammar. So the tradition went on through, even to this day to the nephews, the great nephews. Five generations have been to the Grammar Schools in Brisbane, which I think is pretty special, don't you? Especially the boys because my great uncle was there

02:00 he was an architect. My father was a marine engineer, went to sea and then it became all a bit too much for mother so he left the sea and joined his family firm which was a little shipping firm going up and down the Queensland coast, called William Collin and Son. And William Colin was number one,

02:30 Captain William Collin, my father's grandfather, was number one on the marine register in Queensland. So, he was quite a famous man in his own right and this was the direct family firm and Dad worked for them. Well, after all he had all his children to support, although he didn't have nine then.

03:00 Anyway, we had a wonderful, wonderful childhood, of course. In those days, cousins and uncles and aunts were vital to the fabric of the family. Mother had two sisters. Mother never drove.

03:30 She's over there rowing on the Brisbane River, the little one in the middle there.

Yeah, beautiful.

Yes, she was a wonderful rower, which is interesting because all my sons rowed and my grandsons and my great nephews all rowed, so, it's in the genes.

Did you row?

Not me, no, I rode horses and played tennis and

04:00 played netball and ran. I didn't row, although I can, but I didn't row competitively.

So she was with a rowing club was she?

Yes, Toowong Rowing Club and that's what she did because, see, she didn't work. Her sisters worked, one was a teacher, they were younger than she.

04:30 They had jobs, but mother didn't. In those days, the eldest girl generally stayed at home and helped her mother. That was the tradition, and perhaps she wanted to anyway. But, she had time to pursue her interests, such as riding horses. And she came from the country, my mother, a property outside of

05:00 a place called Harrisville, which is north west of Ipswich, back up in the country. So, she was born on this property and she was used to lots of space and went to school up there and then her father was a dairy inspector for Queensland and they came to Brisbane and

05:30 she just went to a school there where Anzac Square is now, they pulled it down, but I do remember it all those years ago, seeing this school that my mother went to. It was called the Normal School, isn't that interesting?

The Normal School?

Yes, and it was pulled down and flattened and they built Anzac Square there. Which is good,

06:00 it's a centre, very important situation in Brisbane.

Do you know the reason as to why it was called the Normal School?

No, I don't, I think it was, no, I don't. Because all these questions, I'd now like answers to and there's nobody left to ask because they've all flown off to God, you see. Anyway, we all went to the Grammar School and I was there in

06:30 1933, 34, 35, 36 and did my senior exam, what they call here now the ECE [Entrance Certificate Exam] and I passed it and I wanted to be a marine biologist but, in those days getting into university was tough. I didn't get a good enough pass. I didn't win a scholarship.

07:00 In '36, '37, see, the Depression was in the early '30s and there were scholarships available but only a very limited number so I decided I would do a course in shorthand, typing and bookkeeping and I did and my eldest

07:30 brother, he was an architect, well he's still alive, his office was in the bank of New South Wales and he said, "We'll set up an appointment and I can get you in to see the manager", which he did and I was interviewed they took me on

08:00 the staff after I'd given the right answers to all their questions and so I started work in the Bank of New South Wales, which I thoroughly enjoyed, because I liked working with figures, you see. I got on the relieving staff so I went to every branch in Brisbane and lots of branches in places like Ipswich, which were not too far away

08:30 from home, where I could go by train. And I worked in the travel department as well, organising people on overseas trips and it was a really good job, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Let's go back into the childhood years, I'd like to get a picture of Brisbane and how you spent your

09:00 **childhood, you were very active by the sounds of it.**

Oh, yes, yes. Well, as I said, we had cousins and lots of friends and we played tennis quite a lot and rode bicycles, of course. We had bicycles galore having three older brothers and we were always getting another second hand bicycle that had a

09:30 punctured back tyre. So, we quickly learnt how to fix the tyres and my brother Peter and I, that's Peter, we went off riding together, anywhere and everywhere, up hill, down vale, putting our feet up on the handle bars, doing all sorts of terribly wicked things but thoroughly enjoying it. And we played tennis, a lot, and

10:00 when were up in the country at my mother's cousin's home, the old home where she was born, Waratah, and they had horses, we rode the horses and went out with the dray while they collected fire wood and drove the Clydesdale and I loved doing all that, you know, standing up in this dray, holding the reins, with the Clydesdale pulling the dray with lumps of wood

10:30 stored and they'd hobble off, my cousins, boys, strong young men, bung another piece of timber on that had fallen off a gum tree and off we'd go, because everything was wood, you see, wood stoves, wood fires to heat you in the old farm house. So there was plenty of wood around but, you still see it on the TV [television], people picking up wood.

11:00 **Sounds like you sort of, mucked in with the boys, I'm getting the sense that you were quite accepted, as a girl?**

Oh, yes. Having three big brothers, oh, yes. And we had boy cousins and as I said, we spent a lot of time with our boy cousins, playing tennis with them, doing that sort of thing. There was no problem, there was no discrimination.

11:30 And being in a large family as we were, you see, everyone was doing the same things. You think that doesn't happen these days? Well, it doesn't, I suppose. Girls are discriminated against, so are boys sometimes. Although, we went to separate girls' schools and boys' schools but, they were

12:00 the antithesis of one another you see, because we all had brothers at this school and we were here at the Girls' Grammar, here's the Boys' Grammar so it was all interwoven as it were and we travelled on the train together in the same carriage, the same seat and saw somebody get in the next station.

12:30 Everybody knew everybody when you were doing the same things everyday.

So, nine children in the family, very big family, was it big for those days?

Oh, well, mother's family there were only four, the eldest brother, the only brother, Noel, he's still missing from the First World War and then three girls, but, I suppose

13:00 a lot of my cousins, my uncles and aunts, they had four children or six, you know, nine seemed a lot at the time but, little bit spread out because I'm twelve years older than my youngest sister. So, she virtually was only a little girl when I left to join the air force, as you see in the photo, she was quite tiny.

13:30 But, I don't think it was unusual for those days. You, yourself, said there was nine in your family, was it, or your mother's family?

My mother's family. So did you live in the one house in Brisbane?

Yes, oh, two. The first house was next door to the one we finally bought.

14:00 The first house where we were all born was in Ada street, Taringa. Mother used to have, in those days, home birth was the usual thing and she had this nurse, whose name was Warwicka, Nurse Warwicka, used to come and stay in the house for two weeks and look after the mother and the new baby and we had a

14:30 housekeeper as well who used to come and rule the roost in the kitchen and not the same one every time a new baby came. But, I was terrified of the nurse. She wore starch white everything and everything was stiff and I was a bit nervous of her, because I had long hair,

15:00 plaits, and mother always did my plaits, so I used to knock on the door, we had this Queensland house with verandas and French doors opening on to the veranda, lovely big houses they were, and I remember when one of the younger children arrived and I went in and stood at this French

15:30 door of the veranda and the sister said, "Yes, you can come in and your mother will do your hair for you", which she did, brushed it and plaited it and then took the bits of hair out of the brush and wrapped it around her finger, you know, have you seen people do that? And gave it to me and I was supposed to put it in the waste paper basket or go and

16:00 put it in the flower place or somewhere and I just walked straight out the door and dropped it over the railing and the sister said, "Patricia, you naughty girl, you go down and pick that up", and I'd dropped it off the veranda and I had to go downstairs onto the grass or the gravel or whatever it was and find it. I was so frightened of her.

16:30 I did, I found it. I learnt never to drop things off the railing, I mean, mother wouldn't have minded but sister whatever her name was, minded very much, anyway.

Do you recall the births, I mean the brothers and sisters that came after you?

Only the last two,

17:00 when they were born I heard mother calling out at night and it sort of rather frightened me a bit. We were in bed, my sister and I in the sleep-out which was near her room. No, we were never there, I mean, we were kept well and truly out of the way and Dad was panicking because it was raining and the doctor hadn't arrived and I remember him rushing to the phone and I remember hearing

17:30 the phone ringing. But the doctor turned up, Dad didn't have to do it, it was just this tremendous rainstorm, you see, in Brisbane, which happens, thunderstorms and what not and it was the middle of the night so my sister and I were calling out and Dad was saying, "You must be quiet girls, the doctor's coming, he's just held up with the rain".

18:00 But that's all I remember. I used to help with the looking after, taking the baby in the little pram and pushing it around and etcetera, doing the washing up, doing all the things that the eldest daughter has to do.

An old Queenslander house, the nine children, your mum, I mean giving birth to nine children.

Well, we had a laundress, you know,

18:30 she worked hard, but, she didn't have to do all the housework because we had Mrs Brown who came and did the washing, the copper had to be lit and all that sort of thing, there were no washing machines, no wringers, no mangles. I used to have to help put out the washing.

19:00 Often it was done at night because it was too hot during the day. Anyway, we had Mrs Brown who came and helped and scrubbed the kitchen floor and did all those things. We had another, Mrs Glassop, who came and helped mother with the sewing, you know, mending sheets, etcetera, etcetera and she made clothes. She worked hard, everybody worked hard.

19:30 We children we had to do our bit too, which we did, and I thought that was normal, that everybody did those things. And we had lovely, our whole day once a year up in the country with mother's relatives or down when my aunt and uncle, the next sister to mother, they bought some land at Broadbeach, in those days was just bush.

20:00 Uncle Hugh, he ended up Solicitor General for Queensland but he was in a legal family and he was Crown Solicitor for Queensland and he bought this block of land down what is now Broadbeach I would

20:30 think, you know, on the Gold Coast. He never drove a car, but his wife, my mother's sister, Aunt Nelsie, she drove the car, and they had two sons, one a bit older than I and one a bit younger and they were my favourite cousins, boy cousins, and my favourite boy cousins. Alan, the elder one,

21:00 he was at Brisbane Grammar as well, with some of my elder brothers and I just thought he was wonderful, he had red hair, I liked that, dark red hair. Anyway, she used to ask me down because they had no daughters and I was like their long lost daughter, you see, and I learnt to swim in the Nerang River. Walking from Broadbeach across

21:30 the highway was the main road down to Coolangatta, but it wasn't a four lane highway like it is now or six lane, over to the Nerang River and Aunt Nelsie took us there, Rainer, myself and my sister, or was it Peter and me, and this elderly man,

22:00 well I thought he was old but he probably was only about in his fifties, he was there every day because he had this mission in life to children how to swim. He wanted to make sure that any children who came and swam in the river could swim properly, which I thought was most, or I do think know, very admirable but, of course, when I was younger, I thought, "Oh, well if he's going to teach us to swim,

22:30 I'm all for it". So, that's where we went every day, over to the Nerang River and you know, I enjoyed my swimming and he made sure we were all doing the right thing and he was watching us and then we would trot along back to the house, the one at Broadbeach, and have a little bit of lunch and then go in the surf in the afternoon. No lifesavers, no flags in those days,

23:00 I'm talking about the twenties. But, it was paradise, absolute paradise, we used to see dolphins and ships, gorgeous.

Were there many drownings?

In the surf? No.

Or the river?

Oh, not in the river. Well, not where we went because we were very carefully supervised by this person. We didn't do anything stupid.

23:30 We always went at the same time every morning and he was there and he just watched over us and taught us to swim. So, as children that's how we learnt to swim and then later on there was a swimming pool at Toowong, not at Taringa, at Toowong, it was the next suburb and we could walk there or

24:00 ride the bicycle and go to swimming there, which we did, my brother, Peter and I. We were very good friends because he was only 15 months older than I and we were like twins and we did everything together and it was wonderful. That's how

24:30 we spent our childhood, having holidays in the country, having holidays down at the beach.

I'd just like to know a bit more about what your father did.

As I said, he was a marine engineer and he worked in the family firm, William Colin and Sons and

25:00 trailed up and down the Queensland coast on ships, their own ships and then they also went into the sand and gravel business on the Brisbane River we used to go up the river on ships and he worked in the engine room doing all that sort of thing. And then mother decided, or

25:30 they both decided that he maybe would venture off into something else and he was totally fascinated with cars so he worked with a firm called Evers who decided to import American Studebakers into Australia and he worked for them and

26:00 became quite an expert in that business because anything engineering, you know, whether it be ship's engines, car's engines, steam engines, he had model steam engines and he used to make these models of the Flying Scotsman and all those things and he had a room, set up permanently with lines

26:30 and we children loved it. And Steve would remember when we lived out of Brisbane down in Sydney and we used to go up to see my parents and I take them up to see grandpa get his steam engines going, you see, I'd ring from Warwick or somewhere when were driving up and say, "We'll be there in an hour and a half", so he'd have everything heating up, warming up.

27:00 "Hello Grandpa, hello Grandma, and where are the trains?", he'd say, "Come with me", and he had all these railway lines. I've still got one of the Hornby engines, but, he had many of those, the models, Colin [interviewer], do you know about Hornby play toys,

27:30 wind up? But he made his own steam engines and they were beautifully made, you know, absolute perfect scale models of the Flying Scotsman. So that's what we did, and books, the whole room was lined with books. If he wasn't staying up all night reading books, he was staying up all night finishing another engine.

28:00 **So he would go off on the ships?**

By this time when I was growing up, he'd left the sea and he was with this firm and they were selling Studebakers and we got a car and, you know, we were the envy of everybody else, we had this

wonderful Studebaker and it was a big double touring car with front seat,

28:30 back seat, hood that you can fold back, no seat belts, they weren't invented till decades later. We'd all pile in, you see, six of us, and the pram or the pusher thing stuck onto the luggage rack at the back and the toolbox on the running board

29:00 and drive up to that farm where my mother was born with all these children in the car, across the Brisbane River on a ferry, it was fabulous, as children, a fabulous life, really. We just thought it was normal, that's what everybody did, but, of course, it wasn't normal because as the Depression

29:30 occurred and people were unemployed it was pretty horrible, but everyone managed to get through it ok. I know we didn't have the household help as much as we used to have, because Dad's job wasn't, sort of, paying as much as it should have and all these children to

30:00 educate and what not, but, we battled on the, I think they were brilliant, the way they did battle on. We won little scholarships at the Grammar School that helped with the fees, you know, reduced when we applied and entered and because we would step down the line they knew which family we were because of the name, not that

30:30 that had any influence with winning a scholarship but if you were bright enough and you got a good enough pass out of primary school and into secondary school you could get a government assisted scholarship which reduced the fees a bit. So we didn't have to leave the Grammar School, we just carried on with our education. Our parents were keen for us to have that education.

31:00 **So, can you tell me a bit about your education at the Grammar School?**

Well, we did everything, you know. I didn't do Chemistry. You had a choice. I did English, of course, that was compulsory and Maths, compulsory,

31:30 and as you got onto the later years, the last two years, I did Art, English, French, Maths A, Biology and, another subject, what was it? Oh, yes, we did two Maths,

32:00 Algebra and Geometry and Mathematics, ordinary Maths, and Biology and Art and that's about all. I managed to get through all those subjects and they said I didn't get a good enough pass to get a scholarship to the university, but then it was ok because I went to work in the bank, I was doing what I liked doing.

32:30 I was a ledger keeper, adding up ledgers, big ledgers, like this. All handwritten, cheques written in, debit, credit, cheques 19 pounds, 11 shillings and 10 pence hope me or 300 pounds, 18 shilling and 9 pence, all written out in the ledger,

33:00 all added up in your head, there were no electronic little aides like they have now, adding machines or anything. Just straight up the columns, I'd written them all in so I knew I could read my own writing. I was good at it because I was good at mental arithmetic, you see, so I always balanced the books at the end of the day.

33:30 And if there were a mistake sometimes by the end of the month when the pressure was on, one of the branches I was at, the sub-accountant said he'd help me because they didn't like paying overtime. We worked on Saturday mornings, banks were always open on Saturday morning and it was nine to five,

34:00 work hours and they didn't like you to be working at six when you were supposed to be finished at five and he used to help occasionally with the ledgers and adding up and then there was an error and nothing balanced, so we had to go back over it again. It was always that man who made the mistake, not me. I know it sounds as if I'm bragging

34:30 I was good at my job, you see and I could tell it was his figure work, his writing, not mine, he didn't like it one little bit, being caught out making an error in addition. But that's life, as it was then.

What bank was it?

Bank of New South Wales, the first bank in Australia and I was at, they had

35:00 many branches there, in Brisbane. One in Adelaide Street, Eagle Street, Fortitude Valley Post Office, Rose Street South Brisbane, Woolloongabba, Ipswich, I worked at all those and the main head office. So, that's nine or ten different branches I was working in. Because I was on the relieving staff

35:30 they got to know you and I also could type so when I went to the country branches like Ipswich I used to be able to, the manager would come in and say, Miss Voller, he used to call me, "I'd like you do this, copy this Will and you'll be excused from your bookkeeping work while you do this",

36:00 So bla bla bla on the typewriter, it was good fun, you worked hard. I had to travel there in the train, of course.

And stay?

No, I never stayed overnight, I always managed to get home, used to have long hours. Walk to the

station, catch the train to Ipswich, change trains half way

36:30 and get on to an express and all that sort of thing but, well, you just accept it, that's what work was all about and be thankful to have a job, a good job. But women staff in those days, as I told you, it was,

37:00 I finished school in 1936 and then I went to college and learnt shorthand, typing and bookkeeping and then got the job in the Bank of New South Wales that would be 1937.

37:30 There were no female tellers in those days, males only. The girls, the young lads who started the day I started in August 1937,

38:00 I was paid or any of the other girl who started work on the same day I did, we were paid 12 and 6 pence a week and the boys who started on that same day and they might have been able to do ledger work, but they couldn't type, we got two thirds of what they were paid.

38:30 And until I left the bank and joined the air force, it was always the same. Women only received two thirds of what males received. And it's happening today, did you hear that Steve? It was on the news last night about some women only getting two thirds of what the men received doing the same work, it's unreal.

39:00 So I enjoyed that work, especially doing the travel department, you know, in the in between I'd get taken off the ledgers to work in the travel department and in those days people spent, especially

39:30 the graziers and wealthy farmers in Queensland, you know, lived out west, always went on long sea trips maybe to England or somewhere and you had to go down to the travel department of,

40:00 oh, one of those shipping companies, P&O [P&O Cruises] I suppose, book their journeys, they wanted to go to Europe for six months and they wanted to follow a set itinerary. So I would go down and I would meet with these people, wealthy customers who'd come in from their

40:30 country properties, to the travel department, discuss it with the travel officer and I was his number two and then I used to, he didn't leave his department, his desk, when it was all worked out what they wanted to do, then I would go down to the shipping companies or the railway or wherever they wanted to travel and organise it all for them and then they would come in

41:00 and we would hand them their tickets on a plate, as it were, it's all fixed, it's all booked, all you've got to do it pay for it and they were happy to pay for it, they had the money. Well, it was very interesting, I enjoyed doing that sort of work.

Tape 2

00:30 I'm in the bank, working, Saturday mornings and then I had this friend who said, "Patty you've got to come with me, we're going to join the Air Force Club, they're opening a place to feed service men who,

01:00 like Ken was, or anybody else, who are away from home on Saturdays, give them some lunch or some dinner, dance with them, play cards, do something, just fill in their little brief time away from their place and give them a bit of home life, you see. So I joined the Air Force Club

01:30 and we used to go down to the, they had a couple of rooms near the cathedral in Brisbane, and we used to go down there on Saturday afternoons and I used to peel 60 potatoes and cook them all up and we had to prepare the meals for these boys who were coming in you see, to have a little bit of home, as it were.

02:00 And that's how I met Ken, because he was a Western Australian, he was based in Amberley and Peter had gone off, Peter was on a number 5 course, Empire Air Training Scheme, Ken was on a number 7 course, so they were very early on in the war. But Peter had gone off and he was posted missing on the 6th of January 1942.

02:30 And, oh, it was terrible that whole thing, but Ken was posted missing about the same time. But, that's how I met Ken anyway, he was based at Amberley doing the last bit of his flying. So, I met him and a few of his friends

03:00 he enjoyed it and he used to tell me out Western Australian, which to me was the other end of the earth, you know, when you live in Brisbane, Perth's a long, long way away. But, anyway, that's how it all happened. So I stayed at the Air Force Club and when Peter was posted, oh, and then they started advertising for women to apply to be cipher officers and

03:30 air women or ordinary girls who went in as typists or transport drivers, not holding officer's rank, they had to be 18 or above, but, if you applied to do an officer's course you had to be 21. So, when I turned 21 and I was coming up to 22, I was 21 and a half, I saw

04:00 this ad for women to apply to do an officer's course and maybe specialise in cipher and I thought, "Well, that's something I could do", because you see, I worked in a bank and I was good with figures. So, I applied, had my interview, the chief RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] officer came up to Brisbane and I remember being called in to see her

04:30 and she had the entry paper, "Voller", she said, "What sort of a name is that", I said, "British". I was furious, she thought I was going to say German or Austrian or some weird. "British", well, I mean, my forebears came from Britain, so there we are, they're British. Anyway,

05:00 I was called up and I went off and did my officer's course and I had to come to Melbourne and I'd never been to Melbourne and we lived at Queen's College. We were billeted there in Queen's College. And you remember a couple of years ago they talked about, in the newspaper, the night this American serviceman murdered some person near the university? Well, boy, I was walking back to Queen's College from the tram,

05:30 at night and I heard this, somebody walking behind me and I thought, it was a dim out in Melbourne, it wasn't a total blackout, but it was what they called a brown out, and I was really scared so I hurried along and I got to the entry to Queen's College and darted in

06:00 and from then on we were never supposed to come home by ourselves from Swanson Street or Collins Street, wherever we were catching the tram, wait till somebody else comes whom you know will be on your officer's course and come in a group. So I did. And that was that night that that women from the university was grabbed and murdered about that time I was coming back.

06:30 I was terrified, I didn't know, but my mother in Brisbane heard about it on the radio, or read about it in the newspaper, she was frantic because she knew where I was and I was travelling around at nighttime. Only in the weekends because we were so flat out doing this class, you know, drill, navigation, everything. Flat out at

07:00 Queen's College. Living in the college with the university students, boys, who were not supposed to cross that invisible line. Well, they didn't but we had to have a meal with them in their dining room at Queen's College, it was very interesting. All these boys looking at these girls. There were not too many girls and some older men who were not in physical condition

07:30 to be able to fly or go into planes, they had to have ground jobs, you see, and they decided to become cipher officers too. It was a fascinating course.

Can you tell me a bit about the course?

Well, it's just learning how they converted plain language into cipher,

08:00 groups of figures, you see. And then the operators used to send it off in Morse code, the signals, all we did, was have the signals in plain language and convert it into cipher or vice versa, cipher converted to plain language. It was a very intense course.

08:30 You had to be very careful with your figures that you didn't make an error because if you did, you see, you wouldn't have a 'B' you'd have another letter because you'd put the wrong figure, so you had to be very careful and I was careful because in my bookkeeping days doing all those ledgers I had to make

09:00 sure I didn't make any mistakes or nothing came out perfectly and balanced. So the same with the cipher. Anyway, I graduated from the course, it was very intense, as I said, we had to learn drill as well because it was an officer's course we had to learn how to operate as an officer with women, other women, who

09:30 just ordinary airwomen or corporals or whatever but, often older. But, I graduated, and I did well, because I was 22 and my name was read out as going to Townsville and I didn't realise that the town, I thought it may be alphabetical,

10:00 then I realised, no, 'V' is near the end of the alphabet and somebody else came after me so it wasn't alphabetical, it was in numbers of where you graduated, where you were on your passing out level, you see, so four of us were sent to Townsville as cipher officers and I was the youngest. But I was given the travel documents

10:30 because I graduated ahead of all these other women who were with me, which I found fascinating. The travel document meant, it was a big document with our names on it and our number, my number was 352216, Grace Patricia Voller, Assistant Section Officer,

11:00 and my posting was to Townsville, north eastern area. And we were plonked onto this train from Brisbane because I'd gone back from Melbourne to Brisbane just to say goodbye to mother and father and the family. Mother came into the train with me and we left at night and she said to the conductor, "Now, these girls, all these troops",

11:30 and he said, "Madam, they're all together, the four of them are together and I'm the only one who has the key, don't worry I'll be looking after them, all the other carriages are full of troops", but he said, "I'm the person who's going to look after those girls". So he was trying to reassure my mother, you see,

going off into the world

12:00 of the unknown. Well, boy, it was quite a journey, because we left, she came to the train and she was there and I gave her a hug and kiss and got in and introduced the others and I was the youngest one there, of the girls, they were all older than I was, two of them were in their thirties,

12:30 anyway, I'd been given this sheet of paper with our full names, our numbers and our destination, we were all going to Townsville and we were barely out of Ipswich and this woman called Pryer came up to me and she said, "Voller, I want my ticket",

13:00 she said, "I'm going off further down the carriage", because to see men, soldiers, men. She was married, her husband was in the Middle East, but she was a, well, I won't say what I thought, I didn't know much about it then but, boy, I said, "I can't give you your ticket, it's all one sheet of paper, two sheets of paper, I can't tear any of that,

13:30 I've got to hand this in intact". And she flounced off. Anyway, off we went and we were travelling up the Queensland coast and we got to St Laurence, which is south of Rockhampton and we were stopped at three stations along the way, for food. We'd hop out and grab some toast or ham sandwich

14:00 and drink, ten minutes then back in the train go off for another four hours. Anyway, we got to St Laurence in the middle of the night, or early hours of the morning and the train had jumped the point, somebody had made a mistake with the points cause they had a little branch line going off like that where they probably

14:30 parked goods' trains so the express could go through. The troop trains were going up. The Americans had landed in Brisbane and that meant lots and lots of troops and the war was intense, you know, the Coral Sea Battle, it was just in it's dying stages then

15:00 and troops had to be moved up north, including the Americans. Well, here we were they had to fix this junction in the line because the engine had jumped the points, you see, and there was an awful shuddering that they had to stop the train and get crews in to fix it.

15:30 Had to travel from Rockhampton, I suppose and there were three troop trains all one behind the other and all these people. We were the only women. The army had to move in and feed us while they worked day and night to fix up this section of the railway line. It was horrendous.

16:00 The good news was that there were quite a few Americans, there was a little tiny pub at St Laurence and they said that we could go over there, the army came in to feed us, brought the food, the ham sandwiches, the bits of coffee, tea, whatever, but the OC [? Occupation] troops on the train, they were retired colonels, army people, they said,

16:30 "You will be allowed to go, you can leave the train, because we are going to be here for a couple of days, and go over to the hotel, and of course, some of these Americans, coloured men, no doubt, were hot jazz enthusiasts and the music was incredible, I'd never heard anything like it, this is 1942. Never heard anything like it.

That they played?

They played at this pub, there was a piano and

17:00 when we went over to listen to it, it was mind boggling for somebody like me. I love jazz, I loved all that music, but to see it and hear it and it was real, not on record.

Where did you stay for those couple of days?

On the train, on the train. That's all, with our conductor there, you know, guarding us,

17:30 except for Pryer who'd darted off down to the next carriage. Didn't see her, oh, she was a terrible woman. Anyway, we got up to Townsville, I reported to the senior RAAF officer and of course, she knew all about it, everything, because they'd been informed that the train had been delayed at St Laurence, south of Rockhampton

18:00 and this troop train would be late. And she'd heard all sorts of distorted stories, none of which were true but I said, "We were allowed to go, the OC [officer commanding] troop on the train said we could go to the pub, to the hotel, madam, and listen to the music", which, I told her the truth. Anyway, all was well. I gave her my

18:30 pieces of paper and everything was fine. I had to go work, we got in in the morning, I had to go to work at 4 o'clock in the afternoon to the cipher room, because things were urgent.

That's quite a story, but it would be good to go back, I feel like we haven't really covered the training in as much detail as we could, back in Melbourne.

19:00 Yes, we have, oh, yes, we have.

You mentioned for example you were trained in navigation how did you train?

Well, that's later, that's later. I coming to all of that, I'm a cipher officer now, so I'm doing cipher, codes, which is transferring plain language into codes and vice versa, codes into plain language. Now, I'm working in the cipher room,

19:30 doing shift work and that was 1942 and I think 1943 I was still doing cipher. Yes, I think I'd been there six months and after six months I went from assistant section officer to

20:00 section officer, up one rank. We lived in the barracks in Townsville which was a girls' boarding school and they had taken all the pupils away from that school when war broke out and Townsville was in the midst of it all

20:30 and moved them back beyond Charters Towers, so the children would be safe and the air force took over the boarding school and that's where we lived. I shared a room with two other women and we were fed there, pretty awful food. But, we had somewhere to live and then we could walk down the street and around the corner to

21:00 the place in the main street, Sturt street, I suppose it was because I remember where the cipher room was. So that's how I spent my time, day or night, you know, it was all shift work. Then they moved us out of Townsville

21:30 to an area that they called, I just can't recall, but it was out in the country and we taken out there by tender, you know, which is a truck, an air force vehicle driven by a woman, generally, an air force driver, and it was a little cottage.

22:00 This was because of the bombing, you see, they wanted to disguise where we worked as some little country place and it was a little cottage with like, a very ordinary little place but underneath that was a concrete room,

22:30 which was bomb proof and that's where the headquarters were situated and there was this little place up the top that looked like any other little village house. It was quite an interesting aspect. We didn't work in it or go up there, we went in on the side entry.

23:00 I think I've gone ahead of myself a bit because I was just going to tell you about being a cipher officer and working the enigma machine, which came on in 1943. That was the most sophisticated coding machine you could ever see, you know, the Americans had it. There is some fascinating film about it, have you heard of that Colin?

23:30 The Enigma? Have you Catherine [interviewer]?

Yes, yes.

Well, anyway, they got one in Townsville, you see, and I was one of the operators on it. So, the Japs [Japanese] also were hard at work trying to, because we were in different hemispheres the time-span was different so they were creeping up on us and everything

24:00 had to be spot on and of course, coding was particularly important because we changed the grouping of letters all the time, you see, to try and confuse the enemy, as it were, as it happened, as it was. Anyway, I worked that enigma machine and that was very intensive work but, interesting.

24:30 And then I decided that I would like to work in the operations room. So, I would have to do another course because I was a cipher officer but I wanted to become an operation's officer. So, that's when they arranged it, they found out who wanted to do it.

25:00 A couple of women and a few men. So they arranged this course, which was very intense. So, we working on that when we were working in the cipher room, doing our navigation and doing our aircraft recognition and doing, Steve, could you pass me that little group of paper there on the end there? Thanks. I'll just show you the,

25:30 or did I put it, yeah, that's it, that's it. Now, this is where we were, also out there in the bush. This is Northeast Area Underground Bunker, Townsville, Area Operations Room.

26:00 This is the mad Christmas card that was sent. See I did this course before the end of 1942 because I went to Townsville and it was May '42 and then by the Christmas '42

26:30 I had done the course and I had become an operation's officer and this is the controller's area of operations, it means, it's a cartoon as it were, and they were up here, let me see, they were up here and my desk was here and this was a full size wall map

27:00 where everything that was happening. That's what I had to do, I had to get up the ladder and any other person who also, because it was all shift work, where our subs were, where the enemy subs that we managed to crack any of their information, where we presumed they were, where our destroyers were, where our squadrons were.

27:30 Everything was on the map, so you were moving little markers and things as the signals came in.

So where was the map?

Over here.

Can you tell us to the camera, because we can't actually see that, so if you could describe?

Well, it was a big room, up one end was a section, which is this section here

28:00 is where the controllers were with all these secret phones, direct phones to squadrons, red phones which meant red alert. Everything had to be answered smartly. The American headquarters and intelligence, we had an American intelligence officer

28:30 working in this operation's room with us. So we had to know what they were doing, they had to know what we were doing and the whole world was so intense and on this map everything was displayed here, you see, on the end wall, behind me. A huge map, the whole wall is a map. So, they could tell,

29:00 the controllers, who are up there, they're looking through the glass up in their raised area and they were on the phone and they were on the phone to me and signals were coming in. Now, I was on duty, and that's when I did eleven hours on, 24 off, 13 hours on, 24 off because they had enough staff

29:30 to be able to split the times like that. So, that's how you had to work your life, except for that short time when I told you when I did twelve on and twelve off and that lasted for about ten days until they got more relief staff from the south because things were rough in New Guinea so they had to move some of the men to New Guinea, which left us short

30:00 of staff, which is why we worked twelve on and twelve off, which was very intense. Anyway, so, I'm doing operations now, I'm an air operation's officer and the signals are coming in and there was a hatch behind me and the despatch rider would bang, bang on this hatch and I'd get up and open it

30:30 and he'd hand me a signal. If it was a red alert it was the top priority, you see, absolute top priority, things were so important that you had to handle it straight away.

And what would you do with a red alert?

Well, I had a phone, I couldn't leave, I could leave my desk but it was better that I didn't

31:00 because I had phones I had to answer but, I picked up one and spoke to one of the controllers and said, "I've a red alert", he said, "Yes, section officer I'll send somebody down", because they didn't leave their phones. And it was the most incredible situation, this red alert signal. It came from a ship,

31:30 the radio officer on a ship and they were stuck on sand bank at the entrance to Moroquee [?] harbour. Moroquee is west inland now and it was sent by the radio officer on the ship who happened to be my brother, Noel, the very tall guy, he was in the Merchant Navy but he was stationed

32:00 on this ship and it had Australian troops on board and they wanted get these boys landed at Moroquee and into action but, they were stuck in the sand bank, and the Jap, you know, they were always there, they knew what was going on, discovered and starting striking or bombing, trying to bomb this ship from a very high altitude

32:30 and the red alert signal was top priority and was a million, million to one that it was sent by my brother, and I received it. It just is unbelievable isn't it? So the controllers got into action and they said, "Well, red alert is top priority".

33:00 So they got things going, found some plane somewhere, because things were tough in New Guinea in those days, really tough. They could get over there and perhaps chase away these Zeros who were dropping bombs on these ships. They were very high, the Japs, because they knew they were in dangerous territory. Anyway, they managed to get this

33:30 ship off the sand bank and into the harbour and off loaded the Australian troops, so God was merciful.

Just go back to the operations' room, so the despatch rider would put the signal, or hand the signal to you through the hatch, so it's written on a piece of paper is it?

Well, it comes through printed out from a typewriter.

34:00 Well taken down by the wireless operator, you see, and put into plain language. But because we were out in the country, you see, we were out in this little place with this funny little village all around and we're down underneath in the bunker and the despatch rider would have brought it in from the signals' section

34:30 who received the signal, he's an air force guy riding a motorcycle around, we'd call them Don R's, D.R, Despatch Rider, but we called them Don R's.

I'm just trying to get a picture here, so you would have received that red alert, you would have read it?

Oh, yes, on the phone immediately. So they took over,

35:00 I just got up on the ladder and put notices on the map of where they presumed the enemy were and where this ship was and then we got, but, what I'm telling you about is the extraordinary sent by my brother and received by his sister.

How do you know it was from your brother?

Because I found out, you see, the name of the ship.

35:30 He was the radio officer on it. We talked about it later on, when he came back to Townsville on leave and we talked about it, he said, "It is amazing that I sent it and you received it in the op's [operations] room". I think it's incredible. Anyway, all was well, they got off the sandbank and the ship, as I said, and they managed to get into Moroquee

36:00 harbour and the Japs were very cautious at this stage, they weren't keen about bombing Moroquee harbour and getting themselves shot to smithereens. So, that was just an interesting section of my life there in the operations' room. So I stayed there in the operations' room. I stayed there till December 1943.

36:30 I'd had 18 months service in Townsville. I was posted then, that was my time limit, then to Western Australia, to western area. So off I went to western area and worked in the operations' room there and of course, over there was the Indian Ocean war

37:00 going on, you know, flying boats coming in, submarines coming in, going out. Different war from the east coast of Australia but, the same war only the Japs were closer because they were virtually up in Indonesia almost. But doing the same sort of thing,

37:30 you know, shipping movements, aircraft movements, submarine movements. We knew where everybody was operating and where they had to send planes to cover their tracks. It just became work, shift work, day, night, whatever, doing it and we did it.

38:00 I was there. I never got over to Rocknest Island, because I couldn't. I would have liked to, but when you're working twelve hours or eleven hours or 13 hours or whatever, you're busy and you just have to do your work and keep yourself fit enough to

38:30 do it. I was there for 18 months, then I posted to Sydney, eastern area and by that time the war was moving more in our direction than it had been previously but, I was still working in the eastern area in the operations' room and the flying boats were coming out of Rothmans

39:00 and all these places nearby, you know, Mallacoota. There was an air force section at Mallacoota. So, I was there till another six months. Ken had come back from the war in '44

39:30 he came back to Australia and he ran the air transport command out of Perth and I was, by that time, I'd moved to Sydney and he came over and we got together again and we decided we would get married. But the war ended in

40:00 August '45 and we married in October '45.

Tape 3

00:32 **If you can describe to us what you remember of the enigma machine, the technology of it and how you used it?**

It was like a large, this is the days before computer, large typewriter but it was the beginning of computers and

01:00 the enigma machine was a machine which had a section rear top where you set disks every time you came to operate it, you had to set in these three disks, I'm sure there were three, but they were changed every twelve hours because you see, they

01:30 operated with the codings and the Japs were trying to catch up with us so it was important that they were changed all the time but as soon as I went on duty I would take out the disks and put in the disks that were lined up for my ten hours or twelve hours or whatever I was doing, set them into the machine,

02:00 now we had tapes down here one tape coming in with plain language coming out the other side of the machine in code which were groups of five letters in code or vice versa, it's going in from the left in code and going through the whole thing complex and coming out on the right tape

02:30 as plain language. So, that's the important thing that you had to have everything so you didn't make a mistake with your reading 'WPXYT' or whatever. Any odd letters you want to think your head are grouped into five but it's important to get it into the

03:00 right sequence and that's what the signals came in from the WT [wireless telephone] operators as just page of groups of five letters and all of that had to put into the machine as it was, with no errors because one error would throw the whole thing.

So the five letters would represent one letter of plain text or how did that..?

03:30 Oh, it might represent two small words, like, 'in the'. But the way it was done, it was just groups of five letters one after the other, you know, a whole big page full just typed in like this and coming out in plain language or vice versa and which we then handed,

04:00 the operators handed to the supervisors. We didn't do any more than that, we just operated the machine and changed the disks and sat at it and because I was a typist and I could do it and I didn't have to be looking at my hands all the time, I could be looking at the text, which was important.

04:30 **You were doing it both ways, weren't you?**

Oh, yes, yes. I mean, plain language into code or code into plain language, but this is what you see when you see the machine, two sides of it, you see, two lots of tapes and it's this thing that you set and I suppose it's like a computer or not really, it's just like a large typewriter but,

05:00 it was a fascinating machine. The British had it, and if you've read the book or seen the film, you know that the British had it and the Americans had it and it was in a submarine, the code book so they found sub, got it all out, which I thought that was a fascinating story.

05:30 **So these were signals from the Australian forces but was it being used to ..?**

Oh, not necessarily the Australian forces, the Americans, anyone because the intensity of the war, you see. It had to be sent by somebody who was on the

06:00 same connection, like headquarters in Brisbane, RAAF command, you know, [General Douglas] Macarthur's headquarters, anything like that, or from sections in New Guinea. But Townsville was the only place that had the enigma machine apart from RAAF command in Brisbane, probably had it, but we were the only ones who had it up

06:30 in the east coast of Australia, and able to communicate with our allies in code.

It sounds like it was obviously very precious technology.

Oh, it was, it was.

Where did those machines come from, how were they sourced, do you know?

Well, from the British and the Americans, earlier in the war.

07:00 You know, the early section, the Americans had it and the British had one, but I don't quite know the history of it, how it all transpired but, the code books were the important thing holding it altogether because you had to know when to change, every day they were changed

07:30 or every twelve hours they were changed, the disks you see, which operated the mechanism, which made the grouping of the letters so important.

Were there sort of, countless possibilities are far as the settings went or was there sort of, a finite number?

Oh, well, you had to set them, as I said,

08:00 twice a day, maybe, every twelve hours they had to be changed because of the closeness of our enemy, they were listening in you imagine what it was like, the Japanese were everywhere amongst our islands and our listening posts and

08:30 coast watches and they were trying to muscle in on it and we were trying to stop them, so keep changing it. By the time they'd worked out what group of letters came out as what phrase, we'd changed the grouping, you see, so we were only just one jump ahead of them, and that's what the enigma machine did because you had the disks

09:00 changing the coding all the time, well, every, as I said, twice a day, every twelve hours. So it was changed because that's all they needed if they had captured some signals or had a fifth columnist passing them our information, they could unscramble the whole thing.

09:30 But they couldn't know what disks we had or how we were changing the setting on the machine and that's what you see when you see, well you only look at it through the glass when you're looking at it in the war museum but, it is a fascinating, complex piece of mind boggling code.

So that was used only in the cipher room or was that

10:00 **used in the operations' room?**

In the cipher room as far as I remember. When I went to the west of course, I was no longer in cipher I doing air operations.

So you've described the actual enigma machine to us really nicely, can you give us an idea of the actual process of how information came in,

10:30 **was it still the Don R who would come in with the message, how did the signals come into the cipher room?**

They'd been received by the wireless operators who never stopped working, ships sending signals, aircraft sending signals. The wireless operators were on duty the whole time

11:00 picking up signals and they had the very complex signalling set up and I didn't have anything to do with that, I only go the end result. But, that's what kept the war going really.

You described the bunker situation, with that sort of, country house, which was on top,

11:30 **and underneath this.. ?**

Big concrete room.

Yes, so were the wireless operators and so on, all operating in that space?

Oh yes, they were hidden away down there too. And then, see, it had to be not an obvious, sort of, place, you see, the spies were everywhere, we know it, the people did know,

12:00 our intelligence officers knew that there was an awful lot of, how can I put it, for want of a better phrase, fifth columnists, that's why everything had to be set in motion and to be changed every so many hours so they couldn't say, "Oh, well,

12:30 if we listen in on this frequency, we can get the message", but they wouldn't be able to because it would all be changed, every twelve hours, had to be.

You sort of suggested that there was some espionage going on?

Oh, I'm sure there was, I'm sure there was.

There was only one sort of, court, do you know?

We wouldn't hear about that, but

13:00 I mean, the same sort of thing that was going on anywhere in the world, you've got the goodies and the baddies, haven't you and ones trying to keep up with the other and I'm not saying that we were any better than they were, but they were because of time difference and all that sort of thing, where it was night time where we were, it's daytime in England or America or whatever,

13:30 see and this could have an influence on anything that was being sent over the air, couldn't it? That's why everything was in operation, it never stopped, had to be, every minute of every day.

Do you remember the sort of signals that were coming through, the messages that needed to be encoded,

14:00 **the actual content of some of those?**

Oh, well, convoys, you know, when convoys were leaving and how many in the convoy and about that time in '42, the end of '42, they knew that there were spies picking up our signals and we were

14:30 flat out picking up their signals, I'm not saying any side was better than the other, but you had to be aware that's why the frequency was changed all the time you see and the WT operators had to be changed all the time so that nobody could say that it's so and so and we know their type of signalling

15:00 because it was too vital, the whole sections were integrated so they had to keep going like this you see to break the sequence, as it were.

And was it just one person operating the enigma?

Yes, well, I mean, I had

15:30 a relief because I couldn't sit at it forever but it was very important that you kept your mind on the job because I'd had the sergeant who was a young man, we were in this room, no air conditioning and

16:00 he'd come in and hand me a signal and then bring me a glass of water, or anybody, I mean, I wasn't there every minute of every day but I was there for long periods of time and then wipe the perspiration off because the whole thing was so intense and you're watching what's going on and hearing

16:30 whether the ships have managed to join up together or not or everybody's been lost or a submarine's appeared. What it must have been like in London, God only knows, it would have been terrible. It was bad enough up there in Townsville.

How did everyone's tempers cope with that stress,

17:00 **I mean the heat and the humidity and just the stress of the job?**

Well, you just did it, you were disciplined, you had to, this was important work and you couldn't afford to blow your top at all, really. Occasionally, the odd person would but if you were keen about your job and you felt

17:30 this urgency that you were doing something terribly important, which we were, you wanted to give it your best. And that's why shift work is good in that you know that you're going to be on duty for so many hours but then it's very mind draining when you've been through it and you've to get some rest and then get back on to it again.

18:00 It's not easy. When you're young you can do it.

You mentioned you were working, what was your shift again?

Well, they changed. When we were out there at Sydney Street, where I've shown you that little place in the bunker underneath, we had to be taken out there in an air force tender

18:30 and I did seven o'clock at night till eight o'clock the next morning. That's 13 hours. Then I had 24 off then went back at eight o'clock in the morning till seven o'clock at night, so that was eleven hours. We did that and then with the enigma machine

19:00 it was more intense then I did that time with twelve hours and twelve off, only because we were short on staff, we didn't have the required number of cipher officers because they'd moved them up to New Guinea and we had to a couple of fellows came off the course so our numbers were reduced so they said, "Ok, we'll do twelve on, twelve off, divide up the 24 hours that way".

19:30 It was just unfortunate if you got the twelve on at nighttime. Because by the time we got the relief, I just fell asleep like that in the middle of working with a partner and he said, "Patty, wake up". Well, you see I hadn't had enough sleep

20:00 and your brain was absolutely whizzing because you're concentrating so hard and if you haven't had any sleep, there you go, I just fell asleep. That's after about five nights, twelve on and twelve off and then you'd just say hey, and you'd start again. But, the supervisor would be up

20:30 watching and if you weren't on the job he'd be charging over ready to wield the big stick. But it was, they were watching us. He was only the supervisor, he was not doing any of the hard work, we were doing the hard work. But, I've never forgotten that,

21:00 I was in the middle of working these figures, you see, and I just flopped over and this guy's kicking me under the table, we were working in pairs, "Wake up, Patty, wake up, he's coming, he's coming". And he came, but by that stage I'd straightened myself up and I thought, I'd better not do that again.

Was everyone doing the same twelve, 13-hour shifts?

21:30 Well, just in the ciphering, yes. There weren't too many of us because half of them had been moved to New Guinea so we were short staffed and waiting for extra bodies to come in from the south and of course, I had a couple of Americans working with me in the cipher room,

22:00 unpronounceable names, nice guys, corporals, sergeants, and they were trying to learn our way of operating the whole cipher system because they'd just arrived in Townsville and they wanted to be in on, well, they were, they were posted up there

22:30 but they were very inexperienced, you see, and working with them was interesting. Virtually teaching them our systems. They were, eyes like this, young fellow.

What were those systems, other than the enigma, which came along a bit later, what were some of those?

Well, just ordinary cipher using the coding, the

23:00 groups of letters, just that sort of thing but, it was not done with the machine, it was done with books, codebooks, you see and we'd change the code every day. But, it was still groups of letters that had to be used to make, well, divide up the English language

23:30 into whatever we were on about, whether it was ships or planes or subs or troops or whatever.

So rather than have the machine there, you just had the codebooks as your reference?

Yes, well this was before we got the enigma machine, you see. But as I said before, I didn't finish the year in cipher,

24:00 I worked at it and also did all my lectures in these other subjects so that I could change my group from cipher officer to air operation's officer cause I decided I wanted to change and I also wanted to broaden

my outlook

24:30 on the whole war and did more subjects. So, I had to go and do these lectures as well when I should have been sleeping or doing something and I sat for the exam and I did quite well at it and I became a qualified navigator. Now, I worked for these controllers, who were in the control booth I've shown you on the diagram, they had to be

25:00 guys who were pilots, the controller had to be a pilot, qualified, off flying, perhaps for health reasons, they'd been wounded or they'd been ill or it was time they had a change off their flying. And one of the guys I worked for, on the same shift as he did, he was the controller, he said to

25:30 me, his wife and child lived down in Boreen and we were up in Townsville and he'd been sent to Townsville from New Guinea because he had been wounded, but, he was better, but he wasn't able to fly for a while, you see, he had to do the ground duty, so he was qualified to be a controller and he said, "I know,

26:00 you and I work the same shift, how would like to on a day off, I can get a walrus", do you know what a walrus is? A small flying boat with a rear engine and they take them around on cruises, two-seater, little seaplanes.

26:30 He said, "I'm qualified to fly one of those but I can't get on unless I have a qualified navigator with me, would you be prepared to come down to Boreen for the day while I go down there to see my wife and little girl, would you give up your day off to do that?", I said, "Sure, sure, I'll do it". So we did. We went down

27:00 to the harbour, got a little RAAF tender to take us down, got on the walrus, took off in Townsville harbour, zoomed down to Boreen, I was his navigator, we landed on the water at Boreen, in reverse, the tender came and picked us up and then an air force car took him, he was a squadron leader, I mean, a couple of ranks above me, of course, up to his home

27:30 and I went too and I met his wife and saw the child and he said, "Now, I'll arrange for a car to come and pick you up on the beach at such and such a time", so I got all that straight off and the car took me back to the beach and we left him and he had the rest of the day with his little family and then the car came down and got me, I just spent my time on the beach, swimming,

28:00 it was beautiful, lovely. Then off we flew back to Townsville and it was a wonderful day and we got in just as the sun had just gone down, so it was all visual navigation. If it had been cloudy or raining I would have had to get my thinking cap on and do

28:30 this and that and the other with the compass and what not to establish where we were if you didn't have visual navigation but I had it. So that was my day when I was an official navigator for a qualified pilot.

Do you think you would have gone up if it had been a cloudy day?

Oh, yeah, I had enough confidence to be able to do it. I had trained it

29:00 as a navigator and I thought, well, this is testing my skills isn't it? Anyway, as it happened it was visual, but, it was a great day, interesting in the little walrus. And there's one up in Canberra, I saw one, I went with Buzz, Steve, and I think I've told you about that, and they were just fixing it up and

29:30 have you been to Point Cook and you walk around the mezzanine gallery and look down? Anyway, they had this walrus and I said, "I flew in one of those", and this guy looked up, he was probably saying, that crazy old woman there with the white hair making it all up, but of course, I talked to him later and he realised

30:00 he'd made a mistake, I had done it, which is quite fascinating because they're interesting little aircraft.

So you learned navigation what were the other courses with the operation's course?

Aircraft recognition and a bit of intelligence. So, that would come into

30:30 operation if we were dealing with signals that the American intelligence had handed to me or to one of my successors, just things like that, aircraft recognition and shipping and you know, just stuff like that. So, knowing

31:00 what the day-to-day, hour-to-hour programs were because it became day-to-day after a while when things improved a little. Anyway, I can't remember exactly what I did the exams and I passed it so then I was designated

31:30 as air operations officer, no longer a cipher officer. But, having done cipher I understood it better.

So what rank does that accord with?

Well, it didn't, I just kept my own rank, section officer, which is like a pilot officer. I never got promoted to flight officer,

32:00 if I had I would have two stripes and if I'd become a wing officer I would have had two and half. But, I wasn't after that and anyway, I was happy doing what I was doing, section officer, was good and working in the operation's room appealed to me, knowing exactly how the war was progressing and what our

32:30 situation was as far as the enemy went and you could sort of, see, by '44 a bit of daylight at the end of the tunnel, virtually. And of course, I was in Sydney when they found the Jap submarines in Sydney harbour. So that in itself was a very

33:00 interesting time.

I wonder if you can tell us a bit about Townsville itself, you've given us some great descriptions of the work you were doing, but what was the town like, I mean, you were there sort of early...?

Full of army personnel. They had moved civilians of course, as I said, it was the centre of the war,

33:30 up there, at that stage and was bombed, three times. The harbour was full of ships all the time. That's what the Japs were after, trying to bomb the harbour and sink the ships because the ships were important getting the ships to New Guinea or out further. The flying boats took off from Townsville

34:00 and Cairns over to Trac [Truk Island] and places like that in the Pacific. But, it was the very centre of the war for Australia up there in the north and Darwin of course, was the other place but, I mean that got heavily bombed but, they, the Japanese knew all that, of course,

34:30 and they were out to try and keep us all submerged so they could do their dirty work.

So, you were actually in Townsville during some of those raids?

Yeah, yeah.

What was that experience like?

Frightening. I was going to work, I was in ciphering then and I had to start work at midnight and I had to

35:00 leave the barracks and walk down the street and left into Stuart street, I think it was, Steve, and all of sudden, we had slit trenches, I told you we were living in this, what was a girls' boarding school, that was our RAAF barrack, I had to be on duty

35:30 down there at the cipher room at midnight, so it was about a quarter to twelve and I was just walking down the street in this semidarkness and then all of sudden the sirens went and then the search light went up and I looked up and there it was, Japanese flying boat had come off one of their cruisers

36:00 or whatever and I could see it, our code name for it was Betty, it was a little flying boat type thing like a small Catalina, but it was caught in the search light and then it was dropping bombs, you see, vroom, you could hear them coming, so it was frightening when you're on your own and it was very darkish,

36:30 it wasn't full moon because if it had been full moon they wouldn't have been there. They wouldn't have dared come in full moon cause it would all be bright but they were after the ships in the harbour cause they were setting up a convoy to go somewhere, you see, up to New Guinea or wherever. Anyway, I dived into the trench

37:00 and then they sounded the all clear so I hurried along to my destination and some of these old guys who were in the cipher room were quite petrified. I was frightened too, but I was a bit younger than they were. But, anyway, that happened three times over the next month or so. But,

37:30 then they launched their venom on Darwin or that happened around about that same time and they really messed that place up. Have you been to Darwin? Still see a few buildings with bullet holes in them.

What about, I mean, you were there as, I guess, the Americans were as that sort of presence was building.

38:00 Oh yeah.

What sort of impact did that have on the community there?

Intense, intense. Yeah, I worked with them. The American intelligence officer, I worked with in the operation's room and in the cipher room I worked with these American NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers].

38:30 But, they were polite, very polite. Well, I don't quite know what to say about them, they were just there and we accepted them and they were our allies and that was it. The war would never have been able to, well,

39:00 it was a war against America the same as it was Australia or any of the other countries and the British Empire but, it all started with Pearl Harbour of course.

We've heard a few stories from some of the infantrymen, Aussie [Australian] blokes who went through council and how there's sometimes a bit of friction between the Aussies and Americans?

Oh well, yeah, you know, there was,

39:30 there was, but, I mean, it's all been blown up out of proportion I think, I really do. But, the ones I knew and worked with, it was fine and I went and stayed with this American intelligence officer whom I met in Townsville in 1980 or

40:00 late '70s, in Houston and I'd first met him in Townsville, nice man, very interesting and he was the American intelligence officer. They needed us and we needed them because you know, we were closely allied, Americans and Australians with our sections of war,

40:30 overlapping, as it were.

What about, you told us about the crazy hours you were working, those twelve, 14 hour shifts and how you were doing courses at one point during the day when you should have probably been sleeping, were you able to rest sufficiently during the day or, if not, what would you do to occupy your time?

Well, I

41:00 tried to get sleep when I'd been working all night to get back into a barracks where the phone never stopped ringing and women rushing around. It was a form of discipline, you had to discipline yourself to get to sleep and you were so tired when you had to do it, but then I'd go off and sleep or

41:30 that picture of me on a horse that was in Townsville, horse riding, anything like that, playing tennis, anything that was physical activity, but, mostly swimming, I loved the beach and I loved going over to Magnetic Island.

Tape 4

00:30 Point, when they come in the harbour,

Oh, the pilot?

Yeah, the ships, yeah, the pilot, anyway, because of a friendship with another person who did the same work, a Western Australian whom I knew in Sydney

01:00 and they said, "Well, when you go to Melbourne go and look up Paddy Wood Ingram" and I did and Anna is his daughter who's the new grandmother but it was, they had a fascinating, interesting life.

Well, no one else I want to hear about your fascinating, interesting life.

Yes.

You've given us some great descriptions of the cipher room and we started talking about Townsville itself and the Americans.

01:30 Well, Townsville was absolutely full of Americans but they all had their duties to perform but, they wooed the local girls, you know, lots of them, the ones who were there. But, I knew this American officer I worked with in the operations room quite well, he was a highly intelligent person

02:00 and because of his job and I told you that I, after the war, I had his address and Ken had met him also, so I went and stayed with them and it was interesting, he was a shell man, as Ken was and it was interesting

02:30 staying with him and seeing another sort of life in another country, which was similar in a way to our own.

Just take you back a little bit further just to fill in a few little gaps here and there, when you decided you wanted to join up, and you were going to be with the air force, how did your parents react to that decision?

Well,

03:00 I talked to them about it naturally and said, this thing I'd seen in the paper women aged over age 21 who were interested in maybe becoming a cipher officer, talked about it and I said, "That's what I'm going to do". Because I felt I was helping, I was backing up Peter, my brother, you see,

03:30 who'd been posted missing and I just felt that I wanted to do this and I felt it would help my mother,

that she would think that he was missing and that he would be found in a POW [prisoner of war] camp or something like that. I just felt it would help her because she was fairly distraught about it but that's

04:00 what war does and she'd been through it with her own brother in the previous World War. So, I did with their blessing. I rang her, I wrote to her, I wrote to them, always in communication because we were a very closely bonded family and of course, he never was found,

04:30 but thousands weren't. So, I really can't say any more about it than that.

Can you tell us how you met Ken at Amberley when you were with the Air Force Club?

I went to his graduation when he came out as a pilot officer. Got time off from the bank

05:00 because we were, in a way, sort of, unofficially engaged and I asked for time off and they gave it to me, it was just the afternoon and I went up and I saw it all and it was wonderful. See, I didn't see Peter's because he graduated in England, he was two courses ahead of Ken.

05:30 And then Ken went off, went up to the Middle East. He went back to Perth, saw his mother and father and then on the Queen Mary over to the Middle East, to Egypt first and they were off loaded and then his war started in earnest and there it was and it wasn't easy either. Well, war is terrible to

06:00 begin with but that is how it went on and he was away nearly four years, but we kept in touch and then it all started up again when he came back, which was wonderful.

So you were writing regularly?

Oh yes, but, I mean, I could wait two months or

06:30 three months for a letter from him. But, we corresponded, he wrote when he could and he said, "I don't know if you'll ever receive the letter because we're on the move and things are hotting up", and then he was taken out to Tobruk in the middle of the night on a destroyer with

07:00 malaria, so he was in a bad way. They lived in tents, you know, the journey across North Africa, the squadron, backwards and forwards,

07:30 very intense fighting. The fighter squadron number 3 and number 450 were the two Australian fighter squadrons over there. Anyway, Ken was taken back, he was very ill, but he recovered and then I'd never seen anybody with malaria

08:00 and it reoccurred 30 years later, he had this attack of malaria and I didn't know what it was. Never seen anything like it, you wouldn't want to know about it really, it makes people pretty ill and they perspire all the time and go a bit, like that, but it is

08:30 a thing that can reoccur, it's weird isn't it?

How much was he telling you about what was going on in North Africa?

Not too much. Highly censored, of course, all our letters were censored. In the end he censored, members of his squadron, he had to censor their letters, the same as I censored

09:00 any of the airwomen's letters. That was part of our duty to do, read their letters and cross out anything that was not meant to be there, such as saying a destroyer came in and naming it and it's due to leave again, you know, stuff like that. That was one of things officers had to do, we had to censor the other ranks letters

09:30 and then we had to make sure that we didn't give any information away either. So, Ken was busy censoring his own and his mates, the same as I was and he signed it off. I mean, if we had time we could probably find some of them, I think they're in that chest in there, but it doesn't matter. I've kept

10:00 a lot of them.

When did you hear about his brush with fate there in the desert when he crash-landed, I believe?

Yeah, well that was 1941 and I got this cable from his father, who lived in Perth, saying that Ken was missing,

10:30 and then we received another cable, my mother, about my brother being missing, all around the same time. Except that Peter was just after Christmas and I think Ken was missing around about Christmas time, but, anyway, just before Christmas,

11:00 but, he was lucky in that he was rescued by the Bedouins, they were interesting Nomadic people who just led their own little lives out there in North Africa and

11:30 the Germans left them alone and the allies left them alone because they weren't war like people they were just wandering around, feeding themselves, moving their little camps and that was when Ken was

shot down by this Messerschmitt up there

12:00 and the plane was on fire, he had to get it onto the ground quick smart, which he did, grabbed his water bottle and his Mae West, you know what a Mae West is don't you? The yellow life jacket thing and the water bottle, and anything else he had to leave and

12:30 get away from this fire and this burning plane and the Messerschmitt was still up there and he knew that he could hide in, you know, a waddy, the waddy is the sand banky, sort of, irregular type of land in that desert area and that's when

13:00 this little tribe of Bedouins came along with their matriarch leading them and they'd seen it all and you know they were just trekking over to where they wanted to set up their tent and she just saw Ken put his head up out of this sand and she did this and she did this.

13:30 He said he took a quick look and the Messerschmitt was almost out of sight and he thought I'll make a dash for it and he did and she just went like this and he got under the camel and then back came the enemy, swooping down, you see, this guy was going to get this pilot and Ken was hiding there under the camel and

14:00 he said, it was weird but wonderful. So, it was, they camped that night, she had an old, smelly bit of carpet tossed over in front of where she was sitting on the camel, you see, and it hung down and it hid him so he was under the camel. But they were wonderful, they fed him and looked after him,

14:30 three days and he used to go out on a little, when they were getting a meal ready or something and one day he heard a noise and it sounded like an armoured car and he thought I'll go out and I'll peep over and see what I can see and he heard this engine because there was no traffic or any sort,

15:00 I mean, no movement but this armoured car, and he thought I'm not going to get up and wave at them because they could be Germans disguised as British, which of course, is what happened, they captured something, they would swap around and put on different uniforms, just spying, it was a spy game all the time. Anyway,

15:30 he kept them view and he thought, they're still talking English so I'm going to trust my luck and stood up and sort of waved and this armoured car came within distance and he ran over and he said, "I think I'm right, I know you're British" and they said, "Well, we are, lucky for you, we are".

16:00 So, he sort of moseyed around a bit and thought, I'll go with them, because he wanted to get back to the squadron and there was no way he could walk it and he wasn't too sure where they were because they were moving all the time. Anyway, that's what they did, he went off with them and before he left he gave the

16:30 leading tribesman his Mae West. He put it on, it was like getting the crown from the King of England, you know, wonderful. So he gave it to them because he knew if he got back to the squadron he could get another one. So off he went and the armoured car got him back and it was Christmas Eve, 1941

17:00 when they found the squadron they'd moved from where they were, up and down the coast. It was terrific and then I got the signal to say that he'd been found and rescued and we were hoping for a signal about brother Peter but we never got one of those.

17:30 **When were you officially engaged?**

Well, it was announced in the paper when Ken had gone to the Middle East but, you know, I met other people and there was one person who wanted to marry me but I wasn't

18:00 that sort of person, you know, even though Ken and I had corresponded and we still did but I said, "We may be engaged, but we may not be, it's all a bit uncertain we'll just have to wait and see", so we did, and then when he came back I decided and he decided that

18:30 we were doing the right thing after all, we were a few years older then cause I was 26 and he was 28 so we decided well, we would be marry, which we were in Brisbane, Toowong, St Thomas, Toowong. Where I was baptised,

19:00 went to Sunday School [religious instruction classes for children] , went to Brownies [young girls club], did all those things. Beautiful old church. And we had very happy day. He had nobody there because his parents had separated by that time but they were over in Perth and he just had a couple of guys who flew with him, in the picture up on the wall,

19:30 who were in his squadron and that's it. I was still in the air force and he was, by this time, at Mildura and he was chief flying instructed there for a while and the war had ended but you didn't just drop your bundle and go you had to be in line to get out,

20:00 I had to put in my application to leave the air force and I finally did get out at the end of November '45 and Ken stayed on because he thought he would continue his career, he just stayed on for another year or so in the air force.

Ok Patty, I'm not going to let you quite get out of the air force yet, it would just be good to hear about

20:30 **what sort of impact, you moved from Brisbane, I guess, a fairly small town, to Melbourne and then up to Townsville, what sort of impact that had on you?**

Well, it was fascinating, especially going to Perth after Townsville, I did get down

21:00 on leave from Townsville and we got leave, ten days, every six months, generally, and getting down, I could get on the troop train and go down the coast to Brisbane or at one stage I managed to get a lift on a Catalina and we landed on Brisbane River in this flying boat, so that was really something.

21:30 Got to shore, got a taxi, walked in on my parents, it was great. But Perth well, it's a long way from Perth to Brisbane on a troop train, I can tell you and I wasn't lucky enough to get flights out of Perth to get me to Brisbane. Mostly I travelled on troop trains.

22:00 At one stage I remember getting home it took me five days to get home to Brisbane because I had to go Melbourne, Kalgoorlie and then of course, the Nullabor on the train, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, all on the troop train and then do it in reverse and of course, you never wanted to be back late from

22:30 your leave, they didn't like that all. So, I had two weeks leave and I'd only been there a little under a week and I said to my mother, "I have to leave cause I've got to get myself onto the troop train", and that required a bit of organization to get to Melbourne particularly to get on the train across

23:00 the Nullabor and not be too late back. She said, "But you've only been here a little while", I said, "It's a long, long way to travel", she'd never been to Perth and it certainly was. But that was an adventure in itself, travelling on the troop train.

Can you tell us about that?

Well, it wasn't in luxury.

23:30 Every time I got on that train, which was a few time, I found myself as officer in charge of women troops, now that included the WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] of which I was member, Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, the army girls, AWAS's [Australian Women's Army Service], the navy girls

24:00 because they had to have a man in charge of the men and woman in charge of the women and often I got the job. I would get on this train in Melbourne, take off my uniform with the stripe on the sleeve and put on a cardigan and take off my cap and then in would come the OC [Officer in Command] troop with his sheets of paper and of course, he'd picked everything up at the

24:30 RTA's [Roads and Traffic Authority] office, which was the Railway Transport offices down in Swanson Street, "Section Officer Voller" and I'd stand up, "Sir", "You are the senior officer in charge of women troops", which included all these other people from other sections of the armed forces. They didn't like it

25:00 one little bit and I didn't like it either cause I was young and we were going through a tunnel, it might have been on the way up to Sydney, I just can't quite recall, but the train stopped in the middle of the tunnel because there was some obstruction and there was

25:30 also a troop train behind us because if one stopped, anything following up would stop, and this woman, you know, I didn't like having to deal with women from other services to begin with, and one of them turned around, she was climbing out the window, which was

26:00 a very dangerous thing to do in a tunnel, to get to some fellow in the train or in the next carriage and I just leaned out and grabbed her by the shirt, like this, and she turned around and nearly gave me one on the face, but I jammed on my cap, I think, and she could see, she nearly hit me,

26:30 but if she had she would have been up on a charge for hitting an officer, you see. I was awake enough to know that it was a dangerous thing to do and I didn't want to be too pushy but just to tell her that she was doing the wrong thing, getting out of the train in a tunnel and fortunately,

27:00 all was well, because she wasn't an air force girl, she was an army girl. If she'd clomped me on the jaw it would have been dire straits for somebody, especially for me. So that was just a little episode.

So when you'd stop at a station you'd need to make sure you'd be doing a roll call, as it were?

Oh yeah, when you were on troop trains you only stopped to be fed but

27:30 this was an extraordinary thing stopping in the middle of a tunnel, it's an emergency and she thought she'd get out the window so she could get along and be with the guys, you see. Well, there were guys around but they were in the next compartment. So, things were, well, what changes, nothing, I suppose.

She wasn't all that far taken?

28:00 No, she wasn't. She didn't like being told what do to by somebody that didn't belong to her army section. But, I was in charge, I didn't want to be charge, but, that's the way it went. Once you'd signed all the documents and I got to travel on troop trains quite a lot so people would know who you were. If you're an officer,

28:30 you're in it. You've got to do what they say. So, I did.

How did all the girls from the different services get along?

Oh, well, they just kept their own. They didn't do much mingling at all. If there were few of them they kept to themselves. It wasn't easy, I mean, you slept on a seat or you slept on the floor, even up in

29:00 a luggage rack, just wherever you could find a space and I travelled with the kit bag, which of course, you could use, spread out, or couldn't spread it out because it would be full of things, but use it as a pillow. You get used to it, you know, it was a way of getting from A to Z and

29:30 it's just that it's a very big country.

And you saw more of it that just about anybody else would have at that time?

Well, I suppose so. Yes, my sister didn't move around too much. She was an instrument repairer and she worked at Amberley.

30:00 She would get in these planes, American planes, she had done a course because our father was an engineer and very good with tools and engines and she'd inherited all of that, those genes, from him and her pictures around the corner, up on the wall, near the front door.

30:30 She did this instrument repairer's course and she was brilliant at it. She became a corporal. But, she could get an American plane and get down under the dashboard, as it were and fix things up. I think that's a wonderful gift. I was hopeless, I'm hopeless at anything with engines, but then

31:00 I have other qualities, some genes she doesn't have. So that's the way life is, isn't it, with families? Some get more than others or different.

Patty, can I ask you, you mentioned how in Townsville you would have to be censoring letters from girls in the other ranks and on the troop trains you would be looking after all the girls in that carriage, what other responsibilities did being an officer entail, when you weren't

31:30 **in the cipher room or in the operation's room?**

Well, you didn't really have all that much responsibility but, you were an officer and you had to behave like one and especially with this business of that girl trying to get out the window to get in the next carriage with some guy.

32:00 I had to do it, I didn't want to do it but that was part of it, you felt the responsibility, you had to do it because if you're travelling like that on troop trains the OC troop, he wouldn't go around looking for any little air woman or whatever, it's the officer and you take the responsibility

32:30 and you have to because you're an officer. Like if you were the CO [Commanding Officer] of the squadron, you've got to take the responsibility. That's part of it.

So back in the cipher room and in the operation's room, what was the ratio of men to women in those places?

Oh, very few women, mostly men. In the operation's room we would have

33:00 the two controllers and well, there was, in Townsville, there was a sergeant woman, WAAF sergeant, who did a lot of the typing, all the typing, so you were lucky if there were two women. When I was in Perth,

33:30 and I was sent to, that's an airbase to run their operation's room at Pearce, I went down and I was only woman there apart from the nurses in those days, they didn't have WAAF officers around a place like Pearce, which is a flying base,

34:00 only the nurses. So, I was there relieving in the operation's room and the nurses didn't like it at all because I sort of, was well, I sort of had a different approach to it all because I was working with men and

34:30 in the mess, talking to men, and they thought I was bold and not doing the right thing or should be with them but they were all, you know, fashion old ladies, as far as I was concerned. That's funny isn't it, when you're young what you do? But that's the way it was because I worked with men all the time.

35:00 **And generally how were relations, do you think women were respected doing the work they were doing?**

Yes, yes, I do. We couldn't have managed without us because especially in things like cipher because we were, a lot of men couldn't type and do that sort of thing whereas women more versatile,

35:30 more skilled in lots of ways than the men were so we could cope with different things as well as their work and our work was concerned, it was an overall thing. Whereas men considered their work as just male work, you know, none of this, even with cipher, they didn't think women should be doing cipher.

36:00 It's strange isn't it? But then they were older people, older men who were, as I said, taken off flying duties or weren't able to do it, so they looked at it from a different perspective. But it was a very fascinating, you worked hard. You saw the war, you felt the war, you knew what was going on

36:30 and you felt the war, especially in the operation's room because you were living it as it were, signals coming in, knowing what was going on and having to cope with it and ships being torpedo or planes shooting other planes down. It was graphic but it was part of the

37:00 well, war is such a different thing from day to day living. You have to be in it to know about it and to feel it and working as we did, day, night, whatever, that's another life too and you just had to fit in and adjust to everything.

So what exactly, you might have told us, but maybe we can get a bit more detail,

37:30 **what exactly was your role in the operation's room?**

Well, the controllers are up there in their little section and glass. My job was to receive the signals, log the signals, alter the map if ships had moved, convoys had moved,

38:00 if a Catalina or a flying boat was lost, you know, that all had to be noted on the map with these little things, things you wrote. So this big map, say as big as that wall and they were looking at it and saying well, "I think that's

38:30 flying boats, we'll have to think about that", I mean, they were dictating the sequence of what would happen. We were like, sort of, glorified secretaries doing the work, putting the signals into the logs, day to day, every signal that came in or went out was written up in the log,

39:00 time, date, so they could flip it over or see what was said yesterday, what was said today, tonight, the morning could see what the people the night before had said or done. So it was a chronological thing of keeping the whole action, uniting it all.

39:30 So that's what you did. So you had to know what you were doing and keep your mind on it.

So it was pretty much the nerve centre really for operations.

Yes, yes, it was, it was, indeed.

And the map, you know, you said, you need to mark where this..?

squadron was, or this convoy, yeah.

40:00 **How were those things marked, was it written up?**

No, little symbols and things they poked in, you've seen it on movies, I'm sure. Some of the British women in British films, you see them moving, you put up a little sort of symbol which means a convoy and that's moved and flights

40:30 planes, whatever, subs, it's all visual so that they can read the war as it's taking place and it changes, it's all got to be obvious, you see, for the controllers because they're running the ship, as it were.

Tape 5

00:32 Marty, all died, unfortunately. But Coral, her father-in-law, she was in the air force too, she came from Sydney and her son's an

01:00 architect in Melbourne, a friend of my architect son, Rob knows him and her father-in-law was Professor Wilkinson who was a professor of architecture at Sydney University. Interesting, how it all happens and my son-in-law is a professor at Sydney University, Roger Benjamin, father of the children, Kate's husband, of course, they're much older now.

01:30 I love Coral, I had a very strong bond with her.

So where did you meet Coral?

On the officer's course, in Melbourne, she's a Melbourne girl.

How many women were actually doing that course when you were doing it?

I don't know, I think at the most about, let's see, 16, maybe.

02:00 Maybe not as many as that. But, you know, they only took certain numbers from interstate, so, I mean, I came from Queensland.

You said before that one of the reasons they accepted you was because of your experience working in the bank, I wonder..?

Well, I don't think so.

It was a job that entailed a lot of confidentiality

02:30 **and the ability to keep secrets, so a lot of responsibility in that regard.**

Oh, yeah, well, I mean, obviously they thought I was mature enough to handle it, that's why you had to be over 21 to apply for it, you see, you had to be an adult in their terms.

So when it came to the training what kind of training did they give you to ensure that..?

03:00 Well, we did all these lectures while I was at Melbourne University, you know, air force administration and data work and a brief history of the Australian air force and the background of it and then doing the cipher course as well and drill and how to handle squads of girls, you know,

03:30 officer training as such and running around the track there at Queens College at seven in morning, you know, we had to be up and shining and doing our exercise.

You were trained in being in charge of squad of girls, how did they train you do that?

They rely on natural abilities to see

04:00 what I had been in the brownies and I had was at school until, you know, I had to leave and do my next section education but, if you didn't feel confident, you wouldn't apply. I felt confident enough

04:30 when I applied to be able to handle it and hopefully I would get through it all right. Well I did, I did get through it quite well.

Did you have a group of girls within the college that you were responsible for, was that part of your training?

No, no, not so much, no, we were all being trained by senior officers, you see, so I wasn't responsible for anybody. Just doing what the programme said

05:00 we had to do.

So what did drill entail, how did they train you in drill?

Well, certain style of marching, certain style of saluting, all that sort of thing as part of air force drill, you've got to know what to do, what orders to give if you're leading a section, you don't

05:30 just use any old thing, there's a certain pattern you follow.

Do you remember what those orders were?

Oh no, well, you know, they're just.

You couldn't recite them?

Oh no, no, no. Slow march or whatever, it's all gone, into my head and out the back.

And what about the women who were training, you had women training you at the college?

Yes.

06:00 **Yes.**

I think we did have a male doing some of the drill. It was a long time ago, 62 years ago, I just can't think. It was so rushed. We were there, really, to learn about the courses we were going to be working in,

06:30 the cipher, and drill was the air force part was on the periphery and then the administration and how to fill in their forms and how to be responsible for your own section and all that sort of thing, if you can understand that, I'm sure you can.

Oh, yeah, yeah. It's just particular you explain it, it's really for the archive.

07:00 **It's not just for me.**

But I mean, it's got to be through you, so there you are.

So the women that were training you, I know you have difficulty recalling them perhaps, but I'm just curious about what their ranks were and how they'd gotten into that position themselves?

Well, because they had joined the air force before I had

07:30 or they'd been in the air force and maybe made the rank of sergeant and then decided they wanted to become an officer. See, if they were in the air force before, as I said, other ranks you had to be 18, officers you had to be 21 or over. So, if they were in there, Coral was in the air force,

08:00 I know that for a fact, she was my age but a few months younger, she'd been a corporal, I think, so she would have learnt some of the skills of the drills and the marching that I hadn't learned before because she was in the other, lower, you know, not the officer's section.

08:30 So that's how they would know and I learned from the beginning. You had to be quick and take it all in, so that's we did.

However, she was a recruit like you were into the cipher training, is that correct?

Well, she applied to become an officer, while she was in the air force and she turned 21, she applied to become an officer,

09:00 I'm not too sure what she did before she went into the officer's course, whether she worked with teleprinters or whether she worked in cipher, I couldn't tell you, but I just went because I saw this ad, they needed women to become cipher officer trainees and that's why I applied to do it

09:30 because I thought well that's something I could do.

So, for you as a young woman, how did Melbourne compare to Brisbane?

Well, frightening, big, but, you grow up fast when you had to. It was the first time I'd left, well, I'd been on a whole day to Sydney to stay with my aunt, mother's sister, but my mother wouldn't let me go to

10:00 Sydney on my own, even though I was 20, 19 or 20, I'd saved up five pounds out of my bank salary, as such, and Noel, this brother, the second eldest, the one that was on, the big tall fellow, he, mother said,

10:30 "Yes, you can go to Sydney, only Noel will go with you", Noel was a jackeroo, he worked in Western Queensland on one of mother's relative's properties as a jackeroo, fiddling around with his wireless, you know, he knew Morse code and he took all that out west with him.

11:00 **So Noel was playing around with his wireless while he was being a Jackeroo?**

Well, he was a kid, yeah absolute, Morse code, did everything, you see, well then he came home on leave and mother said, "Yes, you can go to Sydney, but you'll go with Noel, Noel wants to go to Sydney". Well, she put it nicely even though she didn't want me to go on my own. So we went on the Byron Bay

11:30 steamer. You go bus from Brisbane to Byron Bay, in those days, get on the steamer at Byron Bay and go over night to Sydney and return when you wanted to go home again, five pounds. Well it was a long time ago. It took me a year to save up five pounds, to save it up because I was paying

12:00 board to my mother and buying material to make my clothes. I was always making myself new dresses and buying my rail ticket and all my other expenses. Five pounds wasn't much. It's all the bank paid us when I started with Les. Anyway, we went to Sydney and we had a super time

12:30 and I think of that holiday with Noel and mother saying, "Yes, you can go but Noel will go with you", she wouldn't let me go on my own, very protected.

So, what did you do in Sydney, did you hang out with Noel?

Oh yeah, we were staying with our cousins and aunt and uncle and we went on ferry rides and went and

13:00 just did, oh when was it, before the war started, of course, oh, we saw a few people that we had heard of through mother and just did what you do in Sydney, go to the pictures, go on the ferry, go look at the bridge, go to Manly, I suppose, I don't remember it, it's a hell of a long time ago now, what we did.

13:30 But he enjoyed it, being a jackeroo, he was out in the back blocks of Queensland, you know, as far away from the sea as you could possibly be and of course, he decided on that holiday that he would do the wireless course with AWAS, I think it was called, and that's how he did it and

14:00 became an operator and a radio officer in the Merchant Navy, so it all followed through in sequence. So, I think that's interesting, don't you? He was the one who was sending out that signal to me from Moratai, about being bombed by the Japs and it was not to me, it was to the northeastern area and I happened to be the one

14:30 who took note of the signal but it is quite an amazing story. He died unfortunately, they all died in their seventies, so I'm lucky I'm still going.

So we're talking about the friendships that you formed.

Yes all those.

So, Coral was one.

Yes,

15:00 Coral and Topsy and then Curtis, another Sydney girl and she married someone called Robertson, I was very close to her, very nice person, she lived in Adelaide and she died and the others were a bit older than I

15:30 and I can't recall anybody whom I knew in the air force who's still going, there must be somebody, but, who's on my officer's course, I can't recall anybody cause the ones that I was very close to have died, unfortunately, but, we won't pursue that matter anymore.

So, what was the accommodation like, can you describe it?

At Queens College? Oh well, we just lived in one of the student's rooms.

16:00 It was a male college, Queens, it's female and male now, I believe, but we just lived in one of the rooms and they put up a sort of, stretcher with a straw palliasse and gave us a couple of grey issue blankets, nothing too exciting. But, we ate in their dining

16:30 room with the students and of course, the boys, as I say it was a boys' residential college, Queens College, it was a no-no, we sat here and they sat there but they didn't talk to us and we didn't talk to them, but we were just there for the meals and the accommodation, you see, and the showers. But, one night it was very funny,

17:00 there were two other girls, we were three in a room and there was this disturbance at the door and we opened the door and there was this frightened kid, because it was residential college for the boys, this boy appeared and sort of, looked at us as if we were dragons and said, "I've got to get out", and he went and got out the window and just hung there by his fingertips because he was being chased

17:30 by another boy, you see, they were having a little bullying tactic, it's still going on, isn't it? Bullying, you hear about it all the time. But, these kids, they were only kids, students, "Did you see somebody?", and we just, "No", and he was there hiding down below the window, you see, we were up on the third floor,

18:00 I think, in amongst the grape vines, he was there. So we didn't have anything to do with it, it's nothing to do with us.

But you let him through to your window, did you?

The one who was being chased, no, the other one didn't find him.

Was that a dormitory room with the girls or was it just a couple of you?

No, it was,

18:30 you could call it dormitory, it's what is there now, I've never been back in to have a look, unless they've altered it, it was just a room with, I suppose now they have two students sharing a room but we had three beds in there but they were only stretcher type beds, as I said, with straw palliasses but, we sat there in the dining room and they had all the house masters and what not in their gowns

19:00 and it was all very formal and nothing's changed, I suppose.

So when you got your posting to Townsville that was your first posting after you concluded your training?

Oh yes, of course, yes, six weeks of pressure that's all we had for training, six weeks from beginning to end and then off on the troop train.

So tell me, how did you find your feet when you got up to Townsville?

Oh, you had to,

19:30 had to, there was nobody to mother you or anything, just had to do it.

Did you make any mistakes, early on?

Well, what sort of mistakes do you mean?

I don't know, with the coding or the decoding?

Well, no I didn't make any mistakes with that because that very important that you were absolutely

20:00 rigorous with your writing and doing the work as such because things depended upon you, lives depended upon you if they're talking about a ship being bombed, chased by the enemy. So, you couldn't

afford to make any mistakes.

20:30 **No, but you know when you start a new job sometimes you've got to kind of get used to things, does that mean that what you were taught in cipher school was directly translatable to the work you did at Townsville?**

Yes, that's what I was doing, that, but it was the real thing, and learning to adjust and doing shift work and coping

21:00 with other people's writing and all that sort of thing.

Was that a bit of a problem, was it?

Well people don't necessarily have copper plate writing, do they? And lots of things were hand written and not typed so you had to be able to decipher and do what was required of one. But it was

21:30 so busy and we were flat out trying to keep up with the work and the sleep deprivation and getting a bit of exercise and maybe having a night out at the squadron base, you know, at Townsville base, going to a dance, which was wonderful and we were allowed to go

22:00 not in uniform and I asked my mother to send me up my pink evening dress which I had made myself and it was gorgeous and I wore that out to the squadron air force base dance and boy, did the fellows like it, loved to see us all in dresses and not in uniform

22:30 and we loved being in dresses too, it was the only time we could get out of our uniform except when we were on the beach and we used to wear shorts then.

Did you girls go out, you know, did you go to pubs, did you go and have a drink with a group?

Mm, mm, I've forgotten the names; I have been back to Townsville once, since then, I am going back again

23:00 again this year cause my sister, the one in the photograph on the wall, she lives in Townsville so I'm going up in the winter so I'll revisit all the old haunts. It will be interesting, I'm looking forward to it. She was also in the air force but she was never stationed there, she was at Amberley in her instrument repair and she did a little bit in Adelaide.

23:30 **So did Coral and Topsy go with you to Townsville?**

Well, not then, but later they came, I don't know where they went first, but, Coral did turn up in Townsville because I was there for 18 months and we ended up sharing a room at St Anne's, which was wonderful,

24:00 cause we knew each other so well and shared all our times at Queen's College. I was devastated when Coral died but, still. And Topsy came up there too at some stage. I did bump into a couple of people whom I knew,

24:30 but, mostly it was those two and Marty. Marty was in her thirties when I met her, so she was quite a bit older than I was, she might have been 36 and I was 22 so she was 14 years older than I was, anyway, I liked her. I can't tell you much more

25:00 about the girls I knew because I've lost track, as I said. Gwennie Starke who was our commanding officer up there, she was a fabulous woman. Do you watch TV [television]? The ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], they had a woman pilot speaking on, I think it was George Negus' show, well, Gwennie was the pilot, she was in her thirties when she came up with

25:30 our senior WAAF officer in Townsville and she could fly a plane and she drove racing cars and she was an incredible woman, petite, but, she would do anything. And I did have, I don't know where it is now, she got herself a little MG [British car, Morris Garages] and she used to run us around in Townsville in this little MG.

26:00 She went off to march, or she was selected because she was a wing officer, which is like a wing commander in the male air force, she was a senior female officer, she marched in the victory march in London. I marched in the victory march in Sydney. Ken

26:30 marched in the victory march in Mildura, but, Gwennie went to London and you can imagine they went to quite a few gatherings and parties and she met Bill, who came from, she was then in her forties, in early forties and she met Bill who came from Scotland and they were married and they lived in [near] Hyde Park

27:00 and she had a daughter, which was a wonderful thing, at about 44, she had Janet. Gwennie's no longer with us, nor is Bill, but, Janet is and still lives in Sydney, I believe.

Extraordinary.

Yes, to fall in love and get married and then produce a child when most women have given up anyway,

27:30 I thought she had a bit of grit and determination, but she was that sort of woman. I was very fond of her and I used to see her when we lived in Sydney, I used to visit her. We had eight years in Sydney and she's died since then, of course. So, you remember the special ones.

28:00 **Did you discuss the work that you were doing at all, between yourselves?**

No, not really. Well, once you're out of that glorified, or not glorified, secret, sort of, atmosphere you just wanted to relax and be yourself

28:30 and do a few things, you know, like go horse riding or anything, get of the mainstream of the war because if you're talking about what you did, you're talking about the war all the time and the war was why we were there but then it had it's undertones and it's overtones didn't it? The war, well, it did for lots of people like me with somebody missing.

Yes, that's right,

29:00 **in fact, all the war you're brother was missing.**

Still missing. That's it, you know, it's tragic.

And when was it that Ken was missing?

Ken, of course, he was missing only for four days and nights with the Bedouins. But, no, Peter, his plane would have, I really can't even dwell on it,

29:30 but, it would have been blown to bits, that's all there is to it.

So the information that was coming through to you that you were privy to

We didn't discuss it.

But did it alarm you at all?

Well, to a degree, but, you're living with it all the time and I mean, when you look up in the sky and you see a Japanese

30:00 plane and you hear the bombs dropping well you can't be any closer to it than that, can you? You're right there and you know what's happening because you're seeing it, you're hearing it and it was a miracle that we survived, I mean, you prayed to God like mad, I did, I said my prayers all the time, "Keep me safe",

30:30 because.

There were three raids on Townsville, you told us the story diving into the trench at night, what were the other raids like?

The same, the same, at night because they working in the harbour trying to get these ships loaded up with food and

31:00 everything so they could get them off, get the troops, so, work was going non stop and the Japs were going non stop too, if they could get in there and sink a few more ships they would be doing it. But, of course, by this time night fighters had been launched cause previous to that night fighting happened in England

31:30 when the Germans were bombing London and they soon realised that we needed night fighters out here with the war and Japan being where it was and getting closer so they had nightfighters operating and they'd take off and you'd feel more secure because knowing they were up there doing what they were supposed to be doing and trained to do

32:00 whereas Ken was a fighter pilot but he didn't fly at night. In those days they didn't have nightfighters, well, it might have been dark when they got back to their squadron base, particularly in places like Italy and Sicily and all the places he was working out of, Malta, particularly, he was in Malta for three weeks and that was very, very

32:30 scary and heavily bombed situation in Malta, the Germans wanted to absolutely make it disappear into the sea, you know, blow it up to bits. Malta was a very dangerous and hard fought place because it was a hopping off point, you see,

33:00 from North Africa and before Italy and getting to here, there and everywhere, over to Gibraltar, I mean, the war was so intense at that stage, that really we can't comprehend it because the countries were jammed packed in together, you know what it's like in Europe, whereas Australia's one great big island isn't it? And it's thousands of kilometres

33:30 from Darwin down to Melbourne and vice versa but Europe is a different matter altogether. Anyway, Ken operated out of Malta and he said, it was pretty scary. He never, ever wanted to discuss, most pilots didn't, most men who went through those sorts of situations wouldn't ever talk about and I

34:00 don't blame them because it was close to the bone. He saw his friends being shot down in front of him

and one of these guys in our wedding photograph, the groomsman, had a brother and they were both in Ken's squadron, which

34:30 was a fatal mistake to have two brothers in the same squadron as pilots, but they did and Keith saw his brother, Keith Thompson I think his name was, I can't think of the other brother's name, but they were Queenslanders incidentally, saw him being shot down, you know, just killed in front of their eyes.

35:00 So, no wonder they never wanted to talk about it because ordinary soldiers on the ground it happened to them but, somehow pilots when they're up in the sky in single engine planes and they had no navigator, just one person operating these fighter planes, and they can't do anything and

35:30 seeing their friends shot through and crashing or the plane blowing up, no wonder they never want to talk about it. It's too riveting and too soul destroyer, you can understand it, I understand it too. Well, it's like the soldiers in the First World War in the trenches getting great big cannon balls shooting

36:00 into the trench and blowing guys about, blowing their heads off, their legs off, you know, it's terrible, you just don't want to think about that, do we? But Ken never wanted to talk about it and lots of people I know who had their fathers or husbands or brothers were in the armed forces, said the same,

36:30 it's finished, it's over, we'll just get on with living as life is, particularly, if they, as most of them did get married and have children, that's all behind them. So, our boys used to say, "But Dad, so and so and so and so", but he didn't' want to talk about it to them cause they weren't old enough to understand that a terrible

37:00 trauma would be going through the pilot's mind, you know, when you're leading a flight and the guy next to you has jumped out in a parachute and then he's being shot to ribbons, in front of your eyes. It's too horrendous to dwell on, isn't it? So I can understand

37:30 why Ken never wanted to talk about it too much, even to his own children but, he belonged to the Naval and Military Club and when the guys were altogether they'd talk between themselves about things but it wasn't a family subject and most people who I knew who were in the same situation, their husbands and fathers didn't want to talk about it because it's just too close, too

38:00 soul destroying for them.

Did you find that people, perhaps close relatives asked you if you could find anything out about their missing ones?

No, it didn't happen to me because I wouldn't have been able to do it. I've tried to do things post war since I've been up to Canberra and I've gone through records up there but

38:30 that's years after the war. No, you just couldn't do it because every day you had to be on the ball and making sure that you didn't make any mistakes and if you worried about other things you couldn't do your job properly, could you? You couldn't because your mind wouldn't have been on the job, which is what you were to do.

39:00 **So when met there in Townsville, you would have met some fellows around the town, I would imagine, did you tell them what your work was, were you able to reveal what you did?**

Oh, I just said, I was cipher officer and that was it or an operations officer, but, nobody really, I didn't meet anybody who wasn't in the services

39:30 because there weren't any guys floating around unless they only had one leg and you didn't meet them. We lived a sort of life which was an air force life with people who worked in the service or with the Americans worked with us but everyone was doing their war job they weren't civilians, there weren't civilians around

40:00 because in those days.

I meant even amongst servicemen.

No, well, you didn't want to. It was not the done thing to discuss too much about anything because as I said, you never know who was listening. But, it would have been foolish to have done it because that's how spies pick up there information

40:30 and there were spies around but nobody could pin point them but, intelligence knew there were people there who were trying to get secret information about when ships were sailing and that sort of thing.

Tape 6

00:32 **What were we talking about?**

Well, we're onto the work, still the work and you know that's what I did the operations in Perth and then

in Sydney and then close coordination with

01:00 the Americans.

There's something I wanted to ask you too, did you debrief at the end of the day or shift or week, was that something that was part of the work?

Not really because every day was different. All the signals I read and

01:30 we worked on, the controllers worked on, they were all logged and filed so if anybody wanted to look it up the information was there. Never threw anything out, never destroyed anything, it was all logged and documented for further inspection if needed.

At the time of the bombings on Townsville you were working in

02:00 **cipher or operations, cipher was it?**

Mm.

Yeah. Had there been any evidence of the likelihood of that occurring, in the work that you were doing?

Well, what do you mean by that question?

Well, I guess, did you, in terms of the signals that were coming through that you were decoding was there evidence in that

02:30 **information there that ...?**

That it was likely to happen? Well, once the Japs were operating closer, as I said, I went to Townsville at the time, towards the end of the Coral Sea battle, so we knew where they were and we knew this sort of thing would happen

03:00 because they could operate from some of these remote islands with flying boats and they had captured little bases particularly up in New Guinea and some of the corporal plantations were and people had been evacuated so it was

03:30 as close as that so we knew that knew and they knew that we knew what was going on because we had both sides of their intelligence working flat out so we had to know who was doing what and you couldn't stipulate that it would be

04:00 a bombing raid like in two days time, it was just one of these things but it was a volatile situation.

In your training were you at all introduced to the enigma code system in your training?

No, no, the enigma machine had not been in evidence here.

And you weren't

04:30 **aware of it at all?**

No, no, it was when the Americans discovered that it was, I don't know who, it operated in Europe first of all and it was, well,

05:00 the senior officers were running the whole show nothing was hidden from them so they found out about it and the British found out about it and once they did, we knew about it and the Americans so it was, because you could change the disks and change the code constantly, you see, for anybody

05:30 to break into it had to be specifically used, say a section used for 12 hours or 24 even but, because it was so complex the whole system they could change it very soon you see, and foil the enemy because the disk changed the code and the code was changed too so

06:00 you'd have to operate a thing for 12 hours before they could catch it and use it and work it out, work out the system, well that had to be prevented so it was a day to day changing all the time, so you can understand that was to stop the interlopers getting in

06:30 and picking up any information so "We know", they might say, "We know, their code system now, we know what they're using for the main letters of the alphabet", well, they couldn't do it because nothing was as repetitive as that, it was changed all the time.

And those 12 hourly or daily changes were for the allies everywhere?

07:00 Yeah, well, the Americans and the British and the Australians were all operating on the same system, yeah, signals were going like this.

But how, excuse my ignorance, how was the new code system communicated across the globe like that?

Well, it all operated, when they found out about the enigma machine or when it was invented and then the codebooks

07:30 and the whole system was analysed operating on the code books which the codes were changed, they'd tell you, they had a system, I mean it's very devious, but, it's beyond my limited knowledge of it but, because it was used in different countries, you see, and they could somehow bring their knowledge together

08:00 to make it into a system that they could understand, so, anything we see on TV, how secret it all was and how clever it all was, it's very true because they had to be right up there on top of it and they were over there just as clever,

08:30 you see, so it was A fighting B or B fighting A, couldn't drop your defences.

So when enigma was introduced up in Townsville you went from these code reference books that you were using onto the new equipment?

On the old code system, as I said, we worked with a partner,

09:00 you see, and everything was put into groups of four letters through the book, we had these code books and the partner. Buzz, hi, this is Buzz.

09:30 **Yeah, can we keep going. Just on this subject of the transition from partners using the code reference books to the enigma?**

Well, the enigma was a machine which one operated, see, in ordinary cipher we used the code books and we worked as a team, the enigma was a one person machine, which you did because

10:00 of the systems of disks and plain language and code language all operating side by side and you know, it was so sophisticated.

So when it was introduced you must have had some training?

Oh, we had a rapid run over on it, had to, because it was all so different

10:30 but then it wasn't hard to follow because if you could operate a typewriter or anything like that you could do that but it was just knowing the system, changing the disks and doing this and doing that and altering this key and that key and etc, etc, just keep your mind on the job and do it.

Was it easier for you?

11:00 Oh it wasn't a matter of saying it was easier, it was different and as I said, very sophisticated piece of equipment so I found that interesting.

So it was more satisfying in that way?

Well, I enjoyed using it because I enjoyed the depth of the sophistication not like doing simple little things with a partner and putting things

11:30 in and working out the codes the machine was doing the working and we were helping the machine do it, that's what I found very satisfying. So that's all I can tell you about the enigma machine.

So who trained you in how to use it, where there people from the [United] States or Britain that came and did the training?

Oh, you just, I recall

12:00 there wasn't a lot of training, there was, but, if you were already used to talking about plain language and codes you knew what it was all about anyway and the machine was helping you do it.

But I imagine it would be something that the cipher section and the CO's [commanding officer] would have been very concerned about getting right and not making any mistakes.

12:30 Oh yes, well, I mean, they were careful about whom they chose to operate it, you see. Very few non commissioned people operated them, not that that meant anything, but, I'd been trained as a cipher officer from go, from the beginning, so I basically knew what it was all about

13:00 except this machine was doing things that previously I had done. So that's all I can really say about it, it was a sophisticated machine and it didn't make errors as long as you were spot on, the operator was spot on and didn't make errors. So you had to have your mind completely on the job.

Mm, I can imagine.

Very much so

13:30 because an error meant, not just one word, the whole context of the thing would go out of it's true placement, it would be repetitive you see, you just couldn't make mistakes, so I didn't, well, I don't suppose anybody did because if you did you'd be removed from the scene

14:00 quick smart and given another job less arduous. So that's the only explanation I can give, but, the machine was very sophisticated, I thought, for its time.

Ok, so you were in Townsville for 18 months?

Yes and Perth for 18 months.

We may have gone over this before, this morning, but, how did you come to

14:30 **get that posting to Perth, how did that happen?**

Because 18 months in the tropics was the limit, after that time you were moved and I think I did say, I spoke to somebody, an authority, about it, that I would be quite happy to be posted to Perth because my eldest brother was there, he was an architect

15:00 and he was working doing, you know, he wasn't in the armed forces because he was working for the government designing air fields and accommodation at air fields so he was in a restricted but important job, he lived at Perth so I said I would be quite happy to go to Perth if there was an opening in the operation's room and

15:30 if they needed somebody with experience and that's how I came to go to Perth. And I loved being in Perth and seeing my brother and sister-in-law, my brother's still alive, he just turned 89, but my sister-in-law died, but, the baby, they had a baby when I was there, he's my godson and my nephew.

16:00 I'm back to square one Buzz. He's another architect, they go down through our generations, architects.

So did you know anyone else in Perth or in that job in operation's, did you know anyone?

No, I didn't, no, no. But, they were all ex-pilots, the men,

16:30 had to be in operation's room, had to have been a pilot at some stage and removed from operations because of illness or domestic situations and you sort of meet somebody who knows somebody, you know, there's sort of interlocking connection with the sort of work that I was doing and people never

17:00 stayed in one place for years and years, they moved around, or, were moved around. That's how it all turned out in that regard, that you knew somebody that they had known or knew of and also having my family there and coming over

17:30 on the troop train I had this friend, another WAAF officer and she was coming over to Perth and I was travelling on the troop train back to Perth and I introduced her to a guy whom I had met

18:00 through somebody else and she was then in her thirties, she had grown up in China, her parents were missionaries, anyway, she married that guy, which was fabulous because she was, you know, late thirties and managed to produce two children

18:30 and she's dead now and so is he, but, it was such a romance, really, all because we travelled on the troop train and I'd met this guy and I introduced her. Terrific, isn't it? She never would have had the chance to meet him properly like that 'cause she was going to a place called Carina, which is in Perth is

19:00 where there's a country club and they took over that to use as a WAAF officers or WAAF residential section and he was an ex-pilot who was going to be working down in Pearce or somewhere, I don't know how they would have met otherwise but, because they were on the troop train and I introduced them and he fell in love with her and she fell in love

19:30 with him and I mean, she never expected to be married, ever. She was a teacher at a girls school in Sydney when she finally left university, but, she had grown up in China with her missionary parents and she come to Australia until she was 16. She wasn't Chinese, of course, she was terribly, terribly English but,

20:00 there we are.

So, know, can we talk a little bit more about Perth, I'm not clear, was Perth where you did the navigation course?

No.

That was Sydney was it?

Mm.

Just on that subject with the navigation course, what was the purpose, what was the point of you doing a navigation course

20:30 **I mean, did you intend to fly?**

No, it was part of changing, no, I did that course part of changing from, I did it up in Townsville actually, from being a cipher officer to working in the operation's room, a different category, I became and

operation's officer not a cipher officer. When you're a cipher officer that's all you do, cipher,

21:00 code, decode etc. Operation's officer, you're in the heart of the action, the operation's room, so you know what's going on.

So why was navigation important to carry out that?

Well, it was part of the deal to become an operation's officer, there were certain schedules and certain subjects that one studied and that was one of them.

21:30 You had know if you were recommending that a certain place be, a reconnaissance flight be instituted to go and find out how many Japanese ships were sheltering over here, the guys who flew the planes, well, they did the navigation and we, the people,

22:00 who instituted the whole thing had to know all about it too. So that was one of the subjects one did to become an operation's officer.

Yes, yes, I understand that, I'm just trying to get how it related to an operation?

Well, that's how it relates, that's how it relates.

But it did mean when you had that trip on the walrus it meant you could actually navigate within a plane?

22:30 Yeah, yeah because I knew what points a navigator needed to know, you know, the compass direction etc, where north, south, east, west was, where the wind was coming from etc, etc, and that was part of the deal when you'd done navigation, which angle you would fly at or the plane would have to fly at

23:00 but the navigator would tell the pilot if they pilot didn't know. Not that I had to because he knew what he was about and also it was a wonderful day, you could see everything.

But was that the first time you'd been up in a plane and navigated or had you done that before as part of your training?

Well, I had done a little bit as part of my training but, out of Townsville, but,

23:30 as I said, it was a theoretical subject in a way but we had to be obviously at home with because you had to know what a navigator would do and what was necessary for a navigator to know, you know, how to ascertain

24:00 one's flight plan if you couldn't visually see because you're working on compass figures and all that sort of thing. I find it difficult to explain exactly why, but, you can understand.

Well, the more you're explaining the clearer it is becoming, that's for sure. So with the

24:30 **map, the map reading, the big map that you had in the operation's room.**

At the end of the wall, yeah.

So you're working with compass reading?

No.

Latitude and longitude reading?

Oh, yes, latitude, longitude yes, yes, distance, everything, but, you know, it was all how many inches would cover

25:00 a hundred miles, it was all sort of written out for us, we knew exactly when, this big scale map, you had to know exactly what you were doing with it. So that was just part of the study coming off the operations.

And what area did the map cover?

Well, the Coral Sea, all the, I'm talking about in, at least, in Townsville,

25:30 it's all out in the Pacific and we had one in Perth too but, you know, it was a different time when I was in Perth, it was 1944 and it wasn't like '42 with the Japanese closing in on Northern Australia, in '44 they were getting things

26:00 under control and it was submarines mostly and navy ships and that sort of thing but, it was the same sort of big maps and distances and currents and harbours and all that sort of thing but, you could see it all because it was a large map.

So the people, the controller for example, people at that level who were working in operations,

26:30 **were they, would you regard them as brilliant people?**

They had to be trained as pilots to begin with, so they had to know what they were talking about,

distances from A to B in a plane or in a ship, whatever. I mean, it was important work but, it's not that they were brilliant at it, they could have been but,

27:00 they had to know about navigation, they had to know about distance, they had to know about well, intelligence and then we had Met [Bureau of Meteorology] officers as well to advise us on what was coming up with the weather and how that would effect operations and that was very much

27:30 a part of the team, intelligence, all this in the operation's room, especially in Townsville and earlier in Perth, all in the one big set up where everybody knew what everybody else was doing and what the planning was because they had to know about the weather, they had to know about what intelligence had said to them or they'd picked up,

28:00 what the navy was planning, what the army was planning, it was all part of the whole working the war business, see.

So those plans, would they sort of manifest up there on the map as well, did they use the map in that way to actually show operations?

You only, you moved planes, or you moved buttons

28:30 or whatever you were working with, for mass evacuation or different areas of sea lanes, which the ships were going to be using to get up to the Dutch East Indies if they were going up there, the submarines, whatever. They had a system, whereby, you could sort of,

29:00 get it all, if you were trained to do it and the controller was trained because he was a pilot, and they could read from the map what was going on, you see, what reconnaissance had told them, how many ships were gathering in some particular place that needed to be reported on and the Catalinas

29:30 would go off and they could have a range of 22 hours and they'd go out of Townsville or Cairns and go all around like this over the ocean, seeing what they could see and what was happening and they could land because a Catalina is designed to land on the water,

30:00 there were some other ones, but, mostly Catalinas and it was part of the strategy to know, they could use a seaplane and it had long-range tanks and because there is so much distance to be covered, you see, in their reconnaissance.

30:30 **It's fascinating, really interesting.**

Go on out with it.

No, look, I don't want this on the tape.

You don't?

Well, it's funny.

It sounds very funny. After all you've been saying about how you (UNCLEAR)?

But this is in Townsville.

31:00 Oh, yeah, that was in Perth, yeah, I did.

What was that?

Playing cards with Admiral Nimits. Oh, boy that was quite a night. He was the head American Naval officer in Western Australia,

31:30 Southwest Pacific.

Well, over to Patty now.

How did I come to be at that dinner party? Was it the American I worked with down in Pearce airbase? I've forgotten now, I haven't thought about that for a long time.

32:00 Did I tell you Buzz? Are you hiding? Are you still there? How did I come to be there? No. It was Perth.

Doesn't matter, doesn't matter, let's hear the story.

Yes, it was Perth, yeah.

32:30 This guy was a pilot, grounded, American, how did I meet him? We lived in the Choruses, which is an old, old monastery base in St Georges Terrace, I think it's still there, beautiful old building, the air force had taken it over

33:00 and I shared a room with Coral there at one stage, but anyway, Admiral Nimits. I met this guy who came into the operation's room in Perth and he was a Texan, tall, good looking and the girls teased me about that and one of them came into my room

33:30 at the Choruses and said, “Guess who’s at the door asking for you, ‘Deep in the Heart of Texas’”, she was mimicking him you see, he wanted to see me and she said, “Yes?”, “I’ll be there”. Anyway, he was a very nice guy and he invited me to this dinner, he was married, he was very honest,

34:00 he was about ten years older than I was, he wasn’t trying to have a quickie or anything, he was very honest, he said, “I have a wife in America and I have a little boy, we’re married for 15 years”, he was an engineer, she was an engineer, oh no, that’s the Shell man, but, anyway, this American, he said,

34:30 “We’re going to have dinner at Admiral Nimits”, who lived in a private home they’d taken for him in Dallkey, a lovely suburb of Perth, and I said, “Will I be able to wear my (UNCLEAR)” he said, “I doubt it”, I said, “Will I wear uniform or not?” and he said, “Have you got a dress?”

35:00 and I said, “Yeah”, I had one. It’s actually the dress that I’m in that picture of, Colin, but it was all black, the one on the Women’s Weekly it was done in different shades, but it was a black silk because we didn’t wear civilian clothes very much but I had taken this one dress with me, so I wore that and I had all these guys,

35:30 at this air force, they’d taken over this home at Coral Bay, where the admiral was installed with housekeeper and servants galore and aides and what not. He sat up the top at the table and then in rank went vice admiral, captains, commanders, so and so, so and so, so and so and then I was the only woman and I sat down the bottom of the table

36:00 facing the Admiral. God, it was a hysterically funny night and I had this black silk dress on. It was a good meal, we had Filipino boys behind each guest serving our meals, producing the beautiful food, taking away the plates, filling up our glasses etc etc and then this

36:30 guy who’d asked me, he’s aid com was on my left ‘cause he was junior officer and he worked in the, the Admiral had an office near the operation’s room in Perth, which was in Perth in a building, St Georges Terrace the building was, in Perth and he said,

37:00 “He likes to roll the dice after dinner”. And I thought, good god, I’ve never rolled dice in my life, but, anyway, this is my American friend kicked me under the table and said, “He likes to roll the dice”, speaking like that out of the corner of his mouth. So we rolled the dice and guess what, I had more, I won.

37:30 So he said, “Don’t do it, he likes to win, he loves to win, don’t do it”. So in the end, you know, I’m back down the bottom of the ladder again so that was good. But, what a night and the girls in the barracks teased me about it. Oh, they teased me, you wouldn’t believe, “Deep in the heart of Texas”. Anyway, I stayed with that guy,

38:00 not the Admiral, of course, but the guy who took me, I saw him when I went to America. So that was interesting.

Oh, after the war, you mean?

Yeah.

Tell me quickly about the dress, the photo for the Women’s Weekly and you were wearing the dress, what was that, what were the circumstances?

Well, I can’t go and get it, you can go and get it.

Just describe what happened, how it came to be.

38:30 Well, I just took a dress with me. We were always in uniform and wherever we went we wore uniform, summer or winter, but I took a dress in case I got invited, see, my brother lived in Perth and I thought, I might need a dress where I can go out of uniform and I took this black silk dress, which was very expensive, I’d bought in Brisbane and it was

39:00 ‘Louis’ was the name of the shop but, it was the only thing in the window, so I saved up for ages and ages to get that dress, but I got it and it’s lovely, I loved it. So it travelled around with me so I thought I might be going to something where I can go without a uniform, you see, because you get sick and tired of wearing uniform every day, every night.

39:30 if you go out you’re in uniform. So that’s how I had the dress with me so I wore it that night and I wasn’t, well, I suppose he knew who I was, maybe, I don’t know, but it wasn’t important, the point was I was there meeting all these fascinating guys and playing rolling dice with the Admiral.

But you had a photograph taken

40:00 **of you in that dress was it, for the Women’s Weekly, how did that come about, was that that night?**

No, that was is painting in the Women’s Weekly, a guy in Perth whom I knew worked with this Group Captain Green and his brother was an artist so he painted me in the dress, but, it’s not black, he painted it as if it’s blue top and I can’t remember now

40:30 what's in the front. So that was the story of the dress.

Tape 7

00:30 **Ok tape 7 now Patty, we want to hear some of the juicy stuff.**

The juicy.

Start with something perhaps a little bit tamer than the other stories, can we hear about Magnetic Island and what you got up to at Magnetic Island, skiing and grenades that sort of thing?

I don't remember, oh, yeah, yeah, I did, but that wasn't

01:00 that was just all, wasn't that Townsville beach, yeah. I went with this guy, wasn't it the one, Buzz can you remember, was it the American guy?

01:30 **It's all right, if you can't remember Patty, we don't have to, we're just here we want to know what you remember and what's important.**

Well, I remember going water skiing, I'd never been, aquaplaning, that's what I did, I'd never been aquaplaning in my whole life and he said, "We're going out there and you can go aquaplaning", I said, "Oh, that sounds interesting", and it was.

02:00 Of course, I just stood up and fell off straight away and we were out there with the sharks. Anyway, I swam back again and I got back. He was the guy of the destroyer I met. I got up again and in the end of the afternoon I could aquaplane very well, just a matter of balance. But, if you've never done it and you've got to do it quick smart before the sharks get you.

02:30 So I did that.

Heard something about a story to do with underpants or the lack thereof, can you tell us about that one?

Well, you visualise the picture, don't you? It's Townsville, tropical, we were allowed to not wear stockings if we wanted not to wear stockings

03:00 in the middle of that humid weather because they were thick issue stockings they weren't fine silk sheer ones, so, and I had very brown legs, so we were permitted if we asked our commanding officer, we could go to work without stockings 'cause we went in the ten down and we were taken out to the op's room and

03:30 did a shift. Everything was fine, but I thought, well, it's such a hot day, wearing these elastic things that were not quite, they were like elastic pants because I didn't have a girdle sort of thing and I was pretty slim but I wore

04:00 these things and it was like an elastic girdle but it had a leg piece around here which kept them on and I put those on and I forgot to put the undies on over the top and I'm up the ladder pushing these red, battle ship was expected and

04:30 where the planes were taking off and I'm up the ladder doing all this and the guys were wondering around underneath looking, "What's this Patty, what have you done here?" and walking around, I thought, oh my god, I'm up the ladder and I haven't got any proper underpants on I've only got these elastic things with leg straps, so I kept all that to myself.

05:00 **Were the men there generally pretty well behaved in that respect?**

Yeah, they were all. In the 18 months I spent in Townsville there was one instance of one of the airwomen, not an officer, becoming pregnant and she had a baby in the Townsville hospital

05:30 and oh boy, did that create a raucous, not done.

What was the upshot of that for her?

She was quietly removed from the scene, baby and all and out the door, but, I didn't know any officers that were anything like that. I didn't participate in anything like that, I suppose some of them did,

06:00 that was their own personal thing, not mine.

So how would you have negotiated that, if someone did try to make a move or was fairly persistent with getting you on a date, that sort of thing how would you deal with that if you were adamant that wasn't going to happen?

I'd just come out and say it's not going to happen because I had my principals

06:30 to adhere to and that was it. I didn't believe in all of that stuff.

Buzz can we just do our thing

07:00 **is that all right, I'm definitely going to get to that period, so thanks. I'm just curious also with the other girls there, off camera talking about an escapade involving beer, were the girls drinkers would they sort of hover around with the fellas in that respect?**

Well, I mean, it all depends how they'd been brought up, yeah.

07:30 I was fairly strictly brought up but, I mean, I wouldn't drink a lot but I wouldn't knock back, I didn't stop drinking. My father drank, he said to me, "You know Patty, you'd be better off drinking a whiskey and water

08:00 with lots of ice rather than beer", because he said, "beer in that tropical climate goes straight through you and you think you're still thirsty, if you have a small whiskey with a lot of ice that will last you one drink the whole evening" and he was so right because we were in an officers' mess situation and, you know, you had

08:30 a drink and I thought that was very sensible and good advice from my father, after all, he'd been at sea a long time in his years and it was wonderful because you see I could say, "Look I already have a drink, I don't need another one, actually all I need's a little more ice because it's very hot", so wiggle out of

09:00 and do the right thing and never get into a disgraceful situation.

When you did get leave and you'd go back to Brisbane and see you parents, did you, after, those lengthy periods away and coming home did you get a sense you were changing as a person or that the people around you were changing?

Oh yeah, yeah, I was, my whole, I

09:30 was growing up I suppose, I wasn't when I joined the air force, I wasn't a very sophisticated person but, being away from home was not easy but one copes and then losing my darling brother, that helped to make me realise what it was, the full potential of it all

10:00 then I found my little sisters had grown up a bit while I was away, you see, I was quite surprised to see how changed they were, but that was natural, but if you were away and it was a long way away from Perth to Brisbane or Townsville to Brisbane or whatever, so it does make a difference but, that's what we did, our life was changed

10:30 and I've never regretted any of it for one minute. I enjoyed it, even the shift work and the hard work and all the things we had to do and take our duty, do our duty as orderly officers, inspect the troops, inspect the mess, the kitchen, see if the kitchen staff were doing their job.

11:00 That was part of being an orderly officer when you're doing your duty for 24 hours, you had to be spot on because if anything went wrong it wasn't the senior officer who coped the lot it was the orderly officer on the day, which could have been Patty or my friend Coral or anybody. So it was a case of rigorous discipline that was important for the individual.

Do you recall times

11:30 **when needed had to meet out a bit of discipline, for example when you were office orderly?**

Yeah, I wasn't terribly good at it.

Patty, where are you going?

I'm just going

You've got the microphone that's all.

I'm sorry, sorry, I've dropped it.

No you haven't you've got it. What did you want to do Patty?

I just wanted to get rid of that.

Ok, we can do that for you.

Sorry I forgot about the microphone being hitched up to the old girl.

Don't worry it happens all the time.

12:00 What was the trend of your question?

The trend and train of it was, I was asking, as an officer were there times where you needed to perhaps pull rank as it were, to meet out a bit of discipline when you had to set an example?

Oh well, yes, there were, but because I was a junior officer and there were always women officers in

senior age

12:30 and senior rank to me, except when our turn came around to be orderly officer, I wasn't terribly good at dealing, I wasn't a prefect at school so I hadn't had the practice, but, of course, I was the eldest daughter of the family so I suppose I'd had a little bit of practice. My younger sisters rebelled if Patty

13:00 told them to do something. I used to bribe them, threepence. Well, I was twelve years older than Rosemary so I used to say I'll give you threepence or even six pence if you dust my dressing table while I'm at work, which she did.

Did the threepence work in the WAAF?

No, no, none of that in the WAAF. I'm just talking about little

13:30 family things then. We had, I had a black woman who used to come and wake me up especially when I was doing night work and trying to sleep during the day, she'd come in to the room, especially over in Perth and I was sleeping in the day

14:00 and she'd say "I'll bring you in your dinner or you can come into the mess because you have to leave soon to go to work", so I was always thankful that she cared enough to do that and that was part of their job anyway to make sure that the officers did what they were supposed to do and meanwhile she'd, sort of, make the bed and you know, do the cleaning up etc, etc.

14:30 **You mentioned your friend Coral how she was also an officer.**

Yes, yes, she was, lovely person. She died at 62, which was terrible but, anyway, yes, Coral and I were very good friends on the same officer's course so it was wonderful. And she had five children

15:00 and I had five children. She had two boys and three girls and I had four boys and one girl so there we are, we had a lot in common. And Winifred was the one I introduced to her husband on the train, the one whose parents were missionaries in China and she married Noel

15:30 and they had a wonderful happy marriage. So looking back you make very good friends and they keep going for ages and ages until everyone's too old and they've died, which is sad, but still that's life, isn't it? What else do I have to, what have you got on that list?

16:00 **I've shown it to you.**

Can I have a?

Don't worry I'll read them out, we've covered most of it, but I'm curious about, we haven't talked a lot about Perth, you've told one or two stories but the changes seen there, you're dealing with a different theatre of the war, you told us about the operations room in Townsville, what was the set up in Perth?

Well, it was in the city, the operations room, in one of the big newish, this is

16:30 in 1944, yeah, 42, 43 in Townsville, 44, buildings in the city or St Georges Terrace, it was an insurance building and they had the op's room set up in there and then they had the American, they took over the two floors,

17:00 that's right, and we had the operations room there with all our phones and set ups and tie ups to the squadrons etc and the Americans also were their officers and that's where I met the guy who was the adjutant to the admiral and he used to come into the room that we were in with, I've forgotten his name now, but, interesting man

17:30 and the pilots used to come and towards the end of my stay in Perth the flying boat pilots used to come into the operations room and my job was to have all the weather maps and forecasts all detailed out to give to them because they went up to Broome and started flying out of Broome, this is in late

18:00 1944 and when did I go to Sydney? I went to Sydney in June '45, so it must have been in '45 but I used to meet all these guys who flew the flying boats and they were, post war they then flew the flying boats, you know, in a civilian capacity, which was interesting.

18:30 **So what was there role, what were they doing up in Broome, do you know?**

Oh, doing up bit of picking up of people coming out of Indonesia and all that sort of thing, you know, the war was getting a little bit less pressured at that time and also taking up naval guys to sort of have a join ships reconnaissance

19:00 ships and see what was going on in the oceans and how close the Japs were or weren't, whatever the case may be. The war was declining somewhat but, it was still important work because of the long coastline etc. I went down to Pearce and worked in the op's room down there,

19:30 I think I told you that.

Yeah, well you mentioned it in passing, but we have had a chance.

Well, that was only relieving, assistant controller, in the operations room at Pearce and the nurses who were the only other females and they didn't like it all that I was there and I wasn't part of their little team of nursing people.

20:00 I was doing men's work. I was only there relieving, I was only there for three weeks, but, going into the mess at night, you see and hobnobbing with the men because I worked with them all the time and I mean, they were looking after sick people they weren't doing what I was doing but, oh boy, I think the word got around, "You want to watch that Patty woman,

20:30 she's dynamite with those guys", I can imagine one of them saying. It was part of my job, fraternise with these guys, after all I was giving them weather information and this and that and the other but these poor old girls didn't like and I was young anyway, so there we are.

Would they ever sort of confront you

21:00 **or snipe from the side?**

I bet they did, I didn't take any notice of them. I did what I did because it was really important that I did it to keep the pilots happy so they'd come in and get the right weather report when they needed it, it was part of my job to see they had it and I had the opening business with the weather bureau, particularly in Perth,

21:30 at the end when it was so important they had the right weather. Now Ken's sister, she's dead too because she was ten years older than Ken, but she worked, it's very interesting, she was small, petite, good looking, she was a dancer and she danced,

22:00 pre-war, with Jasey Williamson, and she and her husband and I don't know what her husband, I think his name was, I never met him, Strickland, I'm not too sure, but, she and he ran a nightclub in Rangoon, this is after she'd been

22:30 dancing around in New Zealand with Williamson, and she married this guy, he was in the Burmese army and she joined the Burmese army, this is when Burma came into the war and as I said they'd been running a night club there and he joined the British army and she joined the Women's Army Corps India, so he went off with his lot and she went down

23:00 to India and she ended up on [Lord] Mount Batten's staff doing cipher, interesting. So, she knew all about what went on with the war there, Mount Batten was chief of staff, you know, in what is know Sri Lanka but it used to be called Colombo then, did you know that? Yeah, anyway,

23:30 I used to get all these signals about people who were arriving, pilots and people of importance arriving in Perth and I had to put them in the log book and show them the controller what had arrived in the signal and I read this one 'Lieutenant D Strickland will be arriving on flying boat coming in from Rangoon and landing at

24:00 Broome and then coming to Melbourne" and I wrote all that down, Lieutenant D Strickland, I just imagined this guy, Lieutenant D Strickland, and then the date came and that person would have arrived and Ken, by this time, had just come back and was living at a pub in Perth

24:30 and he rang me up, I was finishing at seven or starting at seven, pm I'm talking about because we kept the op's room going all the time, day and night, and he said, "Can you get off this evening, can you get a replacement?"

25:00 and I said, "Well, I'll ring around", because it had to be someone who was a trained operations room officer or an ex-pilot and he said, "Well, I would appreciate it", of course he'd just come back from overseas, "if you could because there's a party on at the Esplanade Hotel" he said "I'd like you to come" and I said, "Well, I'll do the best I can".

25:30 I had to have a pilot and I rang around and I got somebody who, you know, we could swap favours, it was a guy, I said, "If you could take over my job", 'cause the controller, the senior controller went home at seven to his wife, you see, and the person I was, the assistant controller running the operations room had to be there all night and if necessary we could call the controller

26:00 and say, "You've got to come back there's something urgent happening". So I rang this guy and I said, "I would appreciate it if you could fill in for me tonight perhaps from eight maybe", and he said, "I'll let you know" and he said "Yes, I'll be able to do it" and I said, "That's wonderful". So I turned up at the party and guess what?

26:30 Lieutenant D Strickland was Ken's sister. I thought Lieutenant D Strickland was a man, you know, I'd written it all up in the log, it was sister, who'd come down on leave from Rangoon down to see their mother and father and she'd been Burma all that time. I said, "I can't believe it, I didn't know I was writing up Lieutenant D Strickland

27:00 I just imagined a guy like you, tall, good looking and there we were and Ken said, "I thought I told you her name", I said, "Well, you didn't but if you did, it might have", I'd never met her before, I knew he

had a sister called Dulcie who was connected with the army in India.

27:30 So there we were, what a night, what a surprise to meet this rather pretty, petite person who, I said, “I’ve written your name four times today, Lieutenant D Strickland”, so Ken said, “What a night, hey”. So there we were.

Did you get back to the operations room on time?

I didn’t I just rang the guy and said no, I said, “I will do

28:00 the same for you some time if you can carry on for me as long as there is somebody there in case our boss comes in, if something important happens ring me, I’ll be at the Esplanade Hotel, ring me” he said, “Yes I will but I’ll be right”. So there we were Lieutenant D Strickland was Ken’s sister, god, what a night that was, amazing”.

Where

28:30 **was Ken at that point, by the time you got to Perth in ’44?**

Well he came home at the end of ’44, this was at the end of ’44, he came home, or was it early ’45, it might have been early ’45, but it was very close to the end of ’44 when she came out on leave, so there we were, very fascinating story, Lieutenant D Strickland.

29:00 **It sounds like you were, well, obviously you were in a position where you had some authority, quite a lot of responsibility?**

Well, I did when the controller, the true head of the operations room wasn’t there, you see, I was the senior officer then so I was controlling the sergeant who did the typing or the messenger who was delivering messages to the Americans

29:30 who were down the hall but, I was in charge once he’d gone and as I said if something urgent happened I could get him in, but he wanted to be at home with his family because he lived in Perth, you see, and I wasn’t married and so it didn’t matter to me I could do my job there.

And the sergeant, the messenger they were male or female?

Oh, both, one messenger

30:00 was male and there was a female who used to come in and do the typing occasionally so, ‘cause this is, as I said, it was ’44 or early ’45, I think it was the end of ’44 because I went to Sydney in ’45, pretty sure I did.

30:30 **That’s all right, that’s ok, we don’t have to get the exact date. At the time were you, sort of, conscious of the fact that you were in some ways quite a pioneer that you might be opening doors for women taking on roles that were traditionally a male domain?**

No, no, no. In what way do you relate that to what I did?

Well, if you go back, I guess in World War II

31:00 **there were more women involved than in previous conflicts and being put into positions**

Oh, of course, of course, the WAAF was formed at the end of 1940, ’41. So there were no women’s services except the nursing service, you see, for the army or the navy and then as our Second World War progressed as far as it and the men were being sent

31:30 overseas they needed women to do the jobs that previously men had done, you see. So that’s the way it worked out that we were doing that sort of work and we could do it as well as they could even with women driving staff cars, driving the admirals around and all that sort of thing. Before that, you know, women played a very minor role

32:00 except for the nursing people involved in that and in hospitals with physiotherapists, they needed the women because we could do all these jobs just as well as they could. Operate the machines and you know, send the signals and Morse code and all that sort of thing and be like my sister,

32:30 repair instruments in an aeroplane and she was good at her job. It took her nine months to train for that job but, she did it and she did it well. So it was a different life for women, the Second World War, and of course, it established them as an integral part of the defence forces as it is now

33:00 but that journey on the troop train when I had army girls, navy girls and air force girls, oh, god that was funny, I looked up and I saw this colonel, you know, unmistakeably the colonel, older man, retired, holding a whole lot of papers and I thought “oh-oh”

33:30 and so I just snuck the cap on and the jacket on and sure enough he had a list, he was heading for me, to keep all these girls in order, “I hold you responsible, section officer, you are the responsible officer in charge” and when you’re on the troop train going across the Nullabor, I tell you, some of these army girl and even

34:00 an air force girl, they just wanted to push off and do all the wrong things and I had to exert my humble authority and tell them they couldn't do it because I would be the one who got the blame. That's what officers do, they have to exert their senior rank, as it were, even though

34:30 you're talking to somebody who is old enough to be your mother, just about. And what else can I tell you?

Obviously there was the matter of rank, but were you able to socialise at all with the air women, for example, with the other ranks, was there any?

Well, we didn't so much, really, we used to sometimes when they drove us

35:00 somewhere. I went out to Charters Towers to relieve in the, they had a squadron based out there and I had to go out and work with their cipher crew out there, Charters Towers, and live there, it was only for a few weeks, but, it was something that you had to do,

35:30 lived in a tent and went down to the basics, but that was part of what was going on in North Queensland during the war. It was fairly crowded at that time with Yanks and some Canadians and lots and lots of our troops because they had to be there, where the action was, ready to move off, over to Darwin,

36:00 up to New Guinea, whatever.

Were they the most, sort of, basic conditions that you came across, those at Charters Towers?

Yeah, well, in Townsville, I'd been over to Magnetic Island and I was doing back flips and all sorts of interesting little jobs because I was mad about gymnastics and I don't know whether I strained my appendix

36:30 or whatever but I ended up back in Townsville and the sister in charge, nursing sister said, "You could have a suspected appendicitis thing here, I've got to put you in here", tent hospital it was. So I was carted out in an air force ambulance

37:00 out, nearly to Charters Towers, back of Townsville, you see, they had to put all these places away from the coast in case there were bombings or something like what happened in Sydney with the gunners shooting up Sydney harbour, you remember when that happened? So I was out there in this bush hospital in a tent,

37:30 hot and no food. They kept me off food for three days because of this pain I had and they thought if she's not better by the Sunday we're going to have to operate. Well because I didn't have any food and I was able to drink some water, but that's all, they decided I wasn't going to die on them and I didn't have appendicitis, I think it was all due to my

38:00 strenuous gymnastics display on the beach at Magnetic. I think that's what happened, I over did it.

A lot of the people we talk to it seems food is a very important matter, but, when you're in the services sometimes its not.

The food when I went to Townsville was terrible.

38:30 We had a custard that was sort of made from custard powder and looked green and we had crumby sort of sausages and they were almost inedible, I didn't like them at all. The food was awful and the woman who was in charge of women's troops,

39:00 I've forgotten her name now, but she had no idea about making sure that the food for her, particularly the officers who were doing so much shift work, was good and you know would sustain them. We needed lots of fruit and all that sort of thing, which we weren't having and then when Gwennie Starke, this other woman,

39:30 who became the director of WAAF eventually, she was a university lecturer that never married, I think, but, Gwennie Starke came on the scene and she said, "The food's terrible, I'm going to sack the cook, I'm going to get another cook and I'm going to make sure you girls are feed properly", and things improved, it was wonderful. We got fruit and I didn't feel sick anymore.

40:00 I felt sick because I couldn't eat the food, it was awful. Especially when you're working at night and using your brain, you've got to have the right sort of food. Anyway, she straightened everything up in Townsville and she was marvellous, absolutely marvellous.

So what was on the menu once the improvements had been made?

Well, we got salads and fruit and fresh fruit

40:30 and, you know, and even fish, after all we're living on the coast you'd think that the catering staff would be able to provide us with fish, which is a marvellous food, especially if people are using their brains all the time. So that was what we needed, thought going into the provisioning of the barracks and we got it because she wasn't going to put up with

41:00 any of your old rubbishy custard powder stuff, horrible. I didn't like custard made out of horrible

mildewy, she said it was green because it was mildewed, I've never forgotten that, smart woman. Anyway, that was important that we had the right sort of

41:30 food. And when I went out to the cipher room when we were dispersed out of Townsville we used to get an early meal then the tender would take us out and we'd be there all night, flat out and a couple of times there were bombing sirens going and we had to dive in down.

Tape 8

00:34 **I think we're still talking food.**

We went to Charters Towers and I did that and then I was in the hospital with suspected appendicitis. I've still got my appendix even now, I've still got it.

Good for you.

01:00 It didn't blow up.

I think you were going to tell us, you were talking about the food and how

It was appalling.

But it got better then you were talking about going into Townsville itself it sounded like you were heading into a story about eating in the city, pub food, restaurants, I'm not sure.

No, well, we didn't do that because being a shift worker, you see, my meals were not regular times.

01:30 I did go, I did go to a pub in Townsville occasionally and have a meal but very, very occasional because being a shift worker I was either getting ready to go out there to Sydney Street or sleeping or coming back in the tender and eating whatever I could eat that was around to be had.

02:00 And the food was not good when we first went there but it did improve once Gwennie got on the scene because she was such a person because she flew a plane and she did all the things that I did, drove a nice car, not that I had a nice car to drive but I had a friend Dorey Roger with whom I grew up

02:30 who had an MG, red, that was the ultimate and he used to let me drive it sometimes.

So where was this?

In Brisbane, before I joined the air force. And Gwennie had a red MG in Townsville and she used to take us, it was her own private car.

So what was Gwen's rank?

She was a wing officer and she was a pilot.

03:00 She could fly a plane herself, she was a member of trained pilot from New South Wales and I went up with her several times in the Tiger Moth and it was great, I loved it. I wanted to learn how to fly a plane too, but, when I was growing up I couldn't afford the fees, you know, at the aero club in

03:30 Brisbane, well, I wasn't a member of the aero club, but Gwen obviously, she was older than I and she had more money than I did so she could do it but she was a very experienced woman pilot.

Off camera a bit earlier today we were talking about your flying exploits, a trip to Cairns to the brewery or something, can you tell us about that?

Yes.

04:00 Well, I shared a room with a woman at St Anne's in Townsville who worked with me, she was quite a bit older than I her name was May Houston, H-O-U-S-T-O-N and she said to me, now was she a cipher officer, I think she was, she said, "Would you like

04:30 to come up to Cairns with me on our day off", I said, "That would be marvellous, I've not been Cairns", she said, "Well, I'm going to arrange it with one of the pilots who comes in to see us in the cipher room", I think it was or was it operations, it's so long ago I can't remember, anyway

05:00 I'm sure it was cipher and May said, "I'm asking you to come with me in the plane and we'll go to Cairns and we'll go and see my father", which we did and he was the chief brewer at the Cairns brewery. We went up in a squadron plane, now what was it, it wasn't a mustang or anything like that

05:30 but it was one of the squadron planes, so it would seat us, seat four, the pilot, the navigator and two behind. Well, because I had done navigation I filled in as the navigator so there were the pilot and the two girls but we flew up to Cairns and we went straight to the brewery and we had all day at the brewery.

06:00 It was wonderful. Seeing how they make beer from the beginning, having a little taste along the way and the boys that we were with, the young fellows, they loved it, of course, we didn't have to drive anywhere we were flying home again at the end of the day.

Who flew you back?

Well, one of the pilots who had taken us up there in the plane, flew us back. So that was pretty good.

06:30 Going to Cairns and seeing the brewery, which it was quite famous, the Cairns brewery, a special sort of beer they made up there, even in those days. And of course Steve was based, you met Steve this morning, based in Cairns and we went to the brewery when he was up there in Cairns and I went up to see him and I told him the story and he said, "My lord, head's full of stories",

07:00 half the time I think they think I make them up but, I don't really.

I'm sure you don't. Okay, I feel like we can talk a little bit more about, you were in Perth for 18 months weren't you, now

Then Sydney.

Yeah, what about, can you tell us about Ken's return to Australia, what that was like?

Oh, it was incredible, I went out to the airport, I was in Perth

07:30 and his father whom I hadn't met, or had I met him, I didn't know him well, but he rang me up and said, "I've just had a phone call from Ken", now Ken was coming back to Australia from his time flying in the Middle East, I've told you, Malta, Italy over to France

08:00 for the invasion, etc, etc, and he just thought, he applied for a transfer back to Australia, the war was still on but it was, you know, heading towards the end, but he would, just sort of, get a job because he'd filled in papers saying he was going to stay on there for us and at one stage he was an acting wing commander, in that photo I think

08:30 he was not, but he was squadron leader when he left the squadron. Anyway, he came back, what they said to him was, yes, he contacted Air Board in Melbourne because he'd been out of the country for those years I told you about and they said,

09:00 "We want you to escort a group of young men who were sent to Canada to do their pilot training", you know, my brother Peter did that, he went to Canada, Ken didn't, he did his pilot training here in Australia and then went to Italy, whereas Peter had done one course at Bradfield Park another one at Tamworth and then did the final

09:30 flying course in England, but they said, "We want you to escort, as the senior officer, this group of young men, we're winding up all that Canadian training business, we're bringing them back to Australia", and Ken thought "Oh well, I'm getting home", so he was in America and they contacted him or he rang them and they said, "You've got to

10:00 arrange, there are 220 young men who are being brought back from Canada and you're going to be the senior officer in charge to make sure they arrive back in this country". So it was all fixed up, all the red tape was adhered to etc, etc, they were put on an American troop ship

10:30 which also had American troops on it and some American nursing staff and he'd escorted these boys across America, they boarded the ship I suppose in San Francisco, they came down through Hawaii and they got to the mouth

11:00 of the Brisbane River, Morton Bay, you wouldn't believe it, they turned the ship around before it had even reached the wharves and off they went because the captain had received a signal that said, "American troops are going to be landed in the Philippines, they're going to invade Laite" because

11:30 on this ship there were American troops and American army nurses. Now Ken was so close, you see and they couldn't get off, they turned the ship around, it was one o'clock in the morning or something and off they went but they were in a bit of a quandary, they didn't want to take Ken and his little party of people to the Philippines,

12:00 they were due to be in Australia, so they off loaded them at Oro Bay, which is up in, oh part of New Guinea I'm not too sure, Oro Bay, I should really look it up on a map. So Ken, having been out of the country thought, "This is ridiculous", contact Air Board, "I need at least eight DC3's

12:30 to come and collect this party, we've been off loaded from this American troop ship in Oro Bay, I've got to get them back to Australia", well he received something saying, "We don't even have eight DC3's, we will send a ship for you", or, "you will be collected somehow or other and be delivered to Townsville

13:00 and then be put on board a troop train". And these young men had no tin hats, they had no mess kit, they had no summer uniform because you know it's the exact opposite climate when you're back in Australia to what it is in America. So Ken said, "It was terrible, these kids didn't want to be

13:30 brought back", but that's the way things operated on and he was the so called commanding officer so they came back to Australia and then he had to get on a train and go all the way to Perth and that's how he came home from the war. So that was quite extraordinary, wasn't it?

14:00 **And can you tell us about your reunion?**

Well, yes, oh that's right, he flew, he delivered all these kids and contacted Air Board and said, "That part of my job has finished and I'm now going home to Perth" and so he did, I think he got a flight, that's right he got a flight. The war hadn't finished

14:30 but he was able to get on a transport plane and go to Perth. Well, I was stationed in Perth and his father rang me up and said, "I don't know whether you've heard from Ken but, he is coming home on a flight", say today's Monday, "he's coming home on Wednesday", he said. His father was state manager for Orlando Brians,

15:00 I do know that much, and he was separated from his wife, Ken's mother, that all happened when Ken was 14. But he said, "I could pick you up and take you out to the airport to meet Ken on Wednesday." So I arranged to have somebody take over my job that evening

15:30 or whatever evening it was to be with the orderly officer and I went out with Harold to the airport and that's when I saw Ken for the first time coming back home again. He couldn't believe it, he was a squadron leader, I was only a section officer, I saluted him 'cause he was senior rank to me, he nearly fell over with shock, but I thought

16:00 I've got to do the right thing and I did and he saluted me back. We often laughed about that. So there we were and the girls at the bags were very interested to find out, in Perth, you know, that I'd seen Ken and he was back and what are you going to do and I took him up to my brother's flat, my brother, the architect, was living in Kings Park so I introduced him to my

16:30 brother and sister-in-law. You know we had to get to know one another again, it was not easy, not easy at all. But we just started from scratch because I'd only known him for a short time before he went away and I'd seen him about four times, at the Air Force Club and then at his graduation from Amberley.

17:00 So we had to, he'd been through a lot, I'd been through a lot so we started from scratch again and then that's the way it was we played it by ear and then I was stationed in Sydney by this time and he was sent to Mildura and he came down and the war had finished and that weekend we decided

17:30 that we would be married, so we were. The war was over and we were married two months later. So that was, we had a very happy marriage, 52 years or something until he just went off but at least he didn't suffer, he just went out to look at the car and toppled over, what a way to go.

18:00 I didn't like it one little bit, I didn't like it at all, anyway.

That's an amazing story.

But it's what happened, you know, he came home suddenly and there we were. It was quite an experience marching in the victory march, in uniform, in Sydney.

18:30 And because I was an officer I was out in front of a squad like in that photograph. You know Sydney? Martin Place and all those places? We went the full circuit, you know Hyde Park and all down into Martin Place where the cenotaph is and took the salute and it was the victory march.

19:00 And then people just, people, everywhere and I was in uniform so I was grabbed, hugged, pushed, I was terrified in the end, I was sort of claustrophobic I wanted to get out of it but I had no one to help me. I needed a big strong fellow like you and I saw this army guy whom I knew slightly and I

19:30 "Jeffrey, could you help me" I said, "I want to go I want to get out of this, I know where I want to go I want to go to St James church to the service, the thanksgiving service and pray for Peter", he said, "Patty, I can understand how you feel, I'll help you". So I had him as a protector and I got out of this heaving, screaming mob and we went to

20:00 the church, which was terrific because I thought even if I never see Peter again at least I'm offering him up a prayer and the war had finished. So that was a memorable occasion and Ken had marched in the victory march in Mildura and he said they were just the same up there only there were less of them.

20:30 **Well, ok, so, with Peter, obviously, you must have had a sense he wasn't coming back, it had been some time?**

It took a long time to accept it because I always thought that he would be like other people I had known they would discover them in a POW camp, lost

21:00 their memories, didn't know who they were and it happened to guys of whom I did hear of one I knew, he had been in a POW camp and he didn't quite know what it was all about, you know, because they'd been through hell. But then, you know, I wrote to the Red Cross, I wrote to everybody I could think of

21:30 to try to find out something and they said that there was no visual evidence but they could only presume that the plane, the day 6 January 1942 and where he was flying these Wellington bombers, which I told you to West harbour to bomb those

22:00 German Pocket battleships, but that's what had happened, that the akeake was so intense coming up from the ships in West harbour and they were flying over, heavily laden with bombs and the whole thing, that's why it just blew up but it was very hard for us to accept, my mother always thought they'll find him,

22:30 he'll be somewhere, alive, but, of course, he isn't. You have a piece of paper, an honour certificate for those with no name grave and their full name and their rank and their number and that's all you have. So it was very hard to accept but that's the way war is.

23:00 **A second ago we had a look at that letter of recommendation or certificate from Lord Gowrie, so tell us what that meant?**

Well, you know, I, it was a sort of a, I'd have to have another look at it. Catherine can you see my glasses?

23:30 I'd have to read what it says.

Just sort of explain to us the background?

There's my service number and my rank, section officer,

24:00 stroke O, 352216, then headquarters it says, Eastern Area, EA is Eastern Area, entered on record 25th day of May, one thousand nine hundred and

24:30 Forty-five.

So this is basically a recommendation or an invitation to stay with them permanent.

Yeah, yeah, a sort of invitation. Commander in chief, in and over the Commonwealth of Australia, the governor general, that's his rank.

25:00 **So was that something that you may have contemplated at the time?**

No, no, no, no the war was over and Ken was back so that's what I contemplated.

25:30 **So what plans did you make, what were Ken's plans post war?**

Well, he decided that he'd stay on in the air force, you see, which he did, for a year. But I told you we were married, the war ended 15 August and we were married on the 13 October and then it took me till the end of the year to get out.

26:00 Have my resignation accepted, but Ken didn't send in his resignation so that he could stay on, you see, and make it his career. But then, the reason he changed his mind was, he was as I told you at one stage he had been appointed acting wing commander and he thought

26:30 well now I'll get to be wing commander, I'll be a senior officer but he talked about it to a whole lot of his friends in Perth at the Air Force Club and his friends in other places and it's like this you see, they're there, how many of those are going to get to near the top, it's not going to happen

27:00 because a whole lot of other guys have the same idea as I have, they're going to stay on in the air force and reach senior rank and be in the permanent air force so decided that the wait, it wasn't going to happen. So Shell approached, he'd been with Shell before when he'd first joined the air force, not for very long, and I don't exactly know

27:30 whether he approached them or they approached him to go back, maybe he approached them, do you know Buzz? Yeah, they offered him this job if he'd go back to Shell to be aviation officer for Australia. Well it was good job and it was going to be created because post war aviation meant something in Shell

28:00 because they would buy fuel, they'd run a sort of almost like a private airline because it's such a big country and they could fly people here, there and everywhere and out to inspect oil discoveries etc, etc. So when they was offered to Ken he went back to Shell and he stayed with them

28:30 until he retired from Shell when he was, oh, they retired him, at 56 there were all these guys his age who where on this level again and they decided they were going to, they wouldn't all get to the top, they'd give them early retirement, which they did.

29:00 And he got a job with a friend of his, oh, first of all he worked with my brother, Noel, who had a whole business making transformers for radios, that sort of thing because that's, Noel was the radio officer in the Merchant Navy. And Ken went and worked in his factory and made transformers and then he thought

29:30 "I think I've had this I'll get something else". So finally, he did, he got another job with a guy who lived

nearby because we lived in Mitcham and Noel lived way over near Kingston Heath golf club and Ken was travelling across Melbourne all the time to the factory it was somewhere down there and he met this other guy who said, " I can give you job and it's

30:00 a lot closer to where you live than that one." Because you know we had Kate at a private school and we needed the money I must say and still paying the mortgage on this big, big house we had, so that's what he did.

Can we just sort of wrap up on those last two..

30:30 I was just going to tell you then end of the story. He said, "I'm going to give up all this job" once we got Kate's school fees paid and she won a scholarship to university so he was off the hook and he said "I'm going to take a job with riding for the disabled and I will do it with either a very low salary

31:00 if they just pay my petrol money" and he did that for some years, because he was a rider and I was rider and that was how we met and found out we had similar interest early on that we both loved riding horses but he decided that he would do that job for riding for the disabled which is wonderful because he enjoyed that and he even went out and helped disabled young people,

31:30 taught them a few things about horses and riding and they paid him just a small amount but he did that because he wanted to contribute to some worthwhile thing and that's all I've got to say about that. But I thought that was very admirable 'cause he was on a pension but I mean once we got Kate sort of established we didn't need quite so much money and I did part-time work

32:00 too so that helped.

Just to wrap up on your last little period in Sydney, how did you spend those final months with the WAAF?

Well, I was in the operations room, I told you I marched in the victory march in Sydney.

32:30 As I said I worked in the operations room, very busy when the war finished because I had to help organise any flying boats, ordinary planes to get the POW's home, you see, they were picking them up from all

33:00 those places up there, in Burma and other places where the prisoners of war were being held and get them back to Australia so it was a very busy time. Flying boats, small ships whatever was needed and that's what I worked on in the op's room, doing all that, organising all that. So, you know, it was every day, I didn't have to do it

33:30 at night. I was there till about seven at night and I lived in Point Piper at the WAAF barracks in one of those well known Sydney beautiful homes, some well known Sydney family, I can't remember whose it was now, but it was very extra special, big veranda and I used to walk out and look down Rose Bay flying boats, great.

34:00 And that's how I finished the war and then in the victory march, marched there in Sydney and then finally the war was over so I put in my application for discharge and it took till the end or the middle of December before I got it, but I finally got it and then of course once you've got it then you're entered on for deferred pay and you get that little pittance.

34:30 I came back on the troop train from Sydney to Perth and there we were and Ken was there and he came back from Mildura so we had a flat down at the beach, Cottesloe, and it was wonderful, swimming everyday and then he finally decided he wouldn't stay on in the air force, he'd had enough.

35:00 And there we were.

Patricia, there's only a couple of minutes left on the tape so just wondering if we could just reflect on that whole period, I mean what do you make of those years '39-'45, what impact did that have on you?

Oh, I think it was amazing, learning about different ways of like.

35:30 **So from the top, so what it all meant looking back?**

Well, I think it was a wonderful, I was a lucky person to have that opportunity to do all those things that I did do, you know, flying around the country, doing all that work in the operations room and the cipher room and doing all the things I did, marching around. I got

36:00 the most out of it that it was possible for me to do and going to all these places. I was a lucky girl, I really was and I do appreciate the chance to do it and I know Kate would have loved to have down something like that but because it was wartime and that was the way it was. But, I hated the separation from my mother, my parents but then when I married Ken

36:30 and we went to live in Perth after all that was where he had to go to work, I didn't see them in Brisbane for four years, we didn't have the money to travel from Perth to Brisbane and back again, post-war, I mean, he was back when we had a couple of children and that's how it was but I don't regret any of it.

The only big regret is of course, losing Peter but then

37:00 we are one amongst thousands. Roger, my childhood friend who taught me to drive in the red MG, he was a pilot also and he lost his life about six weeks before the war ended and his mother, he was one of four boys, like I have four boys, she lost

37:30 three of those boys in the war, POW, Roger was a pilot, you know, shocking. But that's what families went through and then I have other friends who had four boys and they lost all of them, some of them dieing in POW camps. And my friend died in a POW camp, Neville.

38:00 But, you put those things, you have to put them, not let your mind dwell on them too much because you can't do it because it's not humanly possible because you feel almost guilty in a way. You see Ken went through all the things he went through and yet he survived and

38:30 seeing his friend killed in front of him was terrible for him. So this is what war is all about, so you just thank God that you can survive it and have a life and I've never regretted any of it. It helped me as a person. I'm sure it helped me as a person coming from the very sheltered life that we led.

39:00 Well we had a wonderful life, we had each other and all our cousins and friends, it was busy but then it was very encompassed into our section of living in Brisbane but when I joined the air force it just broadened out like that, it was terrific and I think I've come to the end.

INTERVIEW ENDS