Australians at War Film Archive

Harold Ford (Mac) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **So Mac if you could tell us about – take us through your life cycle.**

Ryan, I was born on the 8th of July 1925... at Lismore in Victoria. My father and mother were on a solider settler farm in the Western Plains of Victoria at a place called Foxhound

01:00 which is near Cressy, and I grew up on this farm. In my very early days I was a very sickly child. If anything was going around I got it twice and I've had mumps twice, I've had measles twice and yellow jaundice as it was then, hepatitis these days, I had all those things twice and regularly went down with colds and flux and things like that

01:30 and I was skinny as a Bribie Island rabbit. As a matter of fact the doctor used to call me his "Indian famine baby" but despite all that and despite my grandmother coming along and saying to my mother "Bessie you'll never rear him", we got through it – she got through it quite well, she was a wonderful woman. And so I started school at this Foxhound, in State School number 1.6.

02:00 0.0, now closed, and I started in 1931 and went through from Grade 1 to Grade 8 right up through to 1938. I enjoyed school, I was reasonably quick and you know I didn't have a great deal of problem handling things. I got the cuts [caned] a few times and things like that but that was probably not from lack of learning

02:30 situations, it was more probably for misbehaving or something like that in class. But it was a very closely knit school, there were 52 of us there at the time. Quite amazing when you drive through this place now to think that there were 52 kids at this school. And we had a variety of teachers, my favourite was a man named Clarrie Read. He was a favourite because he was a very good sportsman. He was a natural at tennis,

03:00 cricket, football you name it and he joined in all the local activities and was a great community person as well and he had a lot of influence actually on my life. I suppose like all kids I got off the e straight and narrow occasionally and I can remember once I was given an autograph book and it wasn't very long after one of my episodes of something, I can't remember what it was and I asked him

03:30 to sign my autograph book and he did but he also put a message in it, which said "Good men die when boys go wrong". Anyway, 1938 was the year of the infantile paralysis, now poliomyelitis, epidemic in Victoria. And the 1938 year was very disjointed. A lot of schools in the metropolitan area were closed. Even

04:00 we had children from the metropolitan area came and stayed with relatives and you know, while this epidemic was on. And, we, Clarrie Read built us up for this big exam, you know the Merit Certificate, was the be all and the end all just about in those days and Clarrie built us right up to this and the exam came out and he was absolutely disgusted because it was all very,

04:30 very simple and I can remember I dropped 4 marks in English because I spelt "reservoir" wrong I put it "ior" instead of "oir" at the end sort of business and he whacked 4 marks off me for that. He didn't bother about giving us – he only tested the 4 subjects that went towards the Merit but he didn't worry about the rest of them. And 1938 was a dry year. 35, 36, and 37

05:00 had all been quite bountiful years on the farm and the farms were quite good and the returns were reasonable. We had a mixed farm and set off in the morning by taking our share of milking 23 cows by hand and then after that and doing the separating and feeding the pigs the skim milk and all that sort of thing. We harnessed the horse in the jinker

05:30 and off we drove a bit over 3 miles to school. I was the youngest, my eldest sister Betty was in charge. My next sister, Moira, she was on the other side of the jinker, I was in the middle, kept under control by arms and elbows and occasionally when things got a bit out of hand, Betty used to whack me with the end of the reins across my bare knees. But, I still love her, she's

06:00 been a wonderful sister to me. And, when they left school, I then rode a horse to school. One time I had a very severe fall when the horse stumbled and the horse somersaulted and came down on my lower legs and then rolled up and the pommel of the saddle landed fair in my groin and with the weight of a horse on it, it wasn't

06:30 very comfortable I can assure you but I was terribly bruised and I was off school for quite a few days as a matter of fact. Another time I fell out of the jinker and it ran over me but again I survived that without too much trouble. But 1938 was a dry year and a drought was coming. All the signs for dry weather and dry conditions were there and I left school in early December

07:00 1938 and my job was carting water to feed the stock on the farm. My father and his neighbour a Mr Charlie Worth, had joined forces and sunk a bore in Mr Worth's property, because it was a favourable location but the understanding between the two of them was that in a drought situation that Dad could have his,

07:30 you know have his fair share of the water and Mr Worth honoured that in full. So, we had a lorry, a four wheel lorry and two horses and a 300 gallon tank and I used to make two trips a day to this bore and then cart it out to the troughs we had in the paddocks. It was pretty boring watching water fill into a tank and then watching it empty from a tank into a trough

08:00 and I upset my mother because to speed the things up, I went and got the garden hose which was about 150 feet long I suppose, and chopped it into 6 or 7, 20 foot lengths and used those as siphon and that speeded up the operation of filling the tank and emptying quite rapidly, as a matter of fact. But we had to sell more stock and so the need for water was reduced a fair bit and

08:30 that's when I started to drive a motor car and we had a trailer and 200 gallon tank, which we pulled behind the car and did exactly the same but instead of using horses we used the car. So literally I've been driving since I was about 13 years of age. And, whilst there was only one public road to cross, Worth's were on the other side of the lane to us, you know we got away with it for years

09:00 and years and years and as I said I used to drive the family everywhere and you didn't have to have an 'L' plate up or anything in those days, you just drove. So, that was my introduction, we went ahead and put crops in and I drove the horses, 5 horses abreast and put this crop of barley in as well as some

09:30 oats for feeding the horses. We had a good sort of existence and then the war clouds gathered and I can remember listening to the radio, wireless in those days I suppose but call it a radio, when Chamberlain came back from Munich with the piece of paper, waving you know, said "Peace in our Time" and I can remember

10:00 Dad who had had a pretty rugged war said "The man ought to be made a saint" and my mother said "Silly old man" and turned out that she was right sort of business but anyway be that as it may, war broke out and I can remember listening to the radio and Menzies you know his voice saying "It is my melancholy duty to inform you that Australia is at

10:30 war with Germany." My mother was very upset about it, dad wasn't quite so bad. And about that time of course, they put together the Volunteer Defence Corp and he immediately volunteered to do that and I remember he went into camp at Queenscliff during this time and we all drove, or I drove the car down with Mrs Worth and her son Bob who was

11:00 just about a year older than me and we went to visit our fathers at the army camp at Queenscliff. They were there for about 3 weeks and I remember dad came back and - one ear was terribly sunburnt because he had the slouch hat on and it was turned up and one side of his face got very badly burnt. Mr Worth decided that he would leave the farm, he sold it.

11:30 And he went into the army on a permanent basis. Dad was tempted but not quite so, but we carried on milking these cows and doing cropping and things like that and then when things got grim in 1940 about the time of the collapse of France dad became very perturbed about the way things were going. No doubt he and mum discussed

12:00 it all but it was announced then that he was going to go and get a job in a munitions factory, which he did, at the Maribyrnong Munitions Plant and he boarded with people in Line Street, Maidstone, their name was Foreman and dad went down and did this work. He was in the bomb filling section as a matter of fact. And I was left to run the farm,

12:30 with my mother, the two girls were then both nursing. One was just about finished and the other one was just starting her training. They were trained at the Royal Women's Hospital which was then in Lonsdale Street in the city. So, mum and I did our best. I can always remember the first weekend dad came home. It was in the winter time and I fronted him with

13:00 35 dead sheep and 2 dead cows. The sheep had got into a crop paddock and had overeaten themselves on lush green wet crop and their bowel doesn't operate – when then get full – all you had to do was open the gate and they would've gone out themselves and eaten some dry feed and they would've been perfectly alright, I was told that afterwards. And one cow got her head in the fork of a tree and

13:30 strangled herself and the other one died of milk fever. So it wasn't a very good homecoming sort of

business the first weekend with dad to find these 35 sheepskins hung on the fence, because I was able to salvage those sort of business but skinning the cows was a bit beyond me. But anyway, that carried on, we advertised and we got another young fellow about my own age to come and be a sort of

14:00 companion help, sort of business who wanted to do it. His name was Ken Far and I maintained contact with him for many, many years afterwards. But, things were going from bad to worse in the war situation and it was then decided that the farm would be leased and I would go to Longerenong College. And

14:30 the farm was advertised and the very weekend that it was advertised and people came to look at it, one in particular was a man named Nicholson but it was also the weekend of Pearl Harbour. What we expected to get a reasonable rental for the property, we finished up really renting for peppercorns, you know it was a very minor amount of money. And so we had to then, Ken and I had to then get rid of the

15:00 remaining stock on the property. We had about 500 or 600 sheep I suppose and they were sold and we still had our 20 odd cows and they were all in milk. We had arranged for various things to be left. Some of the equipment was sold and some of it was stored. He was a bachelor, this fellow who took the farm, his name was Nicholson. He was a bachelor and

15:30 so we had one room in the house which we locked up and a lot of our you know things, pictures and personal items and things like that were stored in this one room. It was was quite an amicable arrangement with the fellow. And I departed for Longerenong, probably about late February or very early March 1942.

16:00 The property was to be handed over I think about the first weekend in February. The fellow was brining sheep down up near Ararat somewhere up in that part of the world and we went out to find out where he was and he gave us a date that he would be so that enabled us to clear the rest of the stock out. And Ken acted on behalf of the family at the sale of the dairy cows in

16:30 Colac and that was it. After that was over Mum and Ken returned to Melbourne. Ken lived at Canterbury and Dad had got hold of a house in Coburg, 44 The Grove, Coburg. And I headed off for Longerenong in the train, went down to the Berry Bank [?] Railway Station which was our closest

17:00 one, about 5 miles away. And got onboard the train, the last people I saw was the Brumby brothers, Bruce and Noel who were Berry Bank people but we knew them quite well, I played cricket with them, and off I went to Longerenong and had to change trains at Ararat. I was fearful about leaving all this luggage I had with me sort of business

17:30 and I put in about 4 very very hot hours on the Railway Station at Ararat until the Horsham - Dimboola train came along and off we went. And I got out at Dooen which was the closest railway station to Longerenong and one stop before Horsham. And I was met at the station by a Mr Vincent who was the registrar of the college and he was a bit horrified with all

18:00 this luggage I had onboard but anyway we stacked it all in his car and off we went. And I can remember the college had been burnt down a year or so previously and they had temporary accommodation in galvanised iron huts. Little did I know that in a few years time I would be having a lot of time in galvanised iron huts but anyway I reckon it was about 108 [degrees Fahrenheit] in a water bag that night when I got there. It was a stinking, stinking hot Wimmera night. And…

18:30 I was there 2 or 3 days earlier than the students were due to come back, so next morning I was told where to go to breakfast and I did that and told to report to the Farm Manager, Mr Giles, obviously he got the name of Farmer Giles for pretty obvious reasons. He was a great bloke.

Sorry, Mac, but we're just getting a bit too much in detail for this section, so if you could just keep to the headlines and then we'll come back and get all this detail throughout the day

19:00 **and in the early tapes especially. But it's great but we're just getting a bit too much detail at the moment. So just from where you arrived and…**

We arrived at Longerenong and sent down to work on the farm, it was one day on the farm and one day in class. And that was the pattern for most of the time I was there, although there was some variations which we can cover later on. And I didn't finish the course,

19:30 it was a bit expensive and money was a fairly tight item with the family. So I came back to Melbourne and lived with mum and dad in Coburg and got a job in the same Munitions Factory at Maribyrnong. This pleased mum because she thought that was a reserved occupation. But what she didn't know that the manpower release officer who

20:00 was controlling these sort of things, was an ex-teacher at Longerenong so he said "Are you sure you want to do this Ford?". I said "Yes sir I do." And he signed the thing and off I went (sort of… UNCLEAR). So it came around that I finished up on the 30th of June, had a bit of break. I got my drivers licence, legally, on the 12th of July just 4 days after I was 18 and there were 5 sets of lights in the City of Melbourne at the time.

20:30 And then I went into the air force on the 13th. First day was quite an experience and again I can give

you more detail of that but after attestation we marched down Bourke Street and got on a train and went to Shepparton. And I was hunted into Squad Number 1,041 and did my rookies [recruit training] at

21:00 Shepparton. That lasted a full 4 weeks and then 2 weeks I went down to Bairnsdale and was in a bed alongside a fellow who had meningitis, so we were whipped into isolation. So my fortnight at Bairnsdale was pretty easy because most of it was spent in hospital. And

21:30 after that I went to Geelong, 7STT, [7 Squadron Technical training?] Technical Training, and we were housed in a church hall and we had to march around to the mess for meals and then we marched from there up to the Gordon Technical where we did our filing course. We had to make 12 models. And we

22:00 marched back and go to bed. We did it in shift work, morning a sort of a day shift and an afternoon shift and the only blessing on that was, on afternoon shift you didn't have to walk around for breakfast. You didn't have to march around for breakfast, they just let us walk around. And after that we - I was posted back then to ES, 1ES, which is the Engineering School at Ascot Vale in the old showgrounds

22:30 and we were perched up in one of the grandstands there. And I was mustered as Flight,Trainee Flight Rigger and we did our training in the pig pens as a matter of fact that were in existence then. And we battled away on there, there was another 3 months course but tragedy happened on the 14th of January 1944 when major fires went through the Western

23:00 Plains and our farm was completely burnt out. We lost the house, all the sheds except a galvanised iron hut that we had there and the old dairy which was made of fibro cement. I applied for leave but was knocked back. My father

23:30 by this time had had an accident, he was a bit handicapped, he had a bad leg and I was knocked back and I said, when I came out, I said to the warrant officer who'd taken me in to see this officer, I said "Well sir I'm going to shoot through because I feel it's very necessary that I get up and salvage what's possible." And he said "Hold on son" and he went in and saw the squadron leader again and they gave me

24:00 4 days leave without pay. And I left early next morning and got down there and went through the burnt country from just a bit on the western side of Inverlea right through and met our old next door neighbours, people named White in the township of Cressy where they were in, they'd been burnt out. They were selecting clothing and I said "Can you drop me off at the old farm?" He said "Yes" so I did that and there

24:30 was a dreadful scene of the old property, much loved house, all that just ashes. I did rescue a horse that we'd left on the place. An old draught horse called Minter. Named after one of Dad's wartime girlfriends in England. And anyway old Minter had survived the fire and I grabbed her by the mane and I said "Come along old girl" and

25:00 I took her along to another neighbour people named Griffin and whose farm had been partly, about 90% burnt. Their house had been saved but their sheds and all that had gone and all their sheep in one corner of the property and I said – I used to call this bloke uncle, he was an uncle of convenience, "Anything I can do for you Uncle Bob?" He said "You're just at the right time,

25:30 I'm shifting the sheep tomorrow down to agistment at my brother's place at Birregurra." So for 3 days we took these sheep across this burnt country to agistment at Birregurra but that's quite a big story on its own. So I went back to Ascot Vale and finished the course and by that stage it was getting on into February I think it

26:00 was in 1944. In February or March I applied for leave again because this time we were ready to re-fence the boundary and dad had contacted Ken Far and anyway off we went and loaded up the old car with crow bars and shovels and all those sorts of fencing equipment and we slept in the

26:30 hut. We cooked our meals in the old dairy and we swam and cleaned ourselves up in the old dam. But that I think would probably rate as the hardest, physical constant work I've ever done. My job was to cut the trees, cut them into post lengths and split them while the others sunk the holes and sort of business we carted them backwards and forwards

27:00 in the car. My leave finished up about I think from memory the 12th of March. That's tomorrow isn't it, an anniversary. And I went back and I was exhausted. I didn't have any skin on my hands. They were completely covered in blisters. And I thought bugger this I'm going to take a couple of days off. And I didn't report in on the Saturday morning as I was supposed to report in.

27:30 But I slept in and in the afternoon actually I attended my cousin's wedding and I reported in on the Sunday night. I knew that if you were leave without pay for less than 2 days all you ever copped was confinement to barracks. So I report 1 day, 23 hours and 15 minutes after my time was up sort of business and I was

28:00 immediately taken in command by the SP's [Service Police]. I wasn't locked up but I was told to report there the next morning and I went on a charge absent with pay, leave without pay or AWL [Absent Without Leave] as we called it and I was paraded before the lieutenant and asked what was the reason

for it and I showed him my hands. “Mm” he said “they look a bit sore, don’t they”

28:30 which I wholeheartedly agreed with him and he said “Will you accept my judgement – or sentence” or whatever the word was and I said “Yes Sir” he said “6 days CB [Confined to Barracks]” I said “Righto”. So I was about turned and given my…

Sorry Mac, we’re just getting back into more detail…

I went and got my clearance and that night I was on the way to

29:00 Malalar in South Australia. First time I’d ever been interstate. Got to Adelaide, filled in a few hours there and then got to Malalar which was a Service Flying Training School and first of all I went into a workshop and I think the first thing I was given was a broom pretty obviously and then I joined a hangar, which

29:30 did 40 and 80 hour inspections and I was on that then for a best part of a year, great time in Malalar. And another fellow and I who had been working together in the same hangar, we were both posted together to 99 Squadron. Great excitement, he came from Border Town and his name was Phillip Graham Virgin but he was far from a virgin. And but he was a great mate and

30:00 off we went. We got to the RTO [Railway Transport Office] in Spencer Street and we got to Sydney. We were tropical kitted. We were handed a sugar bag and told to put our “blues”[formal uniform] in it and send them back home. And a day or so later we headed up north. We had an incident on Central Railway Station where we met another fellow but that’s another quite interesting story and we got up to a place called

30:30 Clifton between Warwick and Toowoomba. And the squadron was forming up out at a place called Leyburn. And Leyburn was pretty interesting. We were there for a while. Our aircraft arrived and no sooner than that they were taken off us and handed over to 200 what was called 200 Flight which was one of

31:00 those cloak and dagger operations, I was one of the few, one of the many who was posted to it and one of the few who were posted afterwards back to 99 Squadron. In the meantime that had to shift to another place called Brymaroo which is out from a place called Jondaryon and Jondaryon is between Oakey and… I’ll think of it,

31:30 Dalby and we had the rest of the time there until we had another set of aircraft. Ultimately we left that area on the 30th June 1945 and we headed north and that was one of the greatest experiences of my life of spending 13 days – 14 day - a full

32:00 fortnight really getting from Queensland to Darwin. Train, bus, trucks, again to a train and we got to Darwin where we were met by the advanced party who had supposed to put up the tents. They hadn’t done a damn thing and we had to put up our tents that night and we settled ourselves into just alongside the strip of Darwin off McMillan Road

32:30 and we waited around until our aircraft arrived. And they did that, we formed a football team and I was quite a prominent member of that. And then they dropped the bomb which we knew about the night before incidentally that it would be over the next day. The adjutant who was very much with it, opened the canteen and we drank it dry. It didn’t take much

33:00 wasn’t all that much there. So, the aircraft then all eventually arrived and our role then changed to be a sort of a service squadron and we flew prisoners of war back from Darwin to whatever capital city they were. And there was a little episode there with another cobber who shot through and I covered for him but that’s also another tale. And…

33:30 the squadron was posted south in about November 1945. It came to Tocumwal but a lot of us were not sent back. 99 Squadron consisted mainly of about 80% very young men, 20 and under. And a sprinkling of older men as

34:00 NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and things like that. So all those fellows who had a fair bit of service went south with the squadron the rest of us, who were short service we stayed there and we went first of all to 12 ARD, Aircraft Repair Depot, but there were no aircraft to repair so you know we went and shot kangaroos and did several things like that. And then the last of posting came through for me to go to

34:30 112 Air Sea Rescue Flight on Catalinas on East Arm in Darwin. And that was quite an exciting time as a matter of fact. And I was with that squadron – with that unit for the remainder of the time in Darwin. They took the flying boats off us and they gave us amphibious Cats [Catalinas] so we were then posted back to RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Darwin and we stayed in the huts. It was alright if you were upstairs because the sandflies didn’t worry you

35:00 up there but they gave us hell on the ground floor. And eventually we got ourselves and the aeroplane which is another quite story in its own and I flew into Essendon one Sunday morning towards the end of July 1946. And got the tram up to Royal Parade and along Sydney Road,

35:30 walked down the Grove, knocked on the door, 44 The Grove, my father answered the door and I said

"Mm (FINGER TO HIS LIPS) like that" and walked in and surprised my mother but she was just dishing up lunch so it was a great return. So, then on the 1st July, I went into the Exhibition Building which was the Discharge Depot and on the 3rd July I walked out of the place no longer an airman

36:00 and no longer having a job.

Just... we've only got a couple of minutes left on this tape, in just a couple of minutes can you just say what you did for a living after the war?

I had several jobs, I even tried a bit of farming which wasn't a success. And had a dress poultry round which was interesting, to say the least and then I

36:30 went in and I was trained as a postal assistant and worked in the Post Office and after a year of counter jumping there, I joined the [State Electricity Commission] as a clerical bod [body] and had a marvellous time with the SEC. I did some great work and interesting work and had a break while I tried farming again which wasn't a success and then I went back to the SEC

37:00 and became the senior clerk up at one of their country operations and we were there for 13 years. During that time we married and had our two children up in this country place. Came back after that and left the SEC and was a personnel officer first of all with A.W. Allens, the lolly people, where the casino now

37:30 is. After then I was head hunted and went to personnel office and later as their Personnel Manager for W.R. Grace out in Faulkner and then went to Peters Ice Cream again as their Personnel Manager. Had 5 frantic years there and thought there was easier ways of making a living than working under that

38:00 stress. And I jumped out of the frying pan into the fire when I went to SPC [Shepparton Packing Company] at Shepparton where I finished my working career. I was 12 or 13 years with SPC. I took fairly early retirement. We did our big big trip going to Europe and what have you, where I found Uncle Harry's grave and took a few consulting jobs,

38:30 counted up the cash and reckoned we could survive. Lived at Eildon for many years and when they closed the hospital and things like that and what have you, we decided that we would come to Melbourne and we moved to this unit about 4 years and 6 days ago. That enough for now?

That's sounds pretty good. That's a great life arc and a lot for us to gather in the next few tapes. Many stories there.

39:00 **That'll be excellent.**

Tape 2

00:33 **Okay Mac, my turn now. Tell us about, if you could kindly tell us about your childhood days. I would like you to start off with your parents if you could please.**

Righto, there's a photograph of them there somewhere. Dad was a solider settler. He'd had a pretty rugged war. He was in the 11th Battery of the 4th Field Artillery Brigade. He was

01:00 awarded the Military Medal for going out and repairing telephone lines during a bombardment. He was gassed. He twas sent to recovery in England and tried to meet up with his aunt who was declined

01:30 by the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], she was a trained sister as being too old at 40 for service. So she paid her own fare and went either to Egypt or England we're not too sure which, joined the ship Southland, was sunk, torpedoed off the Island of Madros and finished up back in a hospital in Salisbury. On the Salisbury Plains

02:00 in England. Dad went to see her and the snooty old Matron of the English Army said "No, you can't see her, she's on duty." Dad was very disgusted, a male orderly took him and smuggled him into the place somehow and he had about an hour with his aunt. He caught up with some relatives in England

02:30 and went back to France and I think he finished his active part of the war about May 1918 or somewhere about there, because he was a very sick man and he was suffering – he suffered for many years with shell-shock. He was always an edgy nervous sort of a fellow but he was a very good father

03:00 and although we used to argue a fair bit later on in life, basically I've got no complaints whatsoever. My mother, I think, I suppose everybody thinks their mother is the be all and end all well as far as I was concerned my mother was a remarkable woman. She had been born in Temora in New South Wales where her father had

03:30 a settler block and there she met my father and they became engaged. I'm not too sure whether they were engaged before he enlisted or after, I'm not too sure of that theme but one of the lovely stories they tell was when he was on a troop ship pulling out

04:00 from Station Pier, Port Melbourne. It was always well known when a ship was going to leave in those days, so everybody went down to see the thing off you know they threw streamers off the ship or down onto the pier and as the ship pulled out the streamer connecting dad and mum was the last one to break. And that was always said to be a

04:30 good omen, that that person would come back, as it turned out to be. Mum of course lost her brother this Uncle Harry, that's the Mac part of my name, and he was killed in Pozieres in July – was it July/August somewhere about 1916 anyway. And when dad came back, they married very shortly afterwards and after a honeymoon

05:00 they went up to the farm that they had rented, leased, do you want detail on this, this time?

Detail all the way.

Yeah right okay. Well they went off, my grandfather, that's mum's father, and dad set off. They bought equipment and horses and things like that and a wagon and ploughs and all that stuff, necessary farm equipment

05:30 and they set off from Ringwood and got to Footscray the first day and they camped at the old hotel, that's just over Mount Mistake where it goes over the railway line and they stayed there for the first night and then they kept on going. One of the things that World War I fellows got who were going on to the farm, they were given the princely sum of 7 and 6 pence. 75 cents in our

06:00 terms and they could buy any tools they wished to buy. And dad bought a pipe wrench, which I still have and it's out in the garage now. He paid 7 and 6 for this and it's still perfectly okay to us. Anyway, they carried on and they used to do their 20 miles or so a day sort of business getting down and they had a lot of assistance. They had a horse and

06:30 jinker [sulky], that was their wedding present as a matter of fact from mum's parents, it was a horse and jinker.

Can you tell us what a jinker is?

A jinker is another name for a gig. You know it's a two wheel sulky type of affair pulled by one horse.

Almost like a cart, essentially?

Oh yes but sophisticated you know it had a few springs in it and rubber tyred. They had iron ones as well but they were rubbered tyred ones

07:00 and they were quite polished things and they were the way of getting around. You know, to have a trotting horse in a gig or jig was a hit and bit in those days before motorcars. Grandad drove the horse and the jinker and he would go ahead and set up the camp which was always alongside the water and farmers on their way were only too happy to assist a returned soldier sort of business

07:30 and occasionally they got meals and things like that. And… they… took about nearly 10, 7 or 8 days, they had a couple of days, spelled the horses for a couple of days at Inverlea, which was fairly close to the pub and they camped on the bank of the Lea River and carried on down into the flat country, getting down towards Cressy and they stopped a couple of miles out of Cressy on the last night

08:00 and then they went on next morning to this farm. They would've taken most of the day to get there. And settled in and dad wanted to start fallowing, ploughing the ground as soon as he could. By this stage they'd sent a letter or something and mum came up by the train and she was met

08:30 at the Cressy railway. Dad met her at the Cressy Railway Station and she'd come out and they'd actually been camping on the wagon. They hadn't been into the little house on the place and mum walked in and to her horror it was absolutely – the floor was hopping with fleas. The previous fellow who'd been there was a shepherd and he'd had his dogs and the dogs had camped with him so mum had to boil the copper and

09:00 set out with phenyl to get rid of the fleas. She often spoke about that little episode. Anyway there they were, they settled in and their next door neighbour was Gordon and Mrs McCloud. I can't remember Mrs McCloud's Christian name. And one morning dad and mum woke up to find

09:30 that the wedding gift, the horse Biddy, had gone, nowhere in sight. Mum was very upset about this. Dad was about to ride one of the draught horses into the Cressy Police Station to report the loss of this horse when Mr McCloud drove in with Biddy. His wife had gone into labour that previous evening,

10:00 he couldn't catch his horse so he came down and he knew Biddy was in her stable and he sort of borrowed Biddy and took her home and took Mrs McCloud and just made it to the Lismore Hospital before their first daughter was born, Bessie, Bessie McCloud. That McCloud family, our family are still in touch with them right up till today. Bessie is dead, but the two younger girls, one Violet about

10:30 the same age – we went through school together, another one Una lives over in Clayton. But that was the association there and then farms came up for solider settlement and dad applied and got this block about – in a direct line it'd probably be 3 miles, around the road it would probably be 5 or 6 miles to get

to this new property.

Can I just stop you there for a moment please

11:00 **Mac, okay I'd like to ask a few questions about the First World War. Your father's experience clearly you know a big one in that sense. Can you tell us how that impacted on him as a person and your relationship with him?**

Well, I was always in awe of him in regard to what he'd done.

11:30 The more the years went by you know the more I came to understand him and what have you. He, as I said, he had a very tough time, and I think it was on the German break through in March 1918,

12:00 he told me about whereby the French or British troops in front had been overwhelmed and the Germans were clearly visible for the artillery and actually he said they lined them up through the barrel of the gun, called open sights they called it and shot shells at them from about half a mile away. And then I think it was either the 58th or

12:30 59th Battalion, I'm not sure about that, but it was one of those battalions, who came through, and this must've been fairly close to Villers Bretonneux and the Australians got between the artillery and the Germans and that was where they were stopped and went back. But evidently that action must've been the straw the broke the camel's back as far as dad's nerves and

13:00 what have you and he suffered dreadfully from this gassing business for years and years and years. He used to get thick discharges from his ears. It used to flow out like honey you know, it's coming out all the time. And so you know he didn't talk about the war a lot but if I asked him anything he always you know tried to tell it. Another time he met an old mate,

13:30 a fellow named Tom Kirk who was with him in the same battery. And they came up, Tom Kirk was a railway engineer, he came up and spent about a fortnight with us actually and he and dad chattered away a lot and I tuned into a lot of the things they said. Detail of it I really can't remember so much now except one time Tom Kirk had been a merchant sailor

14:00 and he was pretty good with rope and one of the things that bothered them with the guns, was the shrapnel ricocheting off the guns and Tom Kirk bound rope around the barrels of the guns and over various parts that were exposed, to try and restrict this ricochet flying sort of business and evidently it saved quite a number of lives. I have over there, I could've showed you

14:30 a rounder thing, the nose cone of a German 75 millimetre shell which landed right alongside my father and didn't explode. So it would've killed him had it gone off sort of business and this interview wouldn't be going on sort of business but that's a very prized souvenir that the family's got, which I maintain there.

15:00 It's been used as a doorstop in the all the houses we've been in and things like that sort of business and there's another one too which was the hub cap of the axle of a German artillery piece. Interesting piece of equipment and it had been struck by shrapnel and my son's got that and he uses it as a paper

15:30 weight on his desk sort of thing, to keep it going. And he also had a bit of other memorabilia and when they went down there, there was a family by the name of Turner, Ted Turner. He wasn't a serviceman but he went out of his way to assist soldiers settling back on to the land up there and dad had the greatest admiration for this man. And he gave him

16:00 a few pieces of memorabilia including the bit that went through the horses mouth, off a bridle or set of blinkers and Mr Turner towed it along behind the plough to get all the rust and muck off it sort of business and it was hanging up in the Turner household sort of business. But

16:30 my two sisters were born on the first farm they went to, the one they leased. Betty was born in June 1920 and Moira was born in October 1921 and they had shifted into the farm early in 1925. They took whatever crop it was off the first farm and then dad had been going around

17:00 there fallowing and they went over there in time to sow crops. He loved growing wheat. And anyway the house which was fairly small was extended, was built on to and made a very very comfortable home and dad set about getting his farm into production. He was part of the solider settler

17:30 commission in those days. Very different from World War II, World War I they said "Well there's your block" you know your own your own sort of business. World War II they you know they paid them for a couple of years until they got themselves established. But they struggled through and I came along in July 1925 and in that time dad was growing wheat. He bought a

18:00 very good header. A header is a machine to strip crops you know is good for wheat, oats, barley, anything of that nature and the fellow who came along to set it up going in the paddock, he said "You're very lucky Mr Ford, this is the show model." Because he must've bought it after the 1928, I think it might've been Royal Melbourne Show. And dad

18:30 said “Oh” he said “only just a bit of extra paint” “No” he said “that’s not so.” he said “It might have some extra paint in it but our most skilled tradesmen put together the Show Header and this is the one.” And it was still working that I’m aware of well over 25 years later. As a matter of fact when we left the farm this Gordon McCloud bought

19:00 it and he used it for many many years. Anyway be that as it may, off we went and we went around the paddock and my earliest recollection that I can really remember, clearly, is a scene with a very old lady dressed totally in black in a drain.

19:30 And it turned out, that’s the part I remember very clearly but what she was doing was that first of all she was my father’s mother, my grandmother, and Dad had the reaper and binder out and he was cutting grain - oats and hay near the house. I was a small boy and wanted to go out with him and you know he would sit me

20:00 on his lap and drive around doing this work which you know, now I realise was a stupid thing for a boy to you know be asking to do. Dad obviously knew the danger of it sort of business, so anyway I must’ve got very offended when I wasn’t permitted to do this, so I hid. I was hiding behind the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK house when I could remember seeing this lady. And Mum

20:30 came out and didn’t see me and went across and stopped dad because you know a reaper and binder would just chop you legs off. You know a small boys legs - it was easy as a wink because it could’ve been in the crop, could’ve been stamped on by the horses, anything could’ve happened. And there was granny Ford praying for my rescue or salvation or something sort of business and that I can remember very well.

Can I

21:00 **ask you another question?**

Yeah.

When was it that you actually moved into Coburg?

Not until 1942. 1942.

Were you 17 or 18 then?

Well I was 16 when I went to Longerenong so I was 16 to 17 years of age, yeah.

What was the difference like when you moved from – well obviously quite different but

21:30 **from country to Coburg?**

Well I think the biggest thing was that we had a flushing toilet. Up till that stage we had the thunderbox [outside toilet] and what have you outside and I think that probably was the big difference, electric light. We had gas lights on the farm. And the convenience of being able to walk out the back down and go to Gilmore’s Dairy and have a milkshake.

22:00 You know previously we had to drive 7 miles to go to get a milkshake. So those little things they were very obviously great, huge changes for us.

What was the reason for moving to Coburg?

Well, after trying to run the farm or running the farm with the aid of my mother, it

22:30 got a bit, you see I was only 15/16 then and dad had this accident. He was coming home for Christmas 1940 and he tried to get on a moving train at the Footscray Railway Station, went down between the train and platform and very, very severely damaged – I can’t remember whether it was his left or right leg now, and

23:00 was then taken by ambulance and admitted to the Royal Melbourne Hospital by one of his daughters, who was working in casualty at the time. So that was the beginning of the end sort of business and we stuck it out for the best part of another year but then the farm was leased, dad was still working at the Munitions Factory and it was difficult.

23:30 Unfortunately we leased it badly because it went on the market for lease, it was the time of Pearl Harbour and so the rent we got for the place was very, very small.

Also can you please tell us about the Depression years and they how they affected your family, yourself?

Yes, this property we were on was on the Lower Darlington Road

24:00 which runs parallel to the Hamilton Highway and it was a regular track for the swagmen [tramps carrying a “swag” or sack] in those days and we used to get upwards of three a day coming in. Mrs Worth, who lived you know about three quarters of a mile away but across a paddock didn’t get the callers that we got. But

24:30 Mrs Worth would see them coming across and there was a party line between, a telephone party line, and you know if mum had had two or three in the day sort of business, often Mrs Worth would send over a batch of cakes or scones you know to help out. They were wonderful, wonderful neighbours, wonderful friends, wonderful people. But I think the highlight of that particular thing that I can recall is one day

25:00 and I can remember this one quite well, a man turned up with a very old dilapidated cart and a poor old horse and he had a lady, he had his wife with him, and he came to the back door and mum answered the backdoor and he said "Could I have some food for myself and for my wife

25:30 and myself?" And mum said "Certainly, go and bring her in." And he went off and he came back later and he said "No my wife will feel too embarrassed to come in." So she said "Very well." So she said "Well you go back and keep her company" and by this time dad had come in from somewhere too and

26:00 he was an old soldier and they got chatting and dad said "Come with me" and they went across to the chaff house and they filled up a couple of bags of chaff for this poor old horse and they carried it down. My mother, I might be a bit affected in this, my mother got out her best china

26:30 made the tea, scones and with my sisters carried it down to this lady, they sat in the drain outside the front gate, and they chatted away for a couple of hours but that was my mother. She was that sort of a woman. Nobody

27:00 ever went away from our place without something to eat. It mightn't have been very much but always those tramps, swagmen got something and there was always something on our table. We used to kill a sheep, usually one a week, because we were all big meat eaters, so that kept us in meat and it started off with

27:30 roast and then it you know it went right through to the cold meat cut at the end of the week sort of business. But we always maintained that sort of a situation and there were other people in the district who were far better off, wealthier than we were, who could've helped out sort of business but they rejected, they just refused to feed

28:00 these people. There was a great old saying in those days on those Western Plains that if you were still in sight of Mount Elephant which is the mountain outside of Terrinallum, approximately 20 miles away from where we were, the swagman, would always get a feed and although I've never met the lady

28:30 but Tammy Fraser, the Prime Minister's wife, her parents who had a property near Tarang ['Nareen'] which was also well in sight of Mount Elephant, they were also very very generous in the food that they gave. If ever I met Mrs Fraser I'd mention that to her, because it was well know that

29:00 Mrs Fraser and my mother were two of the most generous people, you know going around, a lot of other people did it as well but they must've sort of stood out in the swagmen's mind. And when Mum died in the late 1960's I can remember receiving one of the sympathy cards, no return address on it, very spidery old handwriting,

29:30 pretty obviously to us a lady's handwriting and all it was that her kindness has never been forgotten. I think it might've been that lady she'd had the cup of tea with in the drain – can please… the Depression was a hard time

30:00 but we struggled through, there was food on the table and we had a very close knit family. We were encouraged to read and all those sort of things and whilst it was hard but we survived and we're probably all the better for it I would imagine. So, anyway, school was

30:30 okay. It was a bit over 3 miles drive to get school and some of our teachers were good and some of them weren't so good. My favourite was this Mr Clarrie Read who taught me for the last two or three years of my schooling life. We had one demon by the name of Mr Salmons who was pretty free with handing out the cuts and got himself into a bit of trouble with some of the locals at times

31:00 but never mind he taught us a lot. We had our pranks at school. We had a very good little football team and it used to give us a lot of pleasure to go into the bigger towns of Cressy and Lismore and thrash them at football. We kept Cressy scoreless one day which was a bit of a horror to them. Lismore was a bit harder but they

31:30 were both bigger towns and were more substantial than Foxhound. We used to have our sports meetings competing against the other schools. Our annual picnic down to the Camperdown Gardens. All those sort of things. I think it was a fairly normal sort of a pattern. The school still gets together - we have a reunion about every two

32:00 years. And of those 52 I think there were 17 of use left at the last one, which we had in Camperdown last year. Camperdown – the farm was very centrally situated. It was 25 miles, I'll say it in miles because I can remember it that way, 25 miles to Camperdown, 33 miles to Colac, 45 miles to

32:30 Ballarat and 50 miles from our front gate to the Geelong Post Office. So it was well situated near towns of you know real substance. We used to use Colac more than anything else because it had a market and

you know we'd take potty calves or pigs or something like that and we would you know then do the shopping in there. But I still get memories when I drive down Murray

33:00 Street, Colac of the places we visited. Some of the old shops are still there. No good situation, used to take about an hour. About, it must've been about 1937, the years had been a bit better, we'd got a motor car. An old Chrysler, second hand

33:30 bought it from Henderson's Motors in Colac and dad had never driven a motor car and a part of the deal that the salesman or somebody from Henderson's would teach him to drive. Well that was an exciting time because you know dad often yelled out "whoa" instead of applying the brake and things like that and there was a few narrow

34:00 squeaks about gateposts and things like that because he learnt to drive in a paddock sort of business before he went out on the road. Anyway he drove around the road, which was I was forbidden to go and I could drive in the back paddocks but not out on the road. And he went in and he went through Cressy and he got his licence from the policeman in Cressy and then he had to take the bloke back into Colac and come back on his own. Well I think mum went to the back door

34:30 about every 3 minutes for the next couple of hours sort of business, waiting for him to return and suddenly he appeared over the little hill that was behind the house and came down and turned in and that was dad's first effort of driving on his own. He was never much of a driver and he kept on driving until he was well into his 80's and he was at that stage living at Eltham.

35:00 He had a couple of narrow squeaks and I think he dented somebody's car one day over there and he decided he would give up his licence. And my sister Betty went over to make sure that they had an arrangement to get food and all that sort of thing, because he and his second wife were living there. Anyway she went down to the shop and she said to one of the people in the shop she said "Oh I'll be coming over quite regularly now

35:30 to get the supplies for dad, he's given up his licence" and the lady in the store said "And aren't we all pleased." Yes, so, anyway the old car hung together. I drove it for many years including carting this water. That wasn't hard work sort of business but it was so constant because first of all we had a

36:00 fair number of sheep, cows and horses to water and a milking cow requires an enormous quantity of water a day, so anyway we carted it from this bore that dad and Mr Worth put down and we survived that and came April, the 6th of April 1939. The war hadn't broken out

36:30 and I I went out on the water run and I came back for a cup of tea or something and I said to my parents "I think it's going to rain." And dad by this stage was pretty downhearted about the drought and he always used to say the weather was the worst managed thing in the universe, it was a favourite saying of his as a matter of fact, cause when he wanted it to rain it didn't

37:00 and when the opposite was too wet for the crops or something like that. Mum said "Why do you think so?" and I said "I've just been over by the plantation and that bull ants nest is absolutely teeming with ants and they're building it higher and you know they're taking stuff down into the hole and what have you." And as the day wore on it got sultrier, very

37:30 sultry and black clouds started to gather out in the west. And there was a function on at the Fox Owl Hall that night. Some people down there had renovated their house, they were having an official housewarming party and I can so clearly remember it, the 6th of April. We drove down there in this stinking sultry evening

38:00 and we had no sooner got into the house and the heavens opened up. Huge claps of thunder and lightning and things like that and there was great joy in the household, because there was about 2 inches of rain that night. And it was very heavy rain which allowed run off, it didn't fill the dams but it put water in the dams so that that was unnecessary then to cart

38:30 water sort of business and 1939 finished up being quite a reasonable year. And we had barley and oats. The oats was a very good crop and that was hay for the horses and any excess over the horses didn't need, didn't require them to get through the year was sold as

39:00 oat and hay or chaff hay and the barley was fair. Unfortunately it got a what's known as smut in the grain, it is a disease of crop which has been largely eliminated now but this was quite badly in you used to stack up the barley crop in small stacks. This travelling thrasher used to come along and it

39:30 would pull up, the stacks were built alongside each other about 10-12 feet apart and this thrasher would come in and set up and it had a big elevator out the back and there used to be 4 men on the haystack, on the sheaf stack, there were 2 men feeding it and there were 4 men on the straw stack. So they'd throw the sheaves into this drum and it would bash all the

40:00 grain out of it. Exactly the same principle as headers today and it was quite a deal. The grain would then come through another elevator and there was a man on the bags as well as the farmer, because he had to stack the bags.

I'm going to have to pause you there because we've run out of tape.

Tape 3

00:34 **So we're just continuing on with the thrashing part…**

The difficulty with the thrashing team arriving, it was pulled by steam engine by the way and it was that the mob had to be fed and you know another 14 people sort of business was quite a major task for the women of the household sort of business. But often Mrs Worth

01:00 and mum used to help out – when they were at Worths, mum would go over there and help her and she would come over and help Mum. It was a wonderful co-operation between them. Whilst they lived, they never ever referred to their Christian names. They were always Mrs Worth and Mrs Ford when they spoke to each other. And Mrs Worth was really thrilled when my eldest sister named her daughter Miram which was Mrs Worth's name.

01:30 But during this droughty time as well and immediately after that, we sunk a bore on the property because dad said we'll never ever go through this drought situation again. We cleaned out all the dams and there were 6 or 7 of them on the property. And we mud scooped them and got in them and deepened them and did all that sort of a thing. And so

02:00 you didn't have to hire it but you could get through the Mines Department, through the Soldier Settler Commission, the Mines Department bore sinking equipment, hand equipment. So the stationmaster at Berry bank rang up and he said "That equipment has arrived for you but you'd better bring the wagon there's a lot of it." So anyway we yoked up a team of horses and we went down to the railway station and it really had,

02:30 these enormous about 30 foot three of them, that made the hoisting part for the gear. So we had attempted to get down by using some borrowed equipment from a neighbour of about 15 miles but it was too light because there was stone in the situation and actually the drill broke off

03:00 and we had to abandon the first hole that we drilled. Oh we were probably down about 20 odd feet I suppose, when the whole thing collapsed sort of business, so dad paid for that and he got this heavier equipment and we sunk the hole alongside the first one. And this equipment was huge, particularly when you're doing it by hand. So they had these big sort of a windlass on

03:30 the top with four arms on it and two of would stand each side, we'd turn this thing around and that bored its way down through, like a big brace sort of business, bored its way down through the earth and again we hit this same rock at about the same level. And it's pretty old volcanic country down there on the Western Plains. And we then pulled out the drill and put on the bit the chisel

04:00 bit and it was about a 100 pounds in weight and the idea was you lifted it up and you dropped and you turned a little, moved a foot and you lifted it and dropped and things like this and this was pretty solid work. So Dad devised the idea of going and cutting down a tree 30 or 40 feet long and he made up what was called a whip and he anchored the butt of the tree against the fencepost over there and put a fulcrum

04:30 in and this came up at a fair, you know, reasonable angle and then above the hole attached a chain and what have you and attached this to this windlass. So you'd push down on it and the spring in the old tree would bring it up again so we didn't have to lift it. Oh this was great fun you know down bang and down and we'd turn this thing you know it was around and around and we were doing beautifully and we bashed our way through about

05:00 12-15 feet of rock I suppose, fairly quickly actually and we got on going and we struck a small flow of water but not very much at all. So Dad decided that we would keep on going which we did. And we were going down and we got down to about 45 feet or thereabouts

05:30 and suddenly the whole thing jammed. Now we were back to the bit, we didn't have the drill, we were back to the bit and what had happened is that the thing had collapsed down below and it had just fallen in on top of the bit and we couldn't move it, there was no way. And fortunately the bore became known as Fords Folly because of all the trouble we were having with

06:00 the damn thing. And the man who had the thrashing machine, a fella named Les Pearce who lived in Cressy and he had a whole bottle of bottle jacks and he turned up one Sunday morning and he said "I might be able to get them out with these bottle jacks, Theo. And so off we went down to the thing and we put these things under it and they were big

06:30 heavy bottle jacks. And we were there and we screwed them up and screwed them up and it got harder and harder and we were really struggling to turn these knurls on these bottle jacks and suddenly Mr Pearce said "I think it's moving, I think it's moving" and slacked off and eventually we got it out. Great relief all the way around.

07:00 So to overcome the problem then, we cased the bore. In other words it was about 6 to 8 inches in

diameter and you could buy casing and fairly light metal, probably about 3/16ths or something like in a round thing and we put that down and pushed it through this mud that was already there and cleaned that out and as we went on we kept pushing it down, pushing it down and we only went about another

07:30 3 feet probably and we hit rock again. So we pulled out the bit, we set up the chisel thing again with the whip and there must've been just a small strata of rock because we were only 10-15 feet and we broke through into water. It was quite brackish but the thing to do was to get the water up and Dad got a

08:00 cake of old Velvet soap sort of business. He got this water and if it would lather with old Velvet soap it was good enough for the stock to drink sort of business. It lathered and the stock drank it. And that bore is still in existence today. I think its salt content had probably increased a little bit as time's gone by but it got us out of this problem. Anyway, we bought a new windmill and we put that on the

08:30 house dam with a new tank and took the old tank and the old windmill because it was very exposed this bore and it still is you know, there's nothing within 100 yards of it in the way of a tree sort of business - it was excellent to have wind power. So that really made the farm water, drought proof as far as water was concerned. Anyway

09:00 we sold the stock, I had already sold most of the stock and then when the drought broke, Dad bought more sheep up at Minyip as a matter of fact and they came down by train bound to Berry Bank and we drove them home and well we finished up 500 odd sheep again or something like back to what we were before but we were still milking these dam cows you know and I hated it. You know hand milking these damn things sort of

09:30 business but we used to get a fortnightly cheque for that, so that was our cash flow sort of business and kept things going.

You lived through the Depression and the drought yet they seem like good times?

Oh yeah they were alright. They were alright. We had plenty to read. We had a radio that was an interesting thing too.

10:00 One of dad's cousins worked for the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission] and he got an old – well it was called a wireless set in those days. I remember Uncle Norman coming up with this damn thing. He had a little old Austin 7 car and he brought his wife and his daughter. They came up and spent the weekend and we went out and cut down a couple of saplings about 30 or 40 feet high and put them up with the two wires between and all that sort of a thing. And

10:30 we tuned in and we got 3AR. 3AR, Australian Radio and at that time used to be broadcasting all the football all the sporting things sort of business and 3LO was the music station, they reversed roles in later years but I remember getting this time and tuning into the football and I said to my mother,

11:00 "Whoever wins this I'm going to barrack for." And Richmond were playing Melbourne and Richmond kicked 12 goals 18 and Melbourne kicked 10 goals 6 so they won by 4 goals and I've supported Richmond ever since. That was, I think, the date was the 31st July 1932 or pretty close to that date anyway. So I've supported Richmond every since then and I've had a very

11:30 soft spot for Melbourne as well. But it was always funny because the announcer for the 3AR, at that time, was a fella named Mel Morris. His brother, Les I think it was, he joined him later on and they sort of broadcasted together. But Mel used to broadcast and he was an old captain and coach after the war of Richmond. So most of the broadcasts were Richmond,

12:00 he you know went out and set up the situation and I can remember an always exciting game sort of business, Mel Morris would forget his role as a football commentator and shout "Come on the Tigers" he used to yell out coming over the air. Oh it was quite good. So that year Melbourne won the premiership. They lost the premiership, because of a big brawl with Carlton the following year, when South Melbourne beat them

12:30 and they won the Centenary Premiership in 1934.

Was sport a big part of your life?

Yes, yes, yes, my favourite sport is cricket, always has been. Foxhound didn't have a cricket team or a football team for that matter but those of us who wanted to play cricket went to Berry Bank. And Berry Bank had a great side, this Clarrie Reid was an all rounder with them.

13:00 The Gange brothers were two more and – and a fellow named Les Bennett. He had been captain of Scots College, the cricket side, and he was a very very good cricketer, extremely good and the VCA [Victorian Cricket Association] was very keen that he should come and play with them but he wanted to be a farmer so he moved out and he bought this property on the

13:30 other side of the highway from us. Well, well away. He married the local shopkeeper's daughter, Mary McDonald, but he used to come and play cricket. And one of my great regrets in life was that I didn't take enough notice of him when he tried to teach me batting, coach me in batting. All I wanted to do was hit the ball out of the you know out of the park, sort of business all the time and he gave me up in the end he said "You can't control yourself" you know

14:00 but had I listened to him you know I wouldn't have been a star but I wouldn't been you know a respectable batsman. As it was I was a bit of hit and miss man and the highest score I ever made was 38 and I took two wickets one day and I can look back on those with a lot of pleasure sort of business but I was the small boy attached to the cricket club and it was good. Uncle Bob Griffin,

14:30 he was the wicket keeper and I used to ride the horse down to his farm and off we'd go when we'd play. Oh we played all over the district, it was Cressy, Berry Bank, Lismore and old Brigadier Street who was the Minister for the army when he was killed, he played there and his son Tony later on. There were two Mingay teams. There was Dareadale and there was Skipton. So we got around a bit to play cricket and I played

15:00 at all those grounds butthey were really good times. Football by the time I got - had been abandoned because of the war, so I probably would've played football for Cressy had I been there cause it would've been the closest ground to me. But we had Lakes, there was Lake Narvett and Lake Rozeen and we swam

15:30 and I don't know we always seemed to be busy. There was always the chores to do, I had to not only milk these damn cows and turn the separator but I had to get the kindling wood and everything else. I had to start the fire because it was a wood fired stove in the house.

Was the empire important?

Mm?

Empire – the British Empire?

Yes, all that sort – it was Imperial preference in those days, yes.

16:00 They particularly in wool were very very strong and wheat, a fair bit of wheat was exported to England but it was starting to go to other countries as well. But the barley was all used locally either for brewing or for pig feed and oat and hay of course there were horses everywhere sort of business and there were some very big oat and hay growers in the district. The people next door,

16:30 right next door to us named Orrie White, also a returned soldier, he exclusively, that was all he did was grow oat and hay, and he was very good at it too.

Did you feel like a British citizen?

Yes, yes we used to fill out forms and we used to put the word, nationality was British, I can remember doing. I think I've got it in my papers as a matter of fact right even now. Mm, yes, that separation didn't come till late. And

17:00 talking about British and things like that brings to mind when King George the 5th died, we had the thrashing machine there and they were pretty wild mob on these thrashing teams you know. You locked up you valuables and your girl and your daughter sort of business when they were around. That's probably a bit too aggressive but you get the idea. And I remember

17:30 the team coming in for lunch at the announcement and you know, the Kings death had been announced and dad called for a minutes silence and got ignored which upset him a bit because he was very much an Anglophile, was dad.

Where they that wild with the daughters?

Oh no, no, no, no, no, it was they were all fellows and some of them rode bikes, some of them had motor bikes and some of them had an old motor car and they were fellas

18:00 just earning a living. Come the weekend they worked – sometimes they worked weekends other times they went home sort of business but this Les Pearce who was the owner of the thrashing machine, he was pretty careful of his picking of his men and he was very very greatly respected by them too. One of my first instances that stood me in good stead later on in life, when I was supervising

18:30 people too. When it came to the end of a hot day and they used to work you know enormous hours, nothing to be going 12 hours on - while it was going it had to be done sort of business and I can remember it the end of the evening and he'd just give a little toot on his steam engine sort of business and that was a bit of a time for the fellas to just relax and give them a bit of a spell and another little toot a minute later and they'd start up again. He'd do this every ten minutes or a

19:00 quarter of an hour in the last hour of the day and you could see the fellas appreciated as well. The fellow, the straw stacker he was one of the key fellows in the thing, because the straw stacker had to be able to stand up, sometimes the straw press would come in and they'd press the straw straight off the thrasher, other times they'd built a straw stack. Dad always built a straw stack, because

19:30 straw sold better in the spring than it did in the autumn sort of business, so we'd store it and then the store press would come in and we'd press it up. But this elevator and this fellow who was an enormous fellow, Charlie was his Christian name, I don't remember his surname and he was the elevator man, he was the bloke of the head of the elevator and he'd shove the straw down to the next bloke and then the next bloke and then on to the stacker you see, because they were quite large. And

20:00 when, as the stack built up, the elevator had to be lifted up and there was a fair bit of noises with this thrashing machine going sort of business, the old steam engine puffing away in the background and he'd get up there and he'd go "ELEVATOR". And Mr Pearce'd drop everything and he'd run round and he had a windlass that he used to drag it up about another foot sort of business and he'd get the signal from old Charlie and back he'd got to look after the steam engine again but

20:30 he was a great character and a wonderful man was Les Pearce.

When did you first hear about Hitler in Europe and what was happening?

Really I think it really came to my attention, my parents might've been earlier, but it really came to my attention when Chamberlain made the flight to Munich to try and you know and brought back the piece of paper you know I can remember hearing that on the radio quite well

21:00 and the comments my parents made you know Dad said "He should've been made a saint" or something like that. Mother said "Stupid old man" and things like you know she was totally opposed to war and as she used to say "There is no such thing as a just war but sometimes a war is necessary" and she could see the problems and no doubt was reading far deeper than I was at that stage. I was still reading

21:30 sorts of things like "Round the World in 10 [80] Days" and you know "Jack and the Beanstalk" and all that sort of stuff. But she was a very big reader and we were all greatly encouraged to read.

When he came back with that piece of paper did you think war had been averted?

Dad did, Dad did, I – I can't recall what my feelings were. I can remember so well the outbreak of war when I thought what am I, only

22:00 14 years or something, I've got 4 years to wait and it'll all be over you know that's the sorts of feelings that were going through my mind at the present time and I was very proud of course when Dad joined up with the VDC, Volunteer Defence Corps and he got a uniform and an old 303 rifle which was kept in his wardrobe at ome and it was probably used in the Boer War too, there was no ammunition with it but at least he had a rifle. But

22:30 the VDC you know, it kept going right throughout the war sort of business and these McLeod people I mentioned earlier, the girl Violet who was approximately my age, she was the main instigator in the aircraft spotting organisation that was in all the towns around you know particularly in the coastal areas. After all we were only

23:00 40 or 50 miles from the coast and they had this set up whereby they used to come and spot aircraft and if they saw an aeroplane they'd have to ring up somewhere and say aeroplane such and such flying from north to south or wherever it was and reported in. She got an award for it in later life, a few years ago as a matter of fact.

Did you father tell you about the horrors of World War I or did you hear him talk about it?

No not in a

23:30 direct sense. He and Mr Worth used to chat away at times. Mr Worth was an Englishman who was in Australia when war broke out and joined up with a, I think, a West Australian unit and served on Gallipoli. Dad didn't do that, when war broke out he was share farming up at Condobolin in New South Wales

24:00 wheat again, another drought and he waited until he took that crop off and disposed, he did all the other things that he was contracted to do, because he was a contractor in the area as well, ploughing and all that sort of thing and then he disposed of his horses and equipment and came back to Melbourne and enlisted I think it was in May 1915. He went

24:30 after Seymour – after Broadmeadows and he went directly to Egypt and training in the desert and then they went directly to Egypt to Marseille and he said "We arrived in beautiful weather in Marseille and we put the horses and – on the train…" and they went to

25:00 a place near Amiens where they were given their old British 18 pounder guns which were clapped out anyway. And he said "We came from beautiful weather to snow on the ground." It was the first time that really he'd been exposed to snow and that would've been probably early 1916 and they then were sent over

25:30 to England to Salisbury to do a 3 week or something crash course in artillery training. It was the only time I can remember him being very down on the British, because they did this training and they'd evidently acquitted themselves fairly well in it, it was not only the artillery work it was physical as well, and he said this well fed

26:00 general with big red tabs on came out from headquarters and gave us a pep talk and he said "I can remember his words" he said "We've brought you over here now" he said "now you're fit enough to kill. Go back to France and get on with it." And dad never forgave him for that.

Did you hear your father talk about the killing and death at all?

No not very much.

26:30 You've probably all seen photographs of the statute of the Virgin Mary on the top of the Cathedral at Albare which is about 12 – 15 miles something miles from Amiens, that was knocked over by a German shell and Dad was in the observation post in that Cathedral the day before. We went back

27:00 there and the whole thing's rebuilt. We went back there with my wife in 1986 and we stayed at Albare as a matter of fact and the people who took it over, English people, the girl was very, very fluent in French and she went round and said you know "His Pa and mon Pa and mon uncle you know served here and mon uncle was killed out in Pozieres". We got the red carpet treatment and as matter of fact when we went to

27:30 Albare, we were very well looked after.

So before World War II what was your perception of war?

My perception of war was really – I'd read very much about the Light Horse and the desert campaign. Dad had been given the

28:00 the pictorial part of the History of the War by C.E.W. Bean you know there was about 8 or 10 books of it all this but one of them was pictorial and dad had been given this and I used to go through this thing oh you know when I wasn't reading, I was looking at these pictures sort of business and the picture of that Albare, that Cathedral Albare

28:30 is in it, there's one down in the club house just down the street here at Blackburn. And then there were the stories, the histories of the Light Horse and I'd read those and to me war was the closer you got to them the more chance you had of either shooting them or sticking bayonets in them sort of business.

29:00 Dad being in artillery was a bit removed from that, although he was an observer and often they were really in the front line sort of business he said – he did tell us about some of the bombardments that he mentioned places which I've forgotten but literally they almost brought the shells down on themselves sort of business, to be most effective. And he won his Military Medal

29:30 because when he was up in one these situations, they had an old telephone situation, they were talking back to the battery control and evidently a shell had hit the lines and he went out and repaired it under fire – and that's what he got his Military Medal for. I've got the citation somewhere in there too. It's part of our history and I got the Medal.

30:00 **How proud was he of that medal"**

I can't answer you in a direct sense - he always wore it with great pride at Anzac Day. He always tried to get down to the marches until the battery, the 11th Battery marched on its own and then the Batteries of the 4th Field Artillery Brigade joined together and then they marched. And

30:30 he marched right up until the early mid 1980's I would think and then of course they used come along with the vehicles and then they used to travel in the vehicles but he was very active in the RSL [Returned and Services League]. He was president of the little branch in Cressy, and when he

31:00 moved out he was a member of the Brunswick RSL when we lived in Coburg and as a matter of fact I joined the Brunswick RSL in November 1946, so I've been a member of the RSL for what's that now, 58 years isn't it? And then when he went to Diamond Creek, they lived in Diamond Creek then later on

31:30 he was very active in the Greensborough RSL and actually I've got a little bit of a history of him talking the last time to the old World War I fellows who were still able to attend, it was in the 1980's, and there were about 8 or 10 of them I think and they used to meet once a week and they'd go down and have a beer and a bit of a chat what have you sort of a business.

32:00 Dad was the unofficial chairman of them or something else like that I don't really know what he was really doing but he proposed the last toast, the last drink, I remember him telling me that, yes.

How important was Anzac Day before World War II?

To Dad very important, very important. If he wasn't able to come to Melbourne there was always a march in Cressy or in Colac

32:30 or something like that and he very very rarely missed. He was interviewed quite widely by Patsy Adam Smith when she wrote the "Anzacs", as a matter of fact I've got it there the part that when she talked to him and his thoughts on war are contained in that book actually. To

33:00 me Anzac Day, we always used to have the Anzac Day speech, which was usually given by Mr Worth because he had been at Gallipoli. If it wasn't Mr Worth it was a fellow named Mr Campbell, Bill Campbell who also lived in the Foxhound area but Mr Worth was usually the main fellow who gave it and

33:30 he use to tell the humorous things. He didn't really go into the ghastly part of Gallipoli. And one of the things that he told – I can remember him talking about was that the fleas and the lice on Gallipoli were

pretty severe. And he said “We thought about the idea

34:00 of cleaning out the bottom part and then putting our blankets up because of the lice were in the blankets most of all putting them up on pegs and we were sleeping under them” he said “but it was terribly cold” he said so he gave that away fairly quickly after the first night. He used to ask us questions about dates and things like that about the war and the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and even though I say it myself, I knew most of the answers

34:30 because I’d read fairly thoroughly on it sort of business. And there was always a picture in the Fox House, in the old school and it was a painting or a print of a Light Horseman with the emu feathers saying goodbye

35:00 to his horse, that had obviously been you know the guts were hanging out of it sort of business and that was up on the wall. Quite a ghastly picture when I come to think about it sort of business but I can remember it well and there was this soldier saying his you know his – “Sad Farewell” I think was the name of the picture it was written underneath. Who it was painted by or how the school acquired it I’ve got no idea. But I can remember it quite clearly.

For you was

35:30 **there an adventure and glamour in war?**

Yes I suppose so, yes, I’ve always been very nationalistic even from a small boy you know right from playing cricket against the Poms [English] and all that sort of thing. And that was one of the things the radio, the old wireless came in handy when we could tune into the cricket in England

36:00 when they use to bang the pencil on the table, you know the ball hitting the bat, they used to simulate that. But glamorous yes I suppose in a certain way until I got a bit older and you know started to appreciate and understand the stories better. To sort of

36:30 jump a little bit to go to my enlistment, the greatest disappointment I had in enlistment was that my parents refused point blank to allow me to join aircrew. You had to you know even to join the Air force in those days you still had to have the permission of your parents but their permission was for ground crew only and nothing I could do to persuade

37:00 them otherwise changed their minds. And you know had I been up there flying, I think I would’ve experienced more horrors but more excitement sort of business. There was not a lot of excitement in as far as warfare is concerned as being in the ground crew. You know you had a major job to do and I tried to do mine as responsibly and as thoroughly as I was able

37:30 sort of business, because I knew the work I was doing was very much going to help the fellas up on the pointy end sort of business for them to be effective. So but it wasn’t very exciting work you know let’s face it.

Did you want to be a pilot?

Oh yes, yes, yes. I was thrilled but a bit concerned when my son you know later on rang up

38:00 and said “I’m going to be pilot, I’m going to take flying lessons.” And I said “Righto, well just watch it yourself” sort of business and then he bought his own aircraft and flew that and I flew a lot with him and then my eldest grandson is also a pilot and he’s in the dangerous part of it, because he’s an Agg [agricultural spray ing] pilot

38:30 and he’s trained in that and David’s son and grandson have got an aerial top dressing service in Tasmania and hopefully if the weather’s good they’re up doing it today sort of business, yes. David’s not active in the company, the grandson is. I think David’s been the guarantor at the bank I think rather than doing the flying although he sneaks over to Victoria every now and again because you get your Agg

39:00 rating down at – the fellow at Leongatha is one of the few licensed to do it and he was over, he has to come over to the mainland quite often and he was over a few weeks ago and been down to Leongatha and Katrina twigged on to it, she said “How was the flying?” He’d be coming over. I think he’s got through the white knuckle part now going under the powerlines and over the fence. I think he’s reached that part now.

Do they

39:30 **sometimes let you fly the plane?**

I’ve flown it but never landed it. Yes I’ve been up with them quite a lot as a matter of fact. They had a Cessna 182. As a matter of fact he had two, he had one, his first one was out on charter and it got stacked up down on the west coast of Tasmania, it was written off, nobody was hurt. And then a little while later he bought another one, a very good old, old Cessna 182.

Tape 4

00:33 **Actually before you embark tell us what you were doing the day war was declared?**

Well I would've milked the cows in the morning and specifically apart from that morning and evening, apart from that I would've just would've been – farm duties I might've been

01:00 just going around the sheep or you know doing something about that but definitely milking morning and night anyway.

When it came to enlistment which was a little bit later on what was the reason you chose the air force initially.

Well I knew I had a lot of, not resistance, but I knew it was upsetting my mother.

01:30 And I didn't have a great yen for the navy, you know nothing wrong with the navy it just didn't seem to be so it was a toss up between the army and the air force and I always harboured a little bit of a hope that they might, my parents might relent and allow me to re-muster to aircrew and I think that was the turning point about going into the air force.

02:00 **Was there also a social appeal to the air force?**

Oh yes we're a bit more glamorous I suppose. Blue – what did they use to call us blue orchids or something of that nature. That really didn't enter my mind to any dominating factor but I thought that if I joined the air force I could do a job of some description and I suppose another thing behind me

02:30 was I might've got trained in something that might've been useful after the war sort of business but as it turned out being a flight rigger, all I can do is splice rope and do some riveting nowadays that's about all I can do. But no in any specific thing there was nothing really dominated one way or the other.

Could you please tell us about the actual process of enlistment into the air force how it happened for you?

03:00 Yes I had to go before, as I was under 18, I had to go a Manpower Officer, there was a Manpower Section it was down in Craig's Building at the bottom end of Elizabeth Street and I went up there and – because I was – after leaving college I was in a reserved occupation as a munitions worker, not that I did any

03:30 munitions actually, I was in the stores while we were there. Boring, bored me to tears. But I had to front the Manpower Officer and he was one of the old teachers from Longerenong College and he looked me up and down and he said "You want to do this do you Ford?" and I said "Yes Sir" he said "Give me the paper and I'll sign" he didn't even interview me he just signed them and said "Good luck" you know next, sort of business and I was out that was getting authority from the

04:00 Manpower. And then I went up to the Recruitment Depot which was in Russell. I think it was an old car showrooms. I've got an idea it might've been General Motors you know they had Chevs [Chevrolets] and things like that before Holdens were made. Prestons Motors it might've been. And anyway I went in there and I presented myself with my clearance form, probably

04:30 best past of two before I was actually called in. I did all the usual medical examinations and the psychological tests and aptitude tests and all that, there was quite a number of those. And anyway I must've passed all those sort of business because the said "Righto you'll hear from us" and I

05:00 duly did early in July, telling me to report on the 13th July to the same thing 8 o'clock in the morning and I duly turned up at 8 o'clock. A bit of an emotional farewell from my mother which I expected but you know that wasn't too bad anyway I went with her blessing sort of business in the end. And

05:30 we did our usual bits and pieces, we had a rear inspection for haemorrhoids and other sorts of things and a front inspection for VD [Venereal Disease] and whatever sorts of businesses were around. One bloke next to me he got whipped out because he had a hernia and he went straight into hospital at Heidelberg and I caught up with him some time later. But I medically was completely in the clear.

06:00 We were in civvies and the thing that amused me about the first day is that we went in really as civilians and the corporals and sergeants who were behind the desks and you know who we had to go to get this and get that sort of business, they were ultra polite "Oh Mr Ford welcome and all that sort of a thing" and we were all you know "anything we can do, any question you have don't hesitate to ask" sort of business

06:30 and then an officer appeared with about 6 or 7 Bibles and he put them on little tables and we all gathered around and I managed to get one finger on the Bible, I can remember, and we took the Oath of Allegiance, the attestation situation. And, as soon as that happened of course we were in the air force and the corporals and sergeants

07:00 came from nice fellows into real horrible bastards. And you know they were "You're in the air force now and you know move quickly" and do all that sort of thing however probably they had to live with themselves that night, not me. But then about 4 o'clock, bit later we were all lined up and there was a squad of us probably be about 30, between 30 and 40 of us I reckon

07:30 we were and at –we were lined up in Russell Street and we bounced out quick march sort of business they had somebody beating a drum just to try and keep us in some step but we were hopeless in marching. We hadn't had any training sort of business but anyway we swung round and went down Bourke Street and all the people came out of the shops around you know Myers and Coles and things like that and clapped and cheered and we

08:00 got on the train at Spencer Street and headed off for Shepparton. The train trip was alright. We got fed at Seymour, tea, we got on, we got up to Shepparton I suppose 9.30, certainly dark anyway. And as we walked in we marched from the station across to the showgrounds, where the training depot was

08:30 as we walked in we were given an enamel pannikin and a knife, fork and a spoon. And we were numbered off into fours and said, "You are in tent number 1, tent number 2, tent number 3, go find those tents and wait there." So we went down and found the tents without any trouble and a sergeant came down and said

09:00 "Righto this is where you're going to be sleeping tonight." And he pointed up over that way somewhere to line up for breakfast next morning. And he said the toilets are up there and he said there's four bunks in each of those tents with three blankets. There were no pillows but there were three blankets he said "Okay they're yours and you'll be signing for those in the morning.'

09:30 So we clambered into bed and he said "Lights out will be in half an hour" or whatever it was, I think it was lights out 10 or 10.30 sort of business and reveille will be at 6 or something next morning and break will be on at 7 and we will pick you up after that. That was fine we all clambered into bed and we were all whispering to one another about you know this and whether we'd done the right thing because you know the old thing is

10:00 you're marched into the place and all the old hands were yelling out "You'll be sorry." Anyway a couple of us wanted to go to the toilet and he pointed us where the toilet block was but there was also he pointed out to us, the sergeant that is, a desert lilly. Now if you don't know what a desert lilly is, is a hole in the

10:30 ground dug out for probably 4-5 feet deep filled up with rocks and then at 2 or 3 points around the side of the whole they put in downpipe and that was the desert lilly. So if you wanted to have a piddle you went down the drainpipe and that was it. But what we didn't bargain for was that the ground was strewn

11:00 with peach pips [seeds] or stones, because the cannery was just over the street on the other side. Little did I realise that you know some 40 years later I would be working at the cannery but anyway these pips were crushed up and they were – in bare feet because we were in such a hurry we couldn't stop to put our shoes on and they were mighty sharp I tell you. That was a very painful walk across to the desert lilly and back again. But anyway

11:30 we were all up for reveille anyway and we were down to the breakfast spot with our cup, our pannikin and enamel pannikin and our knife, fork and spoon and the meal was alright and then we were told to go back for tent inspection – stay at your tent. So they came along and then they showed us how to fold up the blankets you know had to be done a certain way

12:00 and all that sort of thing, so, we asked about pillows "What do you want pillows for?" you know put your boots unde your head or something like that was the answer. So we did all that and then we didn't do a whole lot the first morning. After lunch we were then started to be issued with our kit. We all had uniforms to fit and boots and socks, underwear and the

12:30 other paraphenalia that's required. And I was pretty lucky because I was pretty much a standard size, so I literally got practically all my kit the first day including an overcoat and all that sort of a thing. Some of the other blokes who were a different shape or very tall or very short or you know very fat or something like that, they didn't really have off the shelf uniforms to fit them and so they had be in civvies for a few more

13:00 days. We all got over two pairs of overalls and head gear and all that sort of stuff. Righto we went back to the tent and we were told to mark them all with our number and our names. My mother had foreseen this and she'd given me a bottle of marking ink with a proper pen, so I was a very popular fella that day after I finished mine all the other boys in the tent marked theirs as well,

13:30 so we were in reasonable shape by evening. And someone came down again and told us where the meal would be, lights out and reveille next morning and where we had to assemble. So that was fine, down we go and we have our breakfast and we assembled at this point and a sergeant, can't remember his name, an officer, he was Flying Officer Atkinson

14:00 and a corporal, Corporal Slade. Slade the slave driver we called him. And he, the sergeant and the corporal were our drill instructors our D.I.'s and the officer was in charge of that particular squad. He was one and he assured us that his door was always open and if we had any problems we could come and see him. A couple of us went along but he was never in

14:30 his office. Anyway old Slade he got to us. Boy did he bash us around that parade ground. The bull ring and we formed up in threes and we marched and we ran and we left turned and right turned and about

turned and carried on you know and it went solidly for a total of about six hours. We had a break about 40 minutes for a lunch break or something else

15:00 like that but back on it as well and a few of the fellows who had never ever worn boots and things like that, by the end of the day they were in a lot of trouble with blisters and things like that. Fortunately I was lucky I didn't have any difficulty there. And that lasted oh for… 7 or 8 days, we never left that bull ring and we got marching pretty well and again the officer -

15:30 Atkinson used to come out occasionally and he'd stand at a particular point and we'd march past him and eyes right him or eyes left him whatever the situation might be and then we would sort of turn around and we'd march in line abreast. You know there were three rows and that was easy enough but when you're line abreast with 15 or 20 fellas sort of business, it was much harder to keep in straight lines and Sladey

16:00 he kept at us sort of business, he cracked the whip all day and when he faltered, the sergeant came out and gave him a bit of a spell and he was worse actually. But anyway we survived all that and then to our surprise we got thrown a rifle and I literally mean thrown. So we were told how to care for it and how to take it to pieces and how to clean it etc and then back to the bull ring again with rifle drill. And

16:30 you know marching with arms aslope and you know change shoulders and all that sort of a thing and on guard, charge, high port and run through and high port and we'd turn about and do the same thing and stuck the bayonets in sandbags and all that sort of a thing. And it was all pretty exciting I suppose in some ways. And after we

17:00 had competed three weeks we then went on a week long bivouac so we marched out of the showgrounds down – the main street of Shepparton down to Windham Street and we turned down and all the people came out and clapped and cheered from the shops and they had a monument,

17:30 an Anzac monument in the centre of the road at Shepparton. A very, very graphic one because I saw it many many times afterwards, it was a fellow with a rifle in his arm bending down trying to pick up a mate sort of business, so we eyes righted and saluted that as we went out and Shepparton was famous for its pipe band. One of the first questions that was first asked of us was can you play the bagpipes and one

18:00 bloke in our gang could and before he knew where he was he was out of our squad and he was transferred permanently to Shepparton. He spent the rest of the war, to my knowledge, in the pipe band there but it was very famous. The CO [Commanding Officer] was a Scotsman, McKeller I think his name might've been but anyway out to the bivouac sleeping on the ground, in a tent but sleeping on the ground

18:30 and there we did rifle range, throwing live grenades and Bren Gun drill. We enjoyed our Bren gun drill it was quite good. It was more of a friendly sort of situation, there wasn't the spit and the

19:00 polish and the bullshit that went on in the bull ring sort of business. We had a football and we kicked it around and we were right on the bank of the Goulburn River and somebody kicked the football into the river and it had been raining and the river wasn't in flood but it was flowing pretty freely. And I was the mug who stripped off and swam out and got the football and you know

19:30 got it back onto the shore and ran back to where my clothes were, to be met by Corporal Slade. He said "That was a stupid bloody thing to do wasn't it?" I said "Yes Corp but we got our football" he said, "That's alright son," he said "you go back up to the cookhouse and get warm and get yourself dry by the cookhouse fire and come out and join us when you're ready." So he must've been human after all.

20:00 And we then marched back in again, we were pretty slick at marching by this stage and we eyes righted again at the monument. The pipe band used to come and meet us - it didn't come right out to the bivouac camp but it used to meet us on the way in sort of business, so oh it must've been nearly 30 fellows I reckon, drums and pipes in this thing and they could make a fair noise. It was great marching, we had

20:30 rifles so anyway we swung along and saluted the monument and swung up Windum Street and up High Street back up to the camp and that night I was the only one who had a decent wash for the week that were out there because of my swim in the river. Everybody else made for the showers when we got back to the showgrounds, we were left to our own devices largely, so most fellows went and had a shower obviously

21:00 and went and washed their clothes and we had then all put in, I don't know, 5 bob or something it might've been and we went out to a dinner, at the Terminus Hotel. But old Sladey made sure that he, the sergeant and Flying Officer Atkinson went along at our expense. So I don't know, we put in sixpence extra, it was probably only 5 shillings or something, anyway we had a great old night.

21:30 And next morning we were paraded again after breakfast and then the postings were read out there and then people you know scattered here there and everywhere over the place. About 6 of us were posted to Bairnsdale. Bairnsdale was a general reconnaissance school, first time we saw real aeroplanes.

22:00 But however we had to get there we had to come back through Melbourne and then we had several

hours, three or four hours before we got the train to Bairnsdale. So I took the tram out and went and saw my mother and got back in and off we went to Bairnsdale. Changed trains I think it was at Sale in those days and on out to Bairnsdale and shown to our tents and told where to

22:30 parade next morning, which we did. And we were there really only just to get us out of the way, because there was a log jam in the technical training part and it wasn't sure where we would finish up, where there would be enough holes for us but I cut lawns and I did a few odd jobs and swept a few hangars but here was no real pressure on us sort of business.

23:00 And then the fellow in the bed next to me he got meningitis so we finished up the last 3 or 4 or 5 days in isolation in the hospital and we were on the old M and B [May and Baker, precursor to penicillin] tablets. They were things about the size of a 10 cent piece sort of business but they were as a precaution against catching this meningitis. And eventually

23:30 we got out posting and mine was to Geelong and I thought oh this is beaut, I know Geelong. So back to Melbourne a few hours to spare, back out and saw Mum again and down to Geelong and we got there in the afternoon, late afternoon and we were then housed in Ashby Hall. There's a catholic church there, it's quite close to the railway station

24:00 and the Esplanade and we were in this big hall sleeping on the floor with straw palliasses, donkeys' breakfasts, and laid them out and it wasn't too bad. There were showers down the other end and plenty of hot water and we then had to march around to the mess, which was best part of a mile away I suppose. So we'd swing out down there in our threes and

24:30 sometimes there was a drum just beating you know you'd keep in step job sort of business, sometimes not and then we still had a bit of time to fill in before we could get into the Technical College. And I was allocated to a corporal WAAAF [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] to make the beds in the officer's quarters. Oh that was quite interesting.

25:00 They were in a hotel, one of the old hotels of Geelong and they had quite palatial quarters as a matter of fact but that didn't last long and then we got told we would be starting at the Technical College. The Gordon Institute of Technology as it's called now. And we marched down there and we were then introduced to the Filing Course. We were given files

25:30 and we were given just blocks of metal, lumps of metal and we had to file them into certain shapes, to a certain thickness. It was bloody monotonous I tell you, you know have the thing over a bench sort of business. And we tried all sorts of tricks to make it easier sort of business and one bloke took all our blocks down to a machine shop he knew of. He got put on one of the plane,

26:00 flattener sort of business but the old instructor he was aware of that and he said "These have been foreigners [foreign orders-outside job]" he was an old Scotsmen. "These have been taken away" he said and he threw them all out, as a matter of fact we had to start all over again. We had to make 10 models and sorry 12 models, 10 which were of filing and 3 and 2 were bending. You had to bend sheet metal into

26:30 shapes and sizes sort of business and it was absolutely stone mad boring. And we did it in a day and afternoon shift. The only advantage of that was when you were on afternoon shift you didn't have to march around for your breakfast which was available to us up until about 10 o'clock in the morning. But one time in the

27:00 afternoon we came back for lunch at Brighton Hitchcock, the big store there we used to march past there and have lunch and then march back again. We usually in charge of a sergeant or corporal and this particular occasion it was a sergeant and he stopped to talk to some girls on the way back to the thing sort of business and to get from the mess to the technical college we had

27:30 to go under the railway line. It was in three spans, there were two central piers in this sort of a situation so that the three blokes in the leading files they said, "Well" you know, so one bloke headed way out to the left and went through the left hand, the middle rank went through the middle span and the third rank I can't remember which one it was, went through the right hand one and came together on the other side sort of.

28:00 What we didn't know was that the CO had decided he'd better come and have a bit of a look at all this and he was parked in his car on the other side of the bridge. We didn't get into trouble but that poor sergeant he got pilloried – he had many privileges taken off him because you know in that time you could get married and if you could find somewhere to live you could have your wife you know and he'd just got sleeping out arrangement sort of

28:30 business sort of approved taken off him and boy was he savage about it too, I tell you. The following Sunday, we had every second Sunday off but the next Sunday he was in charge as we did drill and marching, so we'd been carrying these gas masks ever since we'd been up at Shepparton. They'd put us in up there, they put us in a tear

29:00 gas place and gave us what the effect of tear gas would be like on our eyes and things like that. So he said "Gas masks will be carried." So we all line up outside Asbey Hall with our gas masks sort of business and it was a stinking hot day and we get going and we turn into the main street up and down,

can't remember its name,

29:30 and he halted us and he said "Gas masks on." So we thought that'll be alright it won't last for very long and then we walked right from the centre of the town, right up what's now the old Hamilton Highway, right up to Manifold Heights. We turned and we came right back to the centre of the town, down Noble Street and you know

30:00 all in gas masks and all of us were pretty much distressed with it, you know. I know it would've been different if it was gas sort of business but anyway we devised all sorts of things, fellows had their match boxes under the [chin] strap here sort of business, so they could get a bit of air and other fellows were pulling it aside so they could breath properly every now and then. Anyway again

30:30 he was caught by somebody, I don't know who caught him and again he was reprimanded for overdoing the gas mask drill but he never ever forgave us but fortunately we got another sergeant, Ron McMinn, whom I met up with years later and he was a different kettle of fish altogether, we had no trouble getting along with him. And again postings came out, so it was either going up to Ultimo at Sydney

31:00 which was an engineering school or Ascot Vale and of course I was hoping to travel sort of business so I was hoping I would get Ultimo but that was only really for instrument makers and electricians. The armourers went somewhere else I think, they went to a place in Newcastle I think but the fitters and the riggers we all went to Ascot Vale. So

31:30 duly we presented ourselves at Ascot Vale and we were given the drill there, housed in the old grandstands, on double decker bunks, two levels. You didn't have to clamber up too much because the stepping on the topside it wasn't all that difficult to get into the top bunk and I took a top bunk. And

32:00 anyway there we were our on the arena of the Showground with several aircraft including an old Wirraway a couple of Gypsy Moths, a Fairy Battle and a Vultee Vengeance Dive Bomber. Huge, monstrous looking beast of a thing it was. So anyway we lined up in our training course,

32:30 we were in the pig pens and we went through the whole rigmarole of training to be a flight rigger. The very first thing we did was to have lectures on the theory of flight and why and how an aircraft flies, which was interesting very interesting. And then we started to do the bits of pieces of running the fabric over the control surfaces and [placing]

33:00 them into position and riveting – riveting played a very big part in that aircraft of those times. Splicing ropes, annealing metal, so on, the sort of things that are necessary. Tension on cables because all that was pretty important and whilst I was

33:30 there, the first week in January 1944, an aircraft in the air force the Hawker Demon which was a front line aircraft at one stage and then became a training aircraft but they were very snazzy bi-planes. There's one down at Point Cooke and you could imagine they had a quite

34:00 healthy snarl out of their exhaust when they were going and they were a very very manoeuvrable aircraft and they were based at Point Cooke. Anyway they were retired from the service you know they'd been for 15-20 years or something and so about 6 or 8 of these Hawker Demons took off and they shot up Melbourne. We've seen the Roulettes [RAAF aerobatic team] going over in recent times - what those fellows did in the Hawker Demons,

34:30 the Roulettes would've been proud of them as a matter of fact. They screamed down the streets and turned loops and rolls you name it sort of business, they did the whole lot and they really did over the Showgrounds where you know where we were, sort of business. Quite exciting actually, a bit of trouble about it I understand because of the low level flying but who cares. So we farewelled the Hawker Demon and then on the

35:00 14th January, a Friday, was stinking hot, we were in the pig pens and the news came through of the big fires in the western district and on the western plains. And I was duty over the weekend and I couldn't really get home to see what was going on, although I did get permission to sneak home from the corporal of the guard or

35:30 something and saw my parents there and I said "What news is there?" and Dad said "The farm has been totally burnt out. The house has gone, most of the sheds. The only thing that's standing that I've been given to understand is the windmill, the men's hut (as it was called) and the dairy," which was built of cement

36:00 sheet. And he said "Can you get any time off?" and I said "I don't know but I'll try." So next morning, the Monday morning I went in and asked to be paraded to the officer in charge of our part of the training, I think he was a flight lieutenant, anyway I went in and

36:30 told him what the story was and he said "Training's too important" he said "You can't get time off there." And I told him that my father was not capable of doing it because he was – you know he had this injured leg and as I walked out I said to the warrant office who'd taken me in, I said "Look Sir," we called warrant officers Sir,

37:00 "I'm going to shoot through." I said "I'm going to go down and see what I can do with the farm, see

what the situation is." "Oh" he said "you'll shoot through will you?" I said "Yes." He said well you'd better hold on, so he went back himself to the officer and he must've spun a good story anyway loand behold I get four days off. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. So I got the train to

37:30 Geelong and caught the service car from Geelong it went out to Mortlake and that dropped me up at Cressy and we'd driven through fire damaged, fire devastated country from just west of Inverlea right – all the way through. Cressy had been saved but it had been surrounded. Some friends of ours people by the name of Mowett they lived on the outskirts of Cressy and

38:00 Mr Mowett saw the fire coming, he was on his own, his daughter was working in the Post Office I think it was in Shepparton – in Cressy and he just abandoned the property. It was just a wall of flame coming at quite high speed towards him and he drove into Cressy and sort of waited until the fire had you know

38:30 got past the town. There was a river there that had a bit of an effect on it and somebody said to him "You'd better get out to your house Ross, it hasn't been burnt." So he just abandoned it sort of business and he rushed back out and there was a wooden packing case and it had caught fire and it was right up against the house and he was just in time to kick it away to stop the house from being

39:00 burnt down but they lost all their sheds, everything else was gone. So I met up with people, Mr and Mrs White, who were our also close neighbours and they had their car. They'd lost everything and they'd been sleeping on the ground outside the ruins of their house for the previous two or three days. And they were at the Red Cross, which had a you know come and get some clothing sort of business, cast offs from other people and things like that and I met Mr and Mrs

39:30 White there and they were very embarrassed to see me. Pleased to see me but embarrassed that I would see them in these difficult circumstances. Anyway, I wasn't totally aware of it at the time but I said "When are you going back Mr White?" "Oh" he said, "practically straight away" and I said "Could I get a ride out with you?" and he said "Certainly". So anyway we drove out, totally burnt country all the way, all the way through, all the properties had gone. Houses, some houses survived

40:00 you know all that sort of thing. Once a family saw the fire coming and took all their furniture out of the house and put it on the road. Fire came along burnt their furniture and left their house and they couldn't get any insurance for it because it was insured in the house. But they're the sorts of things that happen in fires. And so I got out there and they dropped me off at our place and you know that's a scene I'll never ever forget, to see the old house

40:30 die down.

That's a sad story but unfortunately we have to stop because we've run out of tape.

Tape 5

00:32 **So if you'd just continue the story about the fires.**

Well there was nothing really I could do you know, I was literally in tears when I saw all this devastation, checked that the hut was clean, cause I knew we'd have to be going back to do some fencing we'd left on the property, when it would've been

01:00 leased. We arranged with the fellow who took it over, that we would have one room in the house that we could store a lot of our stuff in you know and we lost heaps of personal stuff and things like that and the fellow had saved his sheep. He'd seen the fire coming and he'd got them down and put them on the bank of a big dam which was quite clear near the house. We left the old WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s on the place, we used to have 10 or 12 WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s sort of business and

01:30 one of those survived it flew out and landed on the pipe going into the dam sort of business. It survived, all the others had gone and we also left my pony and an old draught horse. My pony Jimmy, he panicked when the fire came along, according to the people who saw what happened and galloped ahead of the fire but the fire went too quickly for him and he was caught in a plantation

02:00 oh about a mile and a half away from home and he burnt to death in the fire. And I saw him when the Whites drove me out, I saw the body in the trees. But the other horse was an old draught horse, old Minta, M.I.N.T.A. She was named after an old girlfriend of Dad's he'd met in England.

02:30 And Minta was very old and she saw the fire coming and instead of galloping away – running away from it, she turned and ran towards it and it was funny how the fire came along and then left a strip a hundred yards long, ten yards wide and didn't burn that little section and there were all these strips all across the plains and Minta found one of those and old Minta kept on nibbling away at the grass

03:00 either side. She had plenty of water, there was no problem there. So anyway I went and caught her, she was a very faithful old horse and I led her by the mane and I went down to our next door Uncle Bob Griffin and I said, "Would you look after the horse for me please – for us." "Yes" he said. I said "Is there anything I can do for you?" He said "How long have you got?" I said "I'm on leave until

03:30 Friday and I've got the weekend." "Oh good" he said "I'm shifting my sheep." He had about 600-800 sheep I suppose and all but about 15 acres of his property had been burnt he was right on the north, northern side, northern end – no southern end of the fire, south western end of the fire and we were in it by about 2 miles approximately. He said "Yes,

04:00 I'm leaving before dawn tomorrow morning" taking the sheep down to his brother at Birregurra. He said "Can you give me a hand." And I said "Certainly", cause there was nothing I could do back at the property and so off we got up, we left very very early next morning and we drove these sheep for 3 days across this blackened country. We had to cross a river, the Wodiallic [?] River and we went in via Cressy over the river

04:30 there and then after that we got them clear of the township of Cressy and there was literally nothing, not a fence to stop us or anything, just going straight across this burnt country. And providing we kept Mount Ess on the left hand side and some other mountain I can't remember it now, on the right hand side, if we kept between there we were right. And we had a bit of food and we just slept in the car

05:00 and you know kept the sheep moving all day. It was stinking hot and these whirly whirlies [willy-willy/duststorm] were coming across the plains, black columns of the cinders being thousands of feet into the air. There was one about 200 yards away from us but there was nothing ever came directly on us. And on the the third day, the sheep

05:30 hadn't eaten but no problem with water because there were all these dams and they were all over the place and we could water them without any trouble but they were getting a bit peckish by this time and the Friday was one of those stinking hot, windless days on the plains. I don't know what the temperature would be but it would've been well over a 100, Fahrenheit that is, and the sheep knocked up and so did the dogs.

06:00 And when the sheep knock up in those sort of circumstances all they'll do is go round and round in circles. They won't go forward they'll just go round and round in circles. So after about an hour we were able to get them down to a dam where they got a drink and we still couldn't start them off. And Uncle Bob had 6 or 8 very valuable Corriedale rams and one of these blokes had knocked up the previous day and we'd

06:30 bundled him into the back seat of the car. Uncle Bob and I and hauled him out and said "It's time you earned your keep" sort of business. And we had cream cans full for our own drinking water so we poured the water in the top of the thing and we gave it to the ram and he drank it and

07:00 Uncle Bob sort of straddled him and got him across on to a track leading down on to a plantation probably nearly a mile away. Anyway he rode him out there and I was able to get a few sheep to come in behind him and the old ram he sort of almost nodded his head as though he knew what he had to do. And he just started waddling across the plains on this sheep track heading for this plantation.

07:30 And I can still that old bloke going across there, his old scrotum was flopping from one side to the other as he walked his way down and he got down in the shade of the trees that had been burnt but they weren't totally destroyed and by this stage the sheep were literally stringing out one behind the other right back to the dam where we'd been right across this plantation. Anyway after another hour or so we had them all down there and into the shade.

08:00 And Uncle Bob said "Well I'll go on ahead and see if I can find my brother" cause we were getting close to where we had to be to sort of business and off he went and I could see the car coming back, well two cars coming back, the other one was his brother with fresh dogs and just as they were coming along a beautiful south west change, cool change,

08:30 came in and that livened up the sheep and by the time the cars got there, I had them moving off. You know just shoo them out sort of business and we had about 2 miles to go until we got to grass, to unburnt country and that was it. So Uncle Bob and his brother carried on and I drove his car back home sort of business and next day Aunt Ann, Uncle Bob's wife took me up to

09:00 where I caught the service car and went back to Melbourne.

What were you emotions during this fire and all that happened?

Well during the fire it was just what's happening, what's happening you know, communication was very very poor and I think it was Mr McLeod eventually who got the message through to dad as to what the situation was. The Worths also they had some info – they had relatives back in Foxhound but you know

09:30 it was what Dad had striven for you know, what I suppose was reasonably assumed I was going to inherit sort of business and you know that sort of business was all there. But the devastation was when I got there and saw nothing you know, there was just piles of burnt out galvanised iron and because all the sheds had a lot of wood in them and all that sort of thing so it must've been quite a sight. And we had

10:00 Cyprus trees around the house and the heat burst them into flames you know and the main fire was 200 or 300 hundred yards away.

So you went back to base?

Yes, I went back, finished the course and then applied for more leave to go back and help fence the place, because all the boundary fences were down and the bloke, he had his sheep out grazing them on the roads around

10:30 Mortlake and Terang and you know all those places in quite easy distance. But where there was grass and in those circumstances they could always get their sheep watered. And 3 of us went, Dad, friend Ken Far and myself and we started fencing the property. We did the easy bits first and then I was nominated

11:00 to do the chopping down the trees because we had quite a good plantation with good sized solid sugar gums. So I dropped these trees and then cut them into 6 foot lengths and split them into post size – dad and Ken did the posthole digging and stringing the wire while I chopped and I did that for 10 days and my hands were absolutely you know ruined

11:30 with swinging the axe and things like that. I felt like a few times breaking the axe handle but I knew I'd better not. But anyway we survived all that and I came back to Melbourne late I think that it would've been the 12th – somewhere early in March anyway. And I was exhausted and I was supposed to report in on the Saturday morning and I told my mother that I didn't have to report till the Sunday night

12:00 so I went AWL [Absent Without Leave]. And again I was a bit unlucky because whilst I was away, my posting came through to be cleared from Ascot Vale on the Saturday morning and of course when you had to do that, you had to report to the sergeant who had to control you sort of business. I

12:30 upset the sergeant's weekend because he stayed back waiting for me to turn up and I didn't turn up until the Sunday evening but I knew in most cases with this sort of AWL, that if you were less than two days all you got was a dressing down and confined to barracks for a length of time. Anyway I was away for 1 day 23 hours

13:00 and 15 minutes and I fronted up on the Sunday and I was handed over to the SP, Service Police and I wasn't locked up but I was told to report to them first thing next morning after breakfast. I did that, paraded before the very first officer I went to who first knocked me back on getting this leave sort of business. So the charge was read out and he said "What's your explanation?" and I hardly said

13:30 anything and I just showed him my hands and said that I'd had extra, extra leave and I was totally exhausted and my hands were in such a condition that I couldn't do anything anyway. And he looked at them and he said "Mm, mm, mm, will you take my punishment?" and I said "Yes" he said "6 days CB [Confinement to Barracks]" so I about turned and got out muttering a bit under my breath no doubt but I got hold of the

14:00 clearance papers and I went round Ascot Vale getting the clearance. You had to go to the doctor and dentist and all the different stores where you might've got things and they signed out there was nothing outstanding. And by about 3 o'clock that afternoon I reported to the RTO [Railway Transport Officer] at the Spencer Street Railway Station and he put me on the Overland leaving at 7 o'clock that night. I had a quick look at the watch and tore back out to Coburg and

14:30 saw my mother for a few minutes and came back again and headed off for South Australia.

Just before we move on did a lot of people go AWOL [Absent Without Official Leave]?

Oh at times, I think I was the only one in this particular incidence, yeah but we used to often have one bloke away adrift for a couple of days or one day or something else like that. The AWOL is only a

15:00 recent innovation by the way, it was AWL in our case the Yanks put the "O" into it. But it wasn't big sort of business. I always remember when I was doing my rookies [recruit training] at Shepparton there was a bloke who didn't click with the air force and he went AWL and you know he was a real nuisance and they drilled him with sandbags. They put a 56 pound sandbag on his

15:30 bag and I thought I'm never bloody well going to do that -that looks too tough for me. But AWL I don't think was a major problem at least not in the air force anyway.

And with the fire was that your war during that time?

I suppose in some way it was yes, yes. We were as being farmers my father and I were always very conscious of the need for you know, what the farm could produce

16:00 sort of business and we thought keeping it going with the full intention at that the time of leasing, was to claim it back. I think the lease was for 6 or 12 months notice I think by either party, to take the property over again. Yes I think we were concerned about our livelihood and future too. Yeah, yeah you could say it was part of my war. But getting to Adelaide was good, never been to Adelaide

16:30 before, walked around till we got the train out to Mallala which was 37 miles. I'm staying in miles rather than kilometres and at the camp and the station was about nearly 2 miles out of the town, dead straight road up there. Got in there, first thing you again after your report in, is you go to the

17:00 barrack store and you get your palliasse and you fill it with straw because you had to sleep on

something and we very affectionately called them donkeys' breakfasts but the idea was to stuff them pretty full, because they were always a bit uncomfortable for a start. Once the straw broke down you then had a nice thick mass of short straws in the thing and you could get yourself very comfortable on a palliasse. And I was

17:30 allocated to the maintenance side and first of all I started off in one of the workshops mainly sweeping the damn thing out and then I was allocated to a hangar which did the 40 hour and 80 inspections. And whilst all this was on I was getting a bit concerned about this 6 day CB [confined to barracks] because you know there was a weekend in

18:00 Adelaide coming up and I was pretty keen to go and sample Adelaide. So there was a girl, a WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] in the Orderly Room the Engineer Orderly Room and I said "Can I talk to you in confidence?" and she said "Oh I suppose." I said "There hasn't been a signal come about me being confined to barracks has there?" She said "I don't know but I'll find out for you."

18:30 So anyway she came back a couple of hours later and she said yes the signal had arrived that morning as a matter of fact but she said "I put it right to the bottom of the pile and I think you'll be alright to go to Adelaide this weekend." So that's exactly what happened. See the signal surfaced some 6 or 8 weeks later as a matter of fact, by the time it worked its way through. No doubt she might've put it down the bottom of the pile a couple more times. Nice girl, her name was

19:00 Jean Brandenburg. And anyway eventually it surfaced sort of business and I was paraded before the WOD, Warrant Officer Discipline of the whole station. Alfie Spooner, he was an Englishman and he was a World War I Old Contemptible who had fought at Mons. And anyway armed with all this information I'm paraded into him and

19:30 "Who are you?" "Ford, AC1 Ford Sir" "What are you here for?" "I believe a signal has arrived about me," and I said "Before we get on with that Sir it's a real honour to be with an Old Contemptible." And he said "What do you know about the Old Contemptibles?" and I said "My dad was a World War I soldier and he told me about the Old Contemptibles."

20:00 And he said "Now did he?" he said "Oh well let's have a chat son." So we talked about the Old Contemptibles and that sort of thing. And he said "Now what are you here for?" I said "Before I left Ascot Vale I was AWL" and I told him the reason why I had been AWL. "Oh" he said "I think you've done your penance boy" he said "off, you won't hear any more about it." I never actually did the confinement

20:30 to barracks, which I always thought was a bit of a win on my part.

Was the weekend in Adelaide worth it?

Oh yes, oh weekends in Adelaide were marvellous. Malalar was marvellous – we were the first organisation in Australia to work a 9 day fortnight. We used to be able to ring up or write a letter to the Servicemen's Information Office on the concourse at Adelaide Railway Station

21:00 and you'd say I'm coming down to Adelaide arriving at such and such a time and would it be possible to arrange accommodation. So you'd go down on the train and front up to the information centre, "Ford" "Oh yes, yes, here you are you're billeted with the Simpsons. Now this is their address. You get there by catching this bus or this train or this

21:30 tram" or whatever it was, "Now they won't be home till about 5.30 but I suggest you arrive about 6 and they want you to bring 2 pounds of bananas. That was a sort of a standard – that was you pay for the weekend sort of business so you duly presented yourself at this house at roughly about the time, with the bananas under your arm and I had some wonderful weekends with people over there just doing that. Some interesting

22:00 ones, some very very good.

What would you get up to in Adelaide?

Adelaide, oh going to the football, going to the pictures, to the beach you know all that sort of thing. Yeah that was the typical things teenagers were doing in those days.

Was drinking part of the culture then?

I didn't have a drink until my 19th birthday. You know in the early part of

22:30 my arrival in Malalar I wasn't 19. Another bloke and I, Tommy Day, he said, "I'll take you down for a breakfast meal – for a birthday meal for you." So we did that and we cleaned up three bottles of beer between the two of us and I was not very much in control of myself by the time we got back to the camp. I've always

23:00 enjoyed a drink ever since, oh occasionally in those days we got a bit milo but generally speaking it was pretty moderate. Like the name – one more thing about old Alfie Spooner, he couldn't say his "R's" and we used to be carted down from the station to the railway station you see and we had a big truck and a big

23:30 trailer which we were capable of carrying an aircraft you see, an old Avro Anson. So we'd line up in 3's oh a huge line, it'd be a hundred yards long, you know probably 3, 4 6 hundred men and girls in this queue and he'd get to the end like that sort of business and he'd go 1, 2, 3, 4 right up to 12 and he'd say "On the twuck" and off we'd go

24:00 and scramble up on the truck and he'd go 1, 2, 3, 12 again on the "twailer" and off we'd go down to the railway station. And the thing would turn around and bring the next 36 down. A lot of used to just work down anyway because we had plenty of time. But oh the other good things about Malalar was the football. They had a football team and I was always pretty keen to play football and

24:30 so I put my name down and I attended a few training sessions and got selected you know to play 2, 3 thousand men on the station, when I was there. It was pretty heavy going when I first got there, a lot of flying going on. Service Flying Training, Twin Aircraft Avro Ansons and Oxfords. But anyway each of us had

25:00 our individual trainer and I'd always been pretty muscle bound as a kid and things like that but I had a beaut trainer masseur and he loosened me up and softened me up sort of business and I was in really tip top shape and I play some really good football with Malalar. And the football in Adelaide at the time, there used to be 8 teams in Adelaide and they combined them to make 4 who was it,

25:30 North and Norwood, South Adelaide and Sturt, Glenelg and West Adelaide and Torrens and Port Adelaide they were the combinations. And then there was the fellows who were just on the fringe of selection and things like that and they called them the League Reserves and Malalar, the navy, the University and one army camp used to play the League Reserves as often as the curtain raisers before the main game you see.

26:00 We were playing the League Reserves one time on the Adelaide Oval and I used to play in the back pocket, looking after the resting rover in those days. Anyway the ball came down and we had a big sergeant, Sergeant Law I think his name was, and he had arms and legs like an octopus sort of business and he dragged the other people down without giving away a free kick and I was the only one

26:30 standing and he said "Go Mac go." I picked up the ball and I looked around to pass it on and there wasn't a soul in sight you know this big Adelaider I can remember running down the centre of the ground bouncing the ball and I did it at least 6 times it could've been more but at least 6 times and I just let go and our full forward marked the ball in the goal square. And the bell rang

27:00 and he kicked it through and we won by a point. Always loved that game but we played the navy and the team we could never beat was the University. They were all you know our age and there was a lot of them sort of business and they were pretty tough.

Was there a great mateship between the troops?

What on the station?

Yeah.

Oh yes good. Yes the morale at Malalar was very very

27:30 strong and then you were sort of allocated to a crew and I was in the hangar doing the 40 and 80 repairs and there was about 5 of us on in each crew. There were two engineers, two engine men, two riggers and the other one would be an electrician or an instrument man or something else like that but he would probably be wandering around – we had a corporal in charge of us. And the

28:00 co-operation and help between that group was very very good. You were delegated this week to wash the overalls sort of business and I would do it next week. You know it was pretty dirty work sort of business, we used to dunk them in aviation fuel to get the grease out of them sort of business and boil them up sort of business but that was very very good cover up for one another, sort of a thing. No, no difficulties and whilst I didn't maintain contact

28:30 with a lot of them, there was one fellow who worked with me. He was a 2A - there was a flight rigger and then you did another course which made you a 2A which was an advanced rigging course. He was a 2A and I was a flight rigger and he only died the year before last. Yeah I'd kept in touch with him all that time sort of business. And no, good mateship there no problems.

Why do you think that

29:00 **formed?**

Oh, well I think all being flung together in a big hut with beds all down to one side and down the other side and hang you clothes in the middle, lining up for meals and all that sort of a thing and hearing the woes of a mate and you know hearing the good times. I think it's just one of those things that men and women get together and sort

29:30 of build up that friendship, that mateship. There was a fair number of WAAAF's on the Station. Couldn't remember how many but they were in a compound, we you know, they were in for a dig [joke] to go in there, but they were allowed – we had a lot of entertainment on the place too. Films, pictures, concerts,

dances you name it and the girls were allowed to wear civvies and evening frocks. It

30:00 was quite beaut as a matter of fact, some of them turned up in their uniforms as well but you know it was nice to see the girls in a civilian sort of an atmosphere.

Why were they allowed to do that?

Well it was just one of those things I think. They weren't allowed to wear them off the thing but the flight officer in charge of them was pretty much "with-it" sort of lady, sort of business. I never ever met her but that was the thing

30:30 and she used to put her head in, she would always be accompanied by the orderly officer when a dance was on sort of business and no doubt she made a tour to make sure no shenanigans [mischief] were going on around in the dark parts of the hall, or something like that. But the padres were all pretty active sort of business and church service was initially compulsory and then became voluntary while I was there.

31:00 But no, it was good, we used to go to outside dances as well, yeah.

Did you interact with the WAAAF's yourself?

Well they were working in some cases alongside us. We only had two in our hangar. One was in the Orderly room part and one was a rigger but she wasn't in our group, she was with another one. Oh interact, yes it was quite good,

31:30 I think in the main they were very much respected. As far as I was concerned I respected them very much. Oh they were good girls. I had one, Jean Brandenburg, I remained on good talking terms with her and I got also very friendly with another girl who was in the band. We had a very good band at Malalar too. It wasn't a pipe band, it was

32:00 wind and drums and she used to belt hell out of this side drum and I can still see her going, she was a very tall girl and she'd go on to this drum and give it hell as a matter of fact. But one of the other good things about Malalar was we had CO's parade every Tuesday morning and we'd be lined up in our hangars sort of business and the roll'd be called. Our old flight sergeant his nickname was mad Mick,

32:30 Mile Malalar's Main Man Mauler. He was a devastating old character. And he used to call the roll and then they'd all yell out from the front you know reports, "Hangar 204 all present or 1 AWL or 1 on sick" or something else like that and then came inspection.

33:00 And the order used to be "Front rank, one step forward, rear rank one step backwards, march." So the two ranks would go out like that sort of business and the orderly officer used to come along, there was a flight sergeant in front of him, oh the bullshit was knee deep. So we came along then – we had this officer, I'd better not mention his name in case he's still alive

33:30 but we'd call him "haircut", because he'd come along and walk down the front of us you know, "Get a shave" or something of else like that, you know, "Uniform, report to me afterwards" you know "Unclean uniform" then he'd come up the back and he'd dig you in the ribs like that "Get a haircut, get a hair cut" you know he'd go down the ranks telling all the blokes to get haircuts you know. So we got a bit jack of this, we didn't mind being told

34:00 to get a hair cut but getting a dig in the ribs we didn't think was quite right ,so again this girl, this Jean Brandenburg, she let us be known that this officer's wife was coming over. He'd got somewhere to live in Malalar or one of the farms around by and she was coming over and they were going to spend the weekend in Adelaide and then come up and he had this billet somewhere

34:30 out there. So, we thought righto, so about 6 or 8 of us we met the train, he didn't see us, but we met the train and you know we had an eye on him and this very very charming girl came off the train and he was hugged and kissed in the appropriate manner sort of business and she had two enormous suitcases and a hat box. So she carried the hat box and he picked up the things and one of us were just

35:00 outside the gate as he came along up went the salute, down went the suitcases, we turned to salute off we went. Pick up the suitcases and another bloke was another 15 yards further up there and we did that bugger up from Adelaide Railway Station right up King William Street. We'd salute him and let him get past and we'd cross the road and run up the other side, get in position up there and anyway the lady sort of

35:30 when it was all going on, she'd take a step backwards sort of business, he'd pick up the suitcases and no doubt he was muttering to her all the time and eventually she spotted what we were doing you see. So she crossed over the road this time and caught up with a couple of us who were getting in position for next time and she said "What's going on?" "Well" we said "we quite like your husband but we told her the story about getting the dig in the ribs and you know he was a pilot,

36:00 I think he might've been decorated actually I'm not sure of that, anyway. "Oh" she said "righto, what's to say you knock it off and we're going to be staying at such a such hotel further up near Victoria Square somewhere." She said "Let us get there, have 10 or 15 minutes and then meet me down in the bar?" So we said "Righto" and we left him in peace and he staggered up with his two suitcases and we

met her in the bar and she

36:30 bought us two rounds of drinks each as a matter of fact, so all honour was saved in all ways. Next parade we got the haircut but we didn't get the dig in the ribs, I enjoyed that.

How much bullshit was there in the…

Oh the CO's parade was quite a thing you see, 2,000 men on parade it's a pretty big parade and the aircrew were there, they had to parade

37:00 as well and all that sort of a deal. That was one of the things that separated the aircrew from the ground crew. To look at us, we were practically in the same uniforms except their little forage caps had a little white flair in it and ours were plain. But we used to tell the girls that the fellas with the white flairs, they were the married men and it worked for a while but you know everybody woke up to it

37:30 after a while. But it was good while it lasted but no it was a really big parade you know the parade ground would've been 3 or 4 acres I reckon and 50 yards 200 yards you know big dimensions with a great big flagpole out the front. And when the parade was all assembled, the CO would come out with all the gold

38:00 braid. We had a wing commander once and group captain another time as the CO and then he would come out or he would follow the Adjutant out and the CO was under the flagpole, the Adjutant was 4 or 5 paces in front of him and Alfie Spooner the WOD was 4 or 5 spaces in front of him. You know Alfie'd get all the reports from all the squads and he'd give an about turn and

38:30 salute the adjutant who was a two bob officer, a voluntary officer, he got two shillings a day for expenses but he didn't get any pay. Horner was his name, Johnny Horner and he was a brilliant pianist. And he was actually the pianist for the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and when he put a concert on down in the hall, we all got there. But Alfie'd would give him the you know the report and then

39:00 Johnny would swing around and give a salute to the CO and he heard the thing from Alfie Spooner but that was how it went. The old chain of command all the way through and then the band'd strike up and we would march out but we would march out line abreast. It was quite impressive when you had a good look at it and then as we left the parade ground, we then marched straight down to our hangars or to our places of work.

Did you think all this was necessary

39:30 **at this time?**

Oh… I used to quite enjoy it as a matter of fact oh yes, yeah, it was away from the spanners and the screwdrivers and pliers and all that sort of a thing. No, I didn't mind parade. They had those victory marches too at the time and war bond marches and we'd be taken into Adelaide, a whole train load sort of a business and we'd line up down on the Barrack Square opposite the Adelaide Cricket Ground

40:00 and we'd march up King William Street and people would clap and cheer and one time we were halfway between two bands and we couldn't get our step. I can remember changing step going up King William street about 20 times as a matter of fact you know. Cause we'd hear one band and they weren't in synchronisation but that got so bad as a matter of fact and we came round a corner and old Mad Mick said "I've had this," he said "Here's the leave passes," he said

40:30 "next corner keep walking straight ahead" he said. So the crowd broke up and that was the end of the march as far as we were concerned.

Just got to stop there and change a tape.

Tape 6

00:37 Right well after a best part of year in Malalar I got posted to 99 Squadron. It was not known what sort of a squadron it was what aircraft or anything else like that but we got our clearances. My friend Phil Virgin from Border Town and I were the only two who were posted from Malalar and

01:00 we got our clearances and off we went. Got on the Overland, Phil got off at Border Town to see his people and spend a couple of days there. I came on to Melbourne, had a couple of days in Melbourne. We met up again and went through to Sydney where we got our tropical kit. Given a sugar bag and told to send our blues home to the nearest railway station, freight was paid by the air force. And we

01:30 looked at this new gear with this webbing and all that sort of a stuff. It looked getting a bit more serious our participation in war by this stage and we reported into the RTO [Rail Transport Officer] at Sydney Railway Station and we got booked on to the train. It was a fairly long train but there weren't very many people and the idea if you could was to sort of get hold of a

02:00 compartment and keep as many others out as you possibly could, so you would have somewhere to sleep that night. So we were right up near the engine, we were doing pretty well when the train was only a couple of minutes off leaving and we were just looking forward to be having a seat each, a whole seat each for the night. So, anyway there was a great commotion down at the barrier getting onto the platform and we

02:30 looked out and there was a very drunk airman, fully loaded up with kit bags and all his tropical gear and his equipment etc and he was weaving his way up the platform and people were telling him to get lost as he looked into each compartment, no room here and no room there and if he hadn't have stopped with us I think he would've just about made the engine actually. Anyway Phil said "We'd better look after this bloke"

03:00 so we opened the door and said "In here mate". And he came in and he just flopped onto the floor between the two seats and passed out. All his gear was on top of him and underneath him and he looked a very untidy pile on the floor of the compartment. But the guard waved the green flag and the engine driver tooted the whistle and off we went. And yeah we were looking at

03:30 this character on the floor and wondered what the hell we'd struck and he didn't come to until the noise changed when the train went over the Hawkesbury Bridge, over the Hawkesbury River and he shook his head and he woke up and he said "Thanks fellas". He said "My names' Lalor" and I said "Well that's Phil and I'm Mac." Oh and I said "Where are you off to?" And he said

04:00 "I'm posted to 99 Squadron." And I said "So are we." "Oh good" he said "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said "when we get to Gosford" he said "there's a railway refreshment room there," he said "I'll buy the beer." I said "And you couldn't get two more willing participants." So that's fine, we chatted away and the train pulls in and you know being right up the front it's still going at a fairly good clip by the time

04:30 it gets opposite, near the refreshment room which were about in the centre of the platform. But Lalor stepped off the train when it was still going at this fairly good clip and I can see him now doing one complete somersault and landing on his feet right in front of the door into the refreshment room, not a scratch on him. So we waited until the train stopped and then strolled back, you know all

05:00 the way back down the train and Lalor's over there frantically signalling and he's got nine beers, three each lined up ready for us when we got back up there. The unfortunate part about it was like a lot of railway refreshment room beer it was as flat as a pancake but we still drank it. And that was a start of a very very long standing friendship. One that was only broken about 5 or 6 years ago when Phil died,

05:30 he went back to Border Town in South Australia and Lofty Lalor, Alan Lalor, Lofty as we used to call him, he and his wife and my wife and I went to Phil's funeral in Border Town. Lofty's still alive but not a very well man. Anyway, we get through there and we had the rigmarole of

06:00 changing trains at the border at Wallangarra and then we stooged on through on the Queensland railway up through Warwick to a place called Clifton, where we got out of the train and the sergeant said "The hotel is out of bounds." And we said "Why?" As he didn't give a very convincing answer we kept on and went to the pub because our transport wasn't there

06:30 but it turned up about 20 minutes or so later and we piled on board and we went out to Leyburn. Some people call it Layburn but its right pronunciation is 'Leeburn' and this is where 99 Squadron was starting to form up. Aircraft hadn't arrived and about half the ground crew were there. So we were introduced to the situation, we set our tents and we made ourselves comfortable.

07:00 We did a bit more rifle drill because now being an active squadron we were responsible for guarding all our own boundaries and all that sort of a thing, so we did our guard duty on the front gate and all that sort of a thing and slowly the numbers built up and the aircraft arrived. And try

07:30 as we might the 3 of us couldn't get on the one aircraft. There was about 10 or a dozen of us in a ground crew for a Liberator so we were split up there and we were split up in our tents but the friendship remained very very close. And so off we went down and we got trained in the maintenance of a Liberator and that went on for a best part of a week I suppose. And

08:00 we got to know our counterparts. There were 2 riggers, 4 engine men and 2 armourers and an electrician and an instrument man. That made up the ground crew and in those crews there was a corporal for engines and a corporal for airframes, a rigger.

08:30 And we got hold of our aircraft and we you know went over it with a fine tooth comb and tighten up screws here and what have you and made it all ship shape. Scrubbed it down from top to bottom which is quite a big job. Went up in a test flight with it with our pilot who was a Flight Lieutenant Peter Wood– he'd been on two tours of Europe and he was now on

09:00 another tour in the Pacific area. Terrific pilot and a hell of a good mixer too, great bloke and we got to know the aircrew pretty well. Again there was nearly the same number of that, there was 2 pilots, a navigator, an engineer, bombardier a front gunner, mid upper gunner, 2 waist gunners and a tail gunner and later on there was a belly gunner as well so there was

09:30 a fair bit of armament in the thing. But the aircraft we got initially didn't have belly tanks- belly

gunners. So we got to know our aircraft pretty well. Mine was 077187 and we had it flying pretty well and Peter Woods, he couldn't find any fault with it sort of business and there we were waiting to go on further. And suddenly out of the

10:00 blue the aircraft were taken off 99 Squadron and allocated to two other units. 200 Flight which was at the same place and 201 Flight I think was at Amberley but I wouldn't be sure of that. And 200 Flight was 6 or 8 aircraft and they were involved in the dropping of the

10:30 commandos ahead of the landings in the Celebes and then the Philippines and all through there. And there were nationals, there were Indonesians and there were Filipinos etc in the army which were scattered out in the scrub all around us sort of business.

And these were part of Z Special [Special Reconnaissance Force]?

Yes, Seaman's Z Specials yes, yes.

They had different nationalities?

Oh yes, yeah, yeah, yeah. The saboteurs, you said they had them trained as saboteurs

11:00 as well as commandos and they had to have people to do interpreting too. Yeah, there wasn't a lot of them.

This is an Australian outfit?

Yes, yes. That's right. Yeah.

Very interesting.

There weren't a lot of them. You know there weren't a lot of the Filipinos you know there might've only been one to an aircraft or one to a group or something like that but there were certainly them there and they were kept out of sight. Because it was a straight out hush hush [secret] unit, we were threatened with death just about had we opened our mouths if we went

11:30 into the pub or went into Toowoomba or anything like that. Anyway they had to modify the aircraft to enable paratroops to be dropped from them and these modifications were done up at Amberley and to test them out they had to drop what we used to call 'LAC' wood which was a great lump of red gum, a couple of bolts through it sort of business and

12:00 drop with a parachute attached to it. The parachute was pulled open and then tested but they were really testing this chute that they'd built, to allow the troops to get out of the aircraft. And I was detailed to go and be in the parachute recovery thing and the aircraft was coming in from Amberley with the two or three parachutes

12:30 you know, LAC woods on board and we went down out in the scrub near Condamine river and we waited for this aircraft to turn up. We were in a very large paddock and sure enough I can even tell you the date it was the 10th of March 1945 and we found the aircraft we lit a small fire with a bit of smoke to tell them – show them where we

13:00 were and they came over and they dropped the parachutes, about 3 or 4 in all I think there were. One of which, this was the closest one to us, dropped about 30 or 40 yards over a fence in another paddock and between us, between the truck and the fence was a deep wide drain, so the driver said, "Well I'll drive through the drain and we can use the fence to drop off

13:30 and it'll be easier to recover the parachute from there." And he did that and he headed off and we were just about ready to jump the fence and somebody yelled out, "Look at the aircraft" – look at the Lib [Liberator] or whatever but look out sort of business" and we looked around and here nearly about a mile away was the Liberator coming straight at us at very low level, very low level.

14:00 The driver said "Let's get out of here" and he hightailed it across this drain. We hit a log, and the back of the truck went up, I went right up in the air and came crashing down on my back on the tailboard of the thing. And I was almost falling out backwards when somebody else in the truck jumped forward and grabbed my legs and stopped me from falling out of the truck.

14:30 So I'm bent backwards over the tailboard and I swear the outer propeller of the Liberator was no more than the width of this room from me and it was down very low. As a matter of fact the body was literally in the drain and being a high wing aircraft it was literally in the drain.

Why were they so low by the way?

Oh he'd come down to have a look and a bit of a shoot up sort of business, you know yeah we'll do it. I was in a bad

15:00 way, they left me lying in the truck and somebody went and got the ambulance and they came out and the strapped me in a straight jackety thing you know– I thought my back was broken. And I was put in the ambulance and taken into the hospital at Toowoomba where I was x-rayed and on the way in I started to get the feeling

15:30 back into my lower limbs into my toes and things like that because initially I couldn't move my lower legs. But fortunately no damage to the spinal chord, I was very badly bruised from my buttocks right up to my shoulders, right across the back. Black literally. And although I've

16:00 never seen the original, I don't know whether they exist, the original x-rays, it wasn't 'til a few years ago that they finally discovered two fractured, old fractured vertebrae low down in my back and that back condition has been with me ever since. And I was laid up for quite a few days because of it. I can't complain, I

16:30 got out of that with a bruised back and some difficulties but the pilot and crew of that aircraft, which incidentally was the CO of the 200 flight, were dead 13 days later. They were shot down on the first trip that 200 flight did. There were six aircraft went up and four of them were caught by a flock of Zeros and they didn't survive. So whilst you know, I had

17:00 a lot of pain, I'm still alive to tell the story. He was a famous pilot, Potney was his name or Pokley and he had been on coastal command in Great Britain and had actually sunk a submarine by bombing it with a Sunderland Flying Boat and he was a very nice bloke. Well he didn't come himself to look after me because of his activities. He sent his co-pilot down

17:30 and you know they apologised for it and all that sort of a thing. It certainly wasn't a deliberate affair. Anyway we got posted, ground crew for 200 flight were coming in, we got posted back to 99 Squadron and then we moved from Leeburn across to a place called Briarmaroo which is near John Darian, which is between Oakey and Dalby. And we went out

18:00 to this ramshackle old place a bit cruder than Leeburn but never mind we were all together again and our new aircraft started to come in. A new series of Liberators, they'd just been flown directly from America, across the Pacific into Amberley, checked out there, accepted by the RAAF

18:30 and flown down to us. The airstrip was just big enough to take a Liberator. A bit dicey. Where's our mate got to? So we had to go through the whole rigmarole again, we still had the same pilot. In this case my aircraft was A72308 and we still had Peter Woods

19:00 and as I said the ground crew and the air crew mixed very well together. The sergeant air gunners and things like that used to loan us their shirts with their three chevrons on and we used to be able to get into the sergeant's mess and the army establishment in Oakey where beer was very cheap and very good too. It worked out quite well but

19:30 the only thing we had to do was to wash and iron the shirts before we gave them back to the blokes but that was fair enough. But we did all this work and whilst we were still building up we did a couple of quite big flights around Queensland for aircrew familiarisation, that sort of a thing. Suddenly out of the blue we had VE [Victory in Europe] Day, 8th May I think it was 1945.

20:00 And the squadron had already received an invitation to attend the Vice Regal Red Cross Ball in the Town Hall in Toowoomba. They rang up and asked the Adjutant if a couple of truck load of fellas could come in to boost the numbers of this Vice Regal Ball. So you know the list went and the wild three, Phil and Lofty and I we were all pretty much at the

20:30 front of the queue when anything like that was happening, sort of business. So we all went into this ball. And I escorted a young lady, don't even remember her name, but her aunt was very kind and donated a taxi to get from wherever she lived down to the Town Hall. That was fine, off we went and the ball started up and

21:00 what have you and they'd brought a band in from Brisbane and it was really good dance music and real good ballroom stuff. We were dancing away and this girl was quite a good dancer and I used to fancy myself in being able to do a modern waltz in those days. Anyway the modern waltz came up and I'm striding out with this girl and we're putting on quite an act

21:30 sort of business and people are drifting off the floor at last there's just the two of us on the ballroom sort of business and the band saw it and they seemed to play harder and better. And you know what have you and we put on this great exhibition, what we thought was exhibition of modern waltz dancing. And the band stopped and everybody clapped and cheered sort of business

22:00 and I looked down and to my horror my drabs or khaki trousers had shrunk and because those Darling Downs are very cold at night I had put on my pyjama pants underneath my trousers. Drab trousers and about 3 inches of these red and white striped pyjama pants were hanging out of the bottom you know and hanging on

22:30 the tops of my shoes and the girl was very upset. She stomped off the floor and I was a bit embarrassed but not totally so. Anyway she – she declined to even be taken to supper so (LAUGHS)…

Sounds pretty serious…

That was the end of that little romance.

So you were having a good day, good night and she saw your pyjamas coming out – oh

23:00 **maybe it was probably good…**

Anyway, there was a bit of lull in proceedings after war finished in Europe. There was a lot of discontent, evidently there was a lot of discontent in the aircrews, not only in 99 Squadron but other squadrons, about this going in and bombing places where Japanese had been isolated sort of business. They felt they were risking their lives what they thought

23:30 was unnecessarily sort of business and their idea was that all they had to do was to maintain the blockade and things like that and literally starve these people out, rather than running the risk, running the gauntlet. Quite a number were shot down, not necessarily Liberators but you know the Mitchells and the Bostons and the smaller aircraft but there was quite a lull for a while. The CO was away for 2 or 3 weeks and he came back

24:00 and there was a big big hush hush meeting, commissioned officers only and the area they met in was guarded by flight sergeant and warrant officers sort of business and nobody was allowed anywhere near the place. We never ever heard in a direct sense what it was all about but in later years I found out that it was a you know almost a revolt, that you know why should we be doing this sort of business.

24:30 Also the idea was, I believe they sort of held up the departure of 99 Squadron, you know till they could easily do it, the CO would only have to say we're not ready to move yet, we've got this training or that training to do or something – that's probably all he would've had to do. Anyway be that as it may, there was a real stalemate, so we all got leave again. We'd

25:00 had our embarkation leave between Malalar and going to 99 Squadron in the first place but we were all given 10 days leave except people in Western Australia and there weren't very many of those. And so got our warrants and off we went, came back to Melbourne had a gay time and I'm sitting in the kitchen at Coburg with my mother and the doorbell went

25:30 and it's Phil. He came down with us, Lofty didn't come. Phil came in and I said "What are you doing? We've got 3 or 4 days to go yet?" He said "Didn't you get your telegram?" and he showed me this telegram, recalling in – to report back as soon as possible. And I said "No I haven't got that." And no sooner the words were out of my mouth, the doorbell rang and the telegram boy was out on the

26:00 doorstep with my telegram. So the only thing for it was to go back to the RTO in Spencer Street and we got on the train and we finished up getting back right on the end of June back to our camp at Briarmaroo. The very next day which was a Sunday, the 1st July, we left Briarmaroo, went into Brisbane,

26:30 camped at the racecourse at Eagle Farm or some racecourse on that side of the city. And next morning, about mid morning, we got on another troop train going north. And we were issued with bully beef and biscuits and we were crammed into dog boxes. There were 8 of us in a compartment

27:00 and off we went. And we were pretty unhappy about all of this and we got to Burbengarry which is a town just north of Brisbane and we knew we were in for a big long haul in the train. They were very dirty too,

27:30 because the inferior coal and you got cinders and all that sort of a thing and the idea was that you had to acquire a broom. And we spotted a broom in the Stationmaster's Office at Burbengarry, so some of us distracted him and got his attention elsewhere while somebody else whipped in

28:00 and borrowed the broom sort of business and off we went. And the next stop was at Nambour and it was mid afternoon I suppose by this time and we were pulled up right alongside a goods train which was totally loaded with pineapples, right from end to end. These carriages stacked up oh high, properly stacked and they had guards you know on either side looking after it to make sure we didn't touch these pineapples.

28:30 One of our fellows was a bloke Bill Thacker, he was the electrician in our crew and he had a voice like Jerry Koloona [Colona?], if you remember the old film days and he somehow got down between the platform and the train, under the carriage and under the goods train on the other side where there were no guards. So he got 2 or 3 of these pineapples

29:00 he yelled out "Over the top" and we knew what he was doing and we were all standing on this platform and these pineapples came over which we caught. A big ruction about it but anyway we held on to them and so when the train left, we ate pineapple which was quite good. And the old train bored on through the night, travelled all night and we had breakfast at Rockhampton and

29:30 that was good. Breakfast was excellent and then you know suddenly the train goes up the street in Rockhampton and the man with the red flag walks in it within the populated area so that's good and here's this bloke and the train's going very slowly and eventually they get out of the built up area a bit get out into the edge of Rockhampton and we're approaching a school and the kids saw it was a troop train and they came running down to the train and yelling out

30:00 "Two bob[two shillings-twenty pence] Yank, two bob Yank" and they looked and they said "Oh bloody Australians, penny, threepence[1 cent , 3cents" anyway that was our reception at Rockhampton. We go on a bit further to a place called St. Lawrence where we were side tracked for hours and

30:30 we were very tightly controlled, couldn't leave the compartments and you know I think we were there for the best part of 3 hours. We wondered what on earth was going on and suddenly way up ahead of us there was a smoke of a train coming towards us and it very slowly lumbered along and through alongside us and it was a hospital train bringing wounded

31:00 back from New Guinea and places north and that sobered us up immediately, our complaints stopped. But we kept on going, tea at Mackay or some people called it "Mac – Kay" and there was an army unit on, they were in the front and we were the carriages behind and we didn't get on very well with this group. So their officers

31:30 and our officers decided that it wouldn't be a good idea for both parties to be loose in Townsville so they tossed a coin and our officer lost. Our train OC [Officer Commanding] lost, and we got unloaded at Stewart which is about 8 or 10 miles out of Townsville, nothing there, while the army went on into Townsville and they had their 3 or 4 hours

32:00 break or stop over there. When the train came back of course they were all half shickered [drunk] up in the front of the train and they gave us the 'raspberry' as they went past sort of business. We'd just been sitting in the shade, there was a little mountain alongside there, I can't remember the name of it now, a few of the blokes climbed up that but most of us just had a snooze under the trees while we were waiting for the train to come back. So we got on board the old train going out to Mount Isa, the Western Mail,

32:30 and it was very slow and what have you and towards evening we had to look after ourselves, we had to eat our bully beef and biscuits at this stage that was the only food that was available. So the army was on the same thing but we pulled up at Charters Towers and right alongside there was a hotel, so we thought well we'd better get something to wash this bully beef and biscuits down

33:00 so we went into the pub and we left Bill Thacker with the big, you know to give us a warning if the train was leaving. So we were having a few drinks and they had bottled beer but it was Cairns Draught Beer siphoned out of the kegs into bottles and corks put in it you see. And we paid an exorbitant price for this stuff and it was all those quite big bottles,

33:30 like Darwin stubbies are now, not quite as big but similar. So we were loading ourselves up nicely and suddenly we hear "all aboard – all aboard" and it was a bit late because the train was already moving but very very slowly, so we charged out of this pub and I've got 4 bottles, you know carrying them like a bundle of wood sort of business, I'm running alongside the train and the boys leaning down and taking one bottle

34:00 at a time. There was one to go and I tripped over the bloody signal line- wire, the signal wire came across the line and I tripped over it and I broke the bottle and I've still got the scars on my fingers sort of business, where I cut my hand. But it really wasn't safe to put your head out of the compartment because you know you'd get hit on the head with a bottle, it was so bad. And then we got to, I think the place was called Homestead and we had a bit of an all in brawl with the army,

34:30 don't really know the reason for it all but anyway we had this bit of a fight. Two fellows in our crew, the instrument man and the electrician, Thacker and McCarthy they were sooling each other on and McCarthy got king hit and when Thacker went to his aid he got two black eyes. Beauties, absolute shiners,

35:00 not one but both and next morning at Hughenden was breakfast stop and it was some distance away from the station. I said "Look I'll go ahead and get the meal" sort of business, line up the breakfast for you. They said "Righto" so off I trotted and got my breakfast and these 2 extra ones, they didn't turn up and I finished mine and I finished up carting them back and I meet Thacker who couldn't see

35:30 and McCarthy couldn't talk because his jaw had been smashed about, the blind leading the dumb sort of business down towards their breakfast. But there was a butcher's shop in Hughenden and we got a couple of good bits of steak and we lashed those on to Bill Thacker's eyes and we pulled them into position with a field dressing and anyway he was alright, he was still stoned. And that was alright, next morning we wobbled our way along

36:00 to the 5th of July now and we get to a place called Richmond and there's a pub about 200 yards away from the railway line and the flag is flying at half mast, so we went down to the engine and we said "How long will we be here?" and the bloke said "Oh we've got to oil the wheels and" he said "we've got to cook our breakfast." And that was putting the shovel in on the coals and frying

36:30 a couple of sausages or chops or something, "Oh we'll be here for at least ¾ of an hour." So "Righto, don't go without us, we're going up to the pub." They said "Righto, we'll give a good toot just when we're about ready to leave." So we went up to the pub and got a beer and we said "Why's the flag at half mast?" and they said John Curtin the Prime Minister had died in his sleep and it's just been announced sort of business and we're flying the flag. And John Curtin was

37:00 very popular in the services because of the things he did.

Can you tell me exactly why he's popular?

Yes, yes, Curtin stood up against Churchill and demanded that the Australian troops be sent home from

the Middle East. Churchill wanted them to go into India, Ceylon and India, to stop the

37:30 Japanese in the invasion from Burma and Curtin refused and they came home. Although, my brother-in-law, his unit was diverted to Ceylon through Sri Lanka as we know it today, and he was there for 6 or 7 months but he was in an artillery unit, the rest of the troops came home. And the other thing that I admired about the man was that he had

38:00 pulled himself out of a drinking problem and he had for the good of the country, he had dropped his opposition to conscription and all those things and all the things he did for troops, made him quite a popular figure. Anyway, we were having this drink to John Curtin or to the late John Curtin and the whistle blows and we downed our beers and off we went.

38:30 But one group, “oh we’ll have another one, we’ll catch it, they’ll wait” so anyway we trotted our way back to the thing and they “toot toot toot” sort of a business, they wanted to get going and we got on board and off we went. There was a party of 4 or 5 still in the pub and some of them were in our compartment and some were in the next door compartment and we thought hell what’s going to happen here sort of business. Anyway,

39:00 what they did, was they came out of the pub and they saw it was you know a bit of smoke over there on the horizon sort of business, so they went down to the railway line and the facular [fettler?] gang was there, they were ready to go out and do some line maintenance and they slipped him 10 bob [10 shillings-1 dollar] and they took one of those hand pumped rail trolleys.

Like in the American Westerns?

That’s right,

39:30 one of those – “rrr, rrr, rrr” you know get in time and evidently you can put up a good lump of speed in these things and they set sail across the prairies, across the plains after us sort of business and that country is just very gently undulating country, you know might be 2 miles up a slope and then it wouldn’t be more than 10 feet rise, 20 feet at the outside and then it’d fade off down the other side and these old trains –

40:00 how the Queensland railways ever kept going during the war was quite a remarkable thing. You know the theme song of the Queensland Railways during that time was that “I’ll walk beside you”. And anyway, oh within half an hour, they waited until they were going up hill and the thing slowed down quite a lot and they just tipped the thing off the line and clambered up and got on board the train and off. You know nobody knew except us knew that they were missing.

40:30 How are we going for time?

We are going to have to pause again.

Tape 7

00:31 **So we’ll just continue from the last tape?**

So the train eventually deposited us in Mount Isa, it had taken us 50 hours to do this 600 miles, so miles per hour weren’t very fast and we went to a staging camp a couple of miles out of town. The first night we weren’t permitted to leave,

01:00 the next day was a day off and we were permitted to go into Mount Isa but we had to get back ourselves. They’d drive us in but they weren’t prepared to wait and pick us up. That was the 7th of July and the next day was my 20th birthday. So the fellas took me out to a meal in one of the cafes in at Mount Isa,

01:30 where they primed up the people in the café and said it was his birthday and they brought the piece of steak in on one plate and the vegetables in on another and after having been on bully beef and biscuits for several days it was quite a good change. Anyway we did all that and next day we climbed aboard the trucks and we set sail across the desert.

02:00 The first day was a fairly short run to Camooweal where we camped overnight. The next day we went to a place that was known then as an army staging camp called Bore 6A and that was in the middle of absolutely nowhere. However the army fellows running it were very helpful, very co-operative and

02:30 didn’t charge us exorbitant prices for a bottle of beer and I still remember one of them in his shirt, he opened up his shirt and said “Look at that” and he had a little bilby that he was carrying around in his shirt. That was the first one I’d ever seen and I don’t think I’ve seen one since. But anyway we moved on from there and then we had a pretty big day, there were about 15

03:00 or 16 trucks in the convoy. We were lucky, we drew the number one marble. We were in the front truck, not because it was dusty, it was bitumen road, it was army situation and the corporal was the driver, he

was a sour individual but he was a magnificent truck driver and he set the pace going across

03:30 and they had to you know maintain their distance between the trucks you know about 200 yards it was sort of business. Not that there was any danger down there but that was the regulation that convoys had to do. So we battled our way on and we got into Banka Banka quite late in the afternoon. Banka Banka is near the

04:00 property of – "We of the Never Never" by animus Thea Gun, the authoress, but we were forbidden to go up to the station – camp was just outside the gate into the Homestead. But anyway we could survive that and next day we left fairly early, the biggest day of all, and we were to get to Larrimah and

04:30 one of the trucks broke down and there was a 2 or 3 hour delay. They never left without another one, sort of business and we were all getting pretty cranky by this stage, you couldn't see much in a canopy covered truck– we were better in the for sightseeing sort of business, not that there was a lot to see. But we finished up getting into the staging camp at Larrimah quite late and the army cooks were very upset, because they had

05:00 to hang back waiting to give us the evening meal. But then we got that and we then trooped down to where we were to sleep and we called them the "hen coups" and they were really curved iron, quite large, probably 60 feet long, 30 feet wide with beds, old iron beds in underneath, no mattresses, just the iron and all that sort of a thing.

05:30 And that part of the world at night gets awfully, awfully, cold and my kit bag how it happened I don't know, but on the back of the truck was a trailer carrying another trailer and the wheels had moved and my kit bag had got jammed under the wheel of the trailer being carried. And I very nicely asked the

06:00 corporal if I could undo the ropes to move the thing a little bit to get my kit bag out and he said "If you touch those ropes you're in trouble." So I said "What sort of a trouble?" He said "That's the guardhouse down there and nobody interferes with my truck." I said "Well okay, what about you doing it? He said "Bugger you" and off he went. So I'm trying to sleep on this iron bed without any blankets and

06:30 things like that and I froze. We were in drabs, you know anything warm I had was in the kit bag. And I finished up getting up about 1 o'clock and setting the fire, lighting the fire because there were fire places all around sort of business and it wasn't long before I was joined by a fair few other even with blankets were cold sort of business but be that as it may we had an early lunch and we climbed aboard the Northern Territory train. They had a train line then that ran from

07:00 Darwin to Birdum and Birdum was about – we'd been through Birdum in the trucks about 3 miles before this Larrimah. Birdum was where they used to have the railway marshalling yards and where the engines were repaired and things like that but they came up, picked up the troops etc at this Larrimah about 3 miles further north. So we clambered aboard this old thing

07:30 and again we got the "tail end charlie", this time, we were right in the rear carriage. There was about 6 carriages and oh about 20 or 30 goods trucks, it was a sort of a mixed train. And, there was 7 carriages, that's right because the officers were in the middle one. There were 3 air force at the back, 3 Army in the front and the officers had the one in the middle. And they had loose couplings and

08:00 when they went up a bit of a rise all these couplings stretched out sort of business you know and that would be fine and then suddenly they'd get over the other side and the weight would come the other way and all the rear end of the train was trying to catch up with the front and they'd bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang and there was a whip of about 10 or 12 feet in the last carriage. It was literally you know it was impossible to sit on the seat you got jerked out of the seat. And

08:30 that's what we put up with all night. A couple of very interesting things, the train was fired with a mixture of coal and wood and when they wanted a lot of steam they used coal sort of business when there was any climbing, not that there was very much climbing and other times they used wood with just a little bit of wood. But the fireman and the engine driver had seats on swivels and they both fired the furnace

09:00 and then the swung these things out in the breeze on either side of engines to get the cool breeze and they'd cool down sort of business and then when they wanted to do it again, they came back in again and they did it again and that's how they went up all the time. But anyway it took us 23 hours to do that 300 odd miles and we got in to Darwin at approximately midday the next day, the 13th of July, exactly 2 years after I enlisted.

09:30 And we went and found our camp which we thought would be nicely prepared for us but it wasn't, so we argued a bit with our advance party but they said "Don't complain because we have set up a camp but it's not here" They didn't enlarge on that any longer. So we put up our tents and we got our meals and all that sort of a thing. And we set up our chuffer which is an old oxygen tank and

10:00 there were heaps of those down on the rubbish tip and we filled that up with petrol and got a copper pipe or aluminium pipe and screwed around and we made this chuffer that we could heat water, boil water very quickly. "Shush shush shush" it used to go, that's how they got the name of chuffer sort of business. They were pretty dangerous actually, we had a few fires in the trees because of them. But

after we settled down for awhile they said “Righto we’re going to our

10:30 other camp.” And what they had done, they hadn’t fitted up the main camp where the main squadron was going to be but they’d fitted up a rest camp out on the beach where Rapid Creek is now and oh it had a lovely set up out there. There was an abandoned American Army Hospital nearby, oh great big notices, ‘No trespassers”, “Keep out” and all that sort of a thing but

11:00 they went across and souvenired all these beautiful tents that the American people had, floors in them and all that sort of thing and we had a luxury place on Casuarina Beach near Rapid Creek and that was our rest camp and you could go there, you know you had to take your turn sort of business. But we were all rostered out it was all worked out that you’d get your 2 or 3 days out there every now and again.

Did you meet many Americans?

Oh, only one. I’ll tell you about him,

11:30 but we had a big fishing net out there and we used to wade out into the water, oh it was quite shallow a bit of a danger with sharks and crocodiles but we’d wade right out and then swing this thing around and scoop up all the fish and we lived on fish out at the camp. They’d do that 2 or 3 times a day and get gummy sharks and hammer head sharks and all those sort of things it was

12:00 quite good but my encounter with the American was quite funny. I was on guard duty on McMillan Road which was a dusty gravel road, very dusty and the dust was drifting through the camp you know, make itself quite a nuisance as a matter of fact and we were instructed to hold up traffic and get them to slow

12:30 down and drive very slowly past the camp. You know those old jeeps they used to get a terrible whine up in the gear box, you’d hear them coming for miles away and I heard this thing and it was wound up flat strap and I thought oh well I’ll race down to the front of the camp, all ready you know “Halt” you know and all that sort of thing. The jeep didn’t show

13:00 any sign of stopping so I pulled a rifle off my shoulder and I pointed it at the thing and it screamed to a halt and there was the Yankie, I think he was a major, typical Yank with a cigar in his mouth sort of business and what have you and he said “What is the trouble?” I said “Sorry to stop you Sir but we’re trying to stop the dust problem in our camp and we’re asking

13:30 you to drive slowly.” “How slowly?” “Oh” I said “five, ten miles an hour.” And he slapped it in gear and he said “You can’t win a war in 5 or 10 miles an hour buddy.” And he disappeared in a cloud of dust down the street – down McMillan Road but anyway all the squadron were there and we had a few aircraft and they

14:00 dropped the bomb. We knew about it the night before and we had a great party in the canteen.

How did you know about it the night before?

Through the radio situation. We had a very big radio hook up and they could bring in Japan you know anything like that and it was said then that the war – the announcement was – “The war would finish next morning at 9 o’clock” or something else like that.

So you knew it was going to happen?

We knew I would say 8

14:30 or 9 hours ahead of the actual you know the actual time that it happened.

Did many others know that it was going to happen or…?

No, we had the biggest radio set up in the place and I doubt very much that it was widely known until say about day break next morning. And there was a bit of yahooing went on. You know in the town and what have you

15:00 but you know we celebrated it and I can remember we were sitting around in the tent talking about you know and here’s Thacker who’d joined up from unemployment and he said “You know, “ he said “I’m out of a job.” I can still him saying you now “I’m out of a job” anyway as it turned out he finished up with a pretty good job. But

15:30 our aircraft turned up, they did a half hearted attempt at sort of doing some more flying training but nobody’s heart was in it and then suddenly we get word that we’re to be used as a ferrying squadron bringing POW’s [prisoners of war] that were being picked up in Singapore, taken to Balikpapan

16:00 and dropped into Darwin and then that squadron would fly back and the army took them over, medical examination, not food, uniform, new uniforms, new boots and all that sort of a thing and literally turned them loose. Oh they gave them a 3 minute phone call too if they could get on but they literally turned them loose in Darwin. And

16:30 we’re nicely written up in one of the histories of the RAAF about the squadron going in you know ferrying them out and hosting these groups and they stayed in our tents and everything and when we

got a plane load, which was about 15 or 20, to go to Melbourne or to Sydney okay that group went off sort of business and what have you. They could've been with us for sometimes 3 or 4 days and things like that. They were

17:00 probably the fitter ones of the POW's, they could stand the trip but it was terribly cold for them and there was no toilets or anything like that in the back of the bomber sort of business and we got them blankets out of the barrack's store and got them oil drums for toilets and things like that to you know to try and ease the situation a little bit. And I did have all the names and

17:30 addresses of all the Melbourne fellas that came through but in one of our moves that we made, I've lost that unfortunately.

What did you think of the Japanese when you saw the POW's?

We were horrified. Totally horrified and some of the fellows didn't want to talk about it, others wanted to get it off their chests. And they told one, two stories that stick in my mind, one is they always had nicknames

18:00 for the Japanese guards and one guard they called "piss off" and you know they would meet him in the morning and "morning piss off". It went on sort of business and he thought this was you know they'd clap him and carry on a bit sort of business until he asked somebody else what "piss off" meant. Unfortunately he was told

18:30 and the next time one of these blokes said "Good morning piss off" he got beaten up with a rifle butt so he wasn't very impressed with that. But I think one of the other lovely stories that came out of it was that they also built a wireless in Changi and they also knew about the end of the war.

19:00 The day it was ended they had arranged to have a concert and they were going to have the Japanese CO there. You know he was to be the guest of honour sort of business and they were still worried about – caught with the radio was death you know, was execution so they worked out how they would tell the troops, all the prisoners that the war was over.

19:30 One of them – I should've looked it up seeing as I'm telling the story, but there was a wonderful poem and they got one fellow who knew it to recite it and then they put stooges around right throughout the camp and when he got to a particular line in the poem he would repeat

20:00 it and the line was "But west would look the land is bright" he repeated it and he repeated it and they clapped and cheered and the old OC who knew the war was over couldn't understand and they got the message out through that way. Yeah, quite an interesting bit of a thing and the bloke that told me, was the fella who spruiked the poem. Other men's poems, can't remember the name of it now.

20:30 But anyway the other thing about the being in Darwin and the Libs and flying the POW's back, this mate of ours Laidlor, Lofty Laidlor, he'd missed out on getting this special leave, the 10 days to come back you see and he was all crooked on this, he was real sore on Phil and I because we'd had and he hadn't. So he said to us this day, he said

21:00 "Our aircrafts going" he was on 303, the Silver Bullet we called it and he said I've seen the pilot, he was Flight Lieutenant Grey, Ken Grey and he said "I've seen Ken," and he said "I'm prepared to take the risk" he said "he won't be coming down to check what's in the back" sort of business he said "I'm shooting through." So off he went because then see we had three days out– those crews then

21:30 had 3 days out on the rest camp while the rest of us were doing other things. So off they went and Ken Grey flew it down and he didn't tell Lofty this but he was to be best man at a mate's wedding and strangely enough years later I found out that the mate was my mate too. He lives over at Mount Waverly now and so they got to Laverton

22:00 and they US'd the aircraft, unserviceable you know, unflyable, engine trouble you see. So he teed up with Lofty that he'd have a telephone number, Lofty was staying with his mother down at Bentley, Clayton, somewhere down that way and Ken was best man at the wedding and they fiddled around getting this allegedly unserviceable aircraft, serviceable until they were all ready to come back. They all go on

22:30 board and Lalor was away for 10 days and I answered the roll for him, the sergeant'd call Lalor, "present, present" and I did his fatigues and I peeled his potatoes and scrubbed the toilets and you name it I did all those things oh getting on towards the end of it we were on parade one morning and yelled out 'Lalor' and I said "present" and the sergeant said "How long's this going to go on for Mac?"

23:00 (LAUGHS). So anyway he came back a couple of days later and I never let him forget it and the penalty is that whenever we meet, he buys the first beer. Then 99 Squadron got disbanded. All the older fellows and all the aircrew, flew, came south with it. They jammed the aircraft full with as many people as they could get away with

23:30 of the age, but there was a lot of us who were just 20 and you know we were all a very young squadron and we got posted everywhere. I went for 2 or 3 weeks to 12 ARD [Aircraft Repair Depot] and actually finished the repairs on a Liberator and then we were told that we had to repair the boxing ring and they were just thinking up jobs for us you know.

24:00 Phil and I were put on toilet cleaning duties and what they did up there they had these big long trenches and they had anything from 6 to 16 holes in them sort of business and they use to burn them every 24 hours. Every morning they used to burn them and that kept the flies down, dried them out and kept the flies down you see. And we used to have to go around the trees and pull of branches

24:30 and sweep up grass and put them down each hole and things like that…

Was there a sense of anti-climax in doing this?

Oh yes, but that was a job that had to be done you know, leave them for a couple of days and the flies got unbelievable you know and we were just bad luck that we were the two that happened to be on it sort of business but once you did it, they didn't want to see you for the rest of the day. Anyway Phil got sick of pulling this grass out and all that sort of a thing,

25:00 so he went down to an aircraft with a bucket and he got a couple of gallons of petrol and he put a good squirt down each hole sort of business and in a devious way, with a long stick and a piece of rag or something and me with another string holding the lid up, he dropped this thing down in it. And I can still see about 12 or 15 lids going bang, bang, bang, the whole

25:30 thing exploded, blew them all off and it really blew the toilet apart. So we had to put it together again we had to go and get a hammer and nails and repair it all. I said "That's the last time you're going to do that mate." But after that, then we got the posting to East Armworth Air Sea Rescue 112 and we quite liked this business down on the beach, it was really good. One of the drawbacks to it was that you had to take

26:00 your turn in going down through the mangroves to the fish trap to clear the fish, cause you know we ate pretty well while we were there. Getting the Catalinas out of the water– there was a fuel barge, Kelly, Leo, Leo Kelly was the barge master and he used to sleep on the

26:30 barge, because he never knew when he was required to call and it was good out there because there were no sandflies and no mosquitos and thing like that. I said "Can I come and spend the night with you, sleep on the barge, get away from these sandflies?" He said "Do you snore?" And I snored like a bloody pig in the high wind as a matter of fact and I said "No, no, no" so he said "Righto off you come." So I had this lovely night's sleep in the cool, -

27:00 laid flat out on my back and Kelly didn't get a winks sleep, because I snored all night. That was the only night I ever spent on the barge. He wouldn't have anybody on board who snored. But getting aircraft out and servicing aircraft on the water was a big challenge, compared to land based aircraft and you know on land if you dropped your pliers, you just went down the ladder and picked them up off the ground but if you dropped them in the water, that was "night night nurse" and it used to cost 7 and 6 [75 cents] to buy a new pair of

27:30 pliers, so we had little holes in them and strings around them and round our necks so we wouldn't drop them. And getting them out of the water to do riveting and things like that, that was quite a task. We would go along and the work boat'd go out with a couple of hand grenades and drop them overboard and that would hopefully frighten the sharks and the crocs away and we'd pull them in with the work boat as close

28:00 to the shore as possible. We would have a bloke on either wing tip with the 303 and we had to go into the water, float the wheels in and then you'd pin them against the hull and then 3 of us, it used to be 3, get on the outside of the tyre push it down, then put another pin in down below and that gave them legs, wheels to come out and then there was a small one went on the tail as well and that was quite easy. And the aircraft

28:30 came out very very quickly but that was how they had to get them out.

Can you describe the Catalinas and what it was like to fly in them?

The Catalina was a lovely, lovely lumbering old aircraft. Very, you know in an odd sort of a way, a picturesque aircraft in the air. It didn't look much on the water, it just looked like an ugly duck sort of business you know, in floating around in the water

29:00 and you know the pilots used to reckon they were up to their knees in water sort of business, because they were quite low to the water in that regard. But when they got up in the air they seemed to take onanother dimension. I always thought they were very graceful in the air as a matter of fact. And they were quite manoeuvrable too, you know they could really throw them around. And I was lucky,

29:30 I did quite a number of flights in them including the first flight to Dili when we took the mail up. Japanese were still there but they were prisoners of war of the Portuguese. We were only there one day but they were prisoners of war of the Portuguese and we flew the mail up and bought oranges when we were up there. When he CO tried to fly back through the mountains he wondered why the old kite wouldn't get up to ceiling sort of business but we had about half a ton

30:00 of oranges on board. The old bugger came and confiscated them all and took them into the Darwin Hospital on us as a matter of fact, so he wasn't too popular old Tiger. Tiger Shelmadee.

What did you think of Dili while you were there?

Oh a graceful little place, couple of adventures there too. We wanted this fruit you know, rarely did you get any fruit at all in the mess. We were given – the boys collected

30:30 you know, to buy fruit when you're up there you know and we got hold of an old broken up broken down taxi being driven by a Portuguese and we said "fruit fruit" and he thought we were saying something else starting with "F" and he took us to the 3 brothels in the town. "No, oranges, oranges" "Oh"

31:00 he said "The Cantina, the Cantina, yes" so we went down…

Did you end up in the brothels?

No way, but we had this big splurge on buying up these oranges. They sold us a penny as they called them, they were raffia bags, oh 3 feet about that much in diameter and they stacked them up with oranges and we loaded them on board, this poor old skipper didn't know.

31:30 But we had a couple of tragedies while we were there. My mate who was in the same group as me, George Holmes, he was in a truck I don't know really what they were doing but they weren't doing anything stupid, they were just sort of driving around on the causeway, cause East Arm is connected to the mainland by a causeway.

32:00 And there was a little steep road which was wrongly cambered instead of sloping in and having a drain underneath it, they sloped it out and let the water run off that way. Anyway, the driver was inexperienced or something I don't know but anyway it rolled the thing over and George was in the back and he got crushed with one of the canopy arms, you know over the top.

32:30 He was a Coburg boy too and we were great mates and he lived about as far away from that pub in Sydney Road near Renny Sreet as I did from the Grove sort of business and you know we were going to tee up and meet there every Friday night or something I don't know. That was a tragedy and made worse because we then had to rip down to Adelaide River and the war cemetery

33:00 and dig the grave and then carry the coffin in and participate in the whole thing sort of business and so that was very sad – a close friend going like that. And then about 3 weeks later we had about 2 more but that wasn't bad luck, it was stupidity. They stole a jeep, three of them as a matter of fact, stole a jeep and

33:30 were beating up Darwin and they were flying out on the road out towards Nightcliff and they didn't see the end of the road and they went over the little cliff at the end of Nightcliff. The 2 were thrown out and landed on the rocks and were killed instantly and the driver was hanging on to the steering wheel, he survived. So

34:00 we had a double tragedy 2 or 3 weeks later.

So how do you deal with these deaths personally?

Oh I was very upset with George Holmes. We all were as a matter of fact because he was one of the great big fellows you know, friendly and do anything for you and "Oh I'll do your washing Mac" you know he was that sort of a bloke you know

34:30 do anything. I think the worst part about it was his mother was a widow and he was the breadwinner really, mm, because old Tiger Shellman he was the CO at the time and he went and saw her after the war and he said it was a very unsettling time. And I squibbed it, I could never go and bring myself to go and see her. You know I'm a real squib when it comes to those sort of things. Yes, it

35:00 does affect you but life's got to go on.

Is that a regret that you didn't see her?

Yes it is now, very much so, yes. I didn't know very much else about him. There were other members of the family whether they were brothers or sisters I don't know but there were other members there.

What would you have said to her?

I don't know. That's probably why I didn't go. I don't know what I would've said to her you know. All you can do is give her a bit of a hug and say

35:30 how sorry you are and things like that and if they want to have a description how he died, well okay you'd give it not that I'd enjoy it but no but I squibbed doing it, to my shame really. I think it's one of those things I'm not very proud of.

Did it stay it with you through the years?

Only on the 23rd March that's the date – that's the anniversary, it's a couple of weeks away at the moment that's a you know I remember old George or

36:00 young George, as he was then. The other two didn't affect me quite so much because I wasn't all that

close to them sort of business. I was upset you know, nobody likes to see anybody going that way and strangely enough one of them was a man from Bartlett who came from Adelaide and his father ran a taxi service in Adelaide. Some months afterwards when we were Left East Arm and were posted back at RAAF Darwin, this taxi pulled up and we were in a hut very close to the gate house and the guard came up and he said "I've got a family down there who want to find out about Bluey Bartlett" and I was the only one around at the time who knew him and I said "I'll go down and see them," sort of business.

37:00 That was probably one of the reasons why I didn't go and see Mrs Holmes because they were very very upset sort of business and it was pretty hard to tell them that they were drunk as lords sort of business and you know the fella driving shouldn't have – it was a stolen vehicle and all that sort of thing, it was pretty hard to gloss over those sorts of things. Anyway the father he said thank you very much and he said "Come on ladies, we'll go." And for my relief off

37:30 they went.

Was losing George the worst thing that happened to you in your time in the war?

And not being permitted – not being allowed to train for aircrew. But George was by far the greatest tragedy, yeah, yeah. Yes that would've been my deepest regret because we were so friendly. But adventures didn't stop there. While

38:00 we were still at East Arm, again one of these mad postings came through and we were scattered everywhere, groups of us. Phil went to Matteranka, Lofty went to Gove and I went to Sogrowmore [?] Island which is way down on the coast of Western Australia between Derby and Broome. Derby and Broome, somewhere there

38:30 anyway and it is near where the Truscott Air Base was. And we said "What are we going there for?" "Don't know" so very unhappily we climbed on board and off we went in a Lockheed Load Star and we had on board Alan Marshall the author, he had a bridge chair sort of business and we were flying along and we were chatting away,

39:00 there was about 8 of us I think and a bloke, up the pointy end came back he said "You'd better hang on fellas it looks like we're going to go through some turbulence." Obviously that cumulus effect cloud you know, thunder clouds in front of us and a few minutes later we hit it and boy they reckon we fell over a thousand feet, straight down

39:30 like that. We all finished up on the roof, crippled Alan Marshal was up there with us as well and he crashed down and fortunately none of us landed on him but our kit bags landed on him. And George Bowman, he was another one of the guys, I fell on top of him. He didn't like it much and we were just a total wreck you know in the back in the thing and they said

40:00 "There's more to come" so we hung on to things, cause we were just sitting there when it happened. Anyway nobody was hurt but it was rather strange you know really pressed up against the ceiling sort of business in a fall like that but we got to Truscott and it was one of those interlocked landing strips you know, they put bits of metal together and put it on sand and soft soil and it was a skeleton

40:30 going - dragged across a corrugated iron roof, it was a terrible noise to land on. So anyway we came there and they opened the door and we had to get Alan out and the fellow was already, one of the ground crew helping and he said "You Alan Marshal are you?" Alan said "Yes". "Oh" he said "I've got a bone to pick with you." He said "What for?" And he said "Oh," he said "you're Dorothy Dix aren't you?"

41:00 Dorothy Dix was an agony column in one of the magazines at the time and people used to ring in and say get advice what they would do with their bandy legged kids and this fellow reckoned that he'd given advice to his wife and she'd cleared out and left him. But Alan Marshall wasn't Dorothy Dix at all. And we had a hell of a job convincing this bloke that he shouldn't hit Alan Marshall who was you know, as you know was a cripple.

41:30 But he went away but we hadn't convinced him.

Sorry Mac we've just got to stop and change tapes.

Tape 8

00:33 We were only a day or so at Truscott when we were loaded on a barge which was taking the supplies out to Sogrowmore Island. La Ran or Long Range Radar Station. It was about a 4 or 5 hour trip in the barge to get to Sogrowmore and on the way out we ran

01:00 aground and the old coxswain in charge of the barge, was not the most pleasant fellow I met in the RAAF and he suggested that we get overboard on this coral and try and push the barge off, which we declined to do. So we sat there for 2 or 3 hours until the

01:30 tide came in and floated us off again. It didn't do the bloke's temper any good whatsoever. But we went to Sogrowmore Island to clean the island up. There were 4 of us. There had been many buildings on the

place, these had been damaged or destroyed in cyclones and things like that and we had to wreck them or take them away and get rid of all the asbestos sheeting

02:00 and the galvanised iron that was around. And we were posted for 6 weeks down there but we finished the job in a couple of weeks and then we sort of proceeded to make nuisances of ourselves until they got desperate and said they you know, they released us sort of business and the job was done. But one of the incidents that happened there was in the middle of the wet season and we had a mother and

02:30 father of all thunder storms. I think the thunder and lightning were literally continuous for 10 hours and it rained for over 12 hours and in that time about 12 or 15 inches of rain fell. This was good because the island had no other fresh water and it had a desalinisation plant and you had one day in the week

03:00 when you could wash your clothes. You had to be on a roster to do that and so this huge, tremendous rain storm eased that problem very much and we were in American Bell tents and they were quite steep and when the rain was on, we used to rush outside and stand under the deluge coming off the thing with a cake of soap and we were pretty clean by the time morning

03:30 came. But, have never been back to Sogrrowmore Island, I've been able to take my wife to all the places I served in except Dili and Sogrrowmore Island. But anyway we got back to Darwin and we were reposted to Air Sea Rescue Flight and we just continued on doing what we had been doing for some considerable time and we started to get itchy to get

04:00 home. Getting all the troops, service people back from the islands and up north was quite a major logistic job and the authorities I think were getting a bit worried, because the terms of engagement were for the duration of the war and 12 months after. No doubt they could've easily got over it but anyway I think they were trying their best to meet that

04:30 obligation. So the word got around if we could find any possible way of getting ourselves home, all we had to do was to let our orderly rooms know and it'd be approved and we'd go. Several fellows bought trucks at the disposal sales. I know one fellow who bought three and we helped him repair two of them and he piggy backed the third one or piggy backed them all except one and he drove

05:00 down from Darwin to Melbourne and he went into business in the carrying business. Others got on board the occasional ship. They weren't very popular but the big thing was to hitch a ride on a Yankee aircraft or Dutch aircraft many of which were flying through. But we hadn't been successful in that but in one of the hangars at RAAF Darwin was an old

05:30 DC3 [Dakota twin engined transport]. It had been there for some time, the tyres were flat and it was covered in dust and bird droppings. So we stooped around this aircraft a few of us and we couldn't see very much wrong with it so we got permission to see whether we could make it flyable. There was about 7 or 8 of us in all and my task was to get the undercarriage working,

06:00 and obviously undercarriage and control surfaces and things like that and the flight mechanic and the two "e's" had to get the engine up and running and we worked on it for 2 or 3 weeks. I had the aircraft jacked up and we scrounged some new tyres from somewhere and

06:30 we got the hydraulics going and that part of the aircraft was going quite well. And the engine boys got one beautifully but the other engine had a completely faulty magneto and these aircrafts had 2 magnetos on them, it was a sort of standby situation but it was literally illegal to take off with only one magneto working.

07:00 So, we couldn't get a spare anywhere and suddenly we heard an aircraft and by sound we knew it was a DC3 and it came in to land and we saw it had Dutch markings on it, so we snaffled a jeep. We

07:30 had a big "Follow me" sign and we got out in front of this aircraft, it was another DC3, and we led it down to one of the remote parts of RAAF Darwin. And we then offered to drive them back to the control points and we very kindly said that we would service their aircraft and make sure it was refuelled. So we did that and

08:00 the fellows whipped the engine covers off and found that the magnetos matched the ones that we had, so we put our faulty magneto into the aircraft and took the good one away and we had two good magnetos. We were all set to fly. We reported back to the Dutchman that the aircraft while it was

08:30 refuelled it had a problem with one of its magnetos. "Oh" he said "Not to worry, we'll ring up Batavia as it was called in those days and we'll get them to send another one day and in the meantime we'll have 3 or days off in Darwin.", thank you very much. So we were pretty happy, we'd already teed up a pilot who was in the same boat as ourselves, couldn't get away. He got hold of a navigator,

09:00 and we said the aircraft was right He said "Righto, we're going to test fly it." He said "I'll only test fly if you come with me." So we said "No problems". So we all piled on board, 6 or 8 of us, I'm not too sure of the number. Oh we washed it down got rid of the bird droppings, they were pretty unpleasant and he got it up in the air and the wheels came up

09:30 as required and the flaps worked and all the control services did what they should do and he threw it around the sky for about an hour and he landed it and he said "Righto boys, we'll leave in the morning."

And we said “No way, we’ve got to get our clearances.” “Alright” he said “we’ll leave next day.” which was to be a Saturday. So we reported to the orderly room to say that we’d teed up

10:00 a trip south and could we get our clearances and they issued them to us and we raced around RAAF Darwin and got everything signed and had our final night with the remainder of the fellows and we had an early breakfast and took off about half past six on this Saturday morning. And climbed up to a reasonable lovely clear day and

10:30 we climbed up to a reasonable height, not too cold for us and we were very very pleased with ourselves on the way. We landed at Alice Springs in quite a severe cross wind which nearly popped us of the strip but the pilot was up to it and he kept it under control and we refuelled and kept on going south. Our aim

11:00 was to go on refuel at Parafield and then go on to Melbourne. And we struck head winds between Alice Springs and Port Augusta and this slowed us down considerably and the day crept on and it became dark and the pilot switched on the navigating lights and the landing lights but nothing happened. We’d forgotten the electrics – those parts of the

11:30 electrics in the aircraft. So he reported this fact to the Parafield control tower and he was told that he should land at Port Pirie but he said “No, Port Pirie was a badly lit airport” and he was going to keep on flying and “to put the landing strip lights on at Parafield.” And whilst we didn’t have a landing light we’d get down on the flare path.

12:00 The control tower very reluctantly agreed to that and we came in and we got in, we landed at dark, in the dark about 8 o’clock on the Saturday evening at Parafield. After refuelling the aircraft and doing a few other jobs and getting one of the duty crew at Parafield to

12:30 see if he could find the fault in the electrics, we headed off into Adelaide to spend the night. We did that and we got a tender out next morning and we took off just about before 7 o’clock and we headed for Melbourne and that was a non eventful trip. We landed at

13:00 Essendon and we heaved our bags out and we finished up being quite close to the tram line and the pilot who was the last off the aircraft, sort of – they’d wheeled up a set of steps for us to get out of the aircraft and the pilot was the last to leave and sort of took one final nostalgic look into the cabin of the aircraft

13:30 and when he did so, the steps collapsed. And he had his hand on the inside of the door and they come down in little pincer movements like that, to account for the contour of the body of the aircraft and he amputated his little finger as cleanly as though he’d taken it off with an axe. His little finger just came off like that and he swore a bit

14:00 and he said “Don’t worry about me boys, we’ll be right – I’ll be right.” “No” we said “No, we’ll get you to the first aid post. We’ll carry your gear down there.” “No,” he said “no” but anyway we didn’t listen to him and we took his gear to the medical centre and put him in there and he was getting attention. And he said “I’ll be right fellas. You go home and you know you might just get home in time for lunch now. “And my, I’m sorry but I can not

14:30 remember that pilots name but it was a tragedy to finish the war, you know, for him in that regard. But anyway we got on the tram, didn’t pay our fares and I got up to the Haymarket corner near the old Royal Melbourne Hospital and changed trams to go up Royal Parade and Sydney Parade and got out at the Grove and staggered down to the Grove to where we lived, number 44,

15:00 was well and truly loaded with kit bag and what have you and rang the front doorbell. And my father came to the door and his eyes popped open and I gave him a signal not to say anything and he said “Come in” and I went in and mum was just putting lunch on the table, so I was just there in time for that. It was a wonderful return home. I hadn’t had a really proper soaking bath

15:30 for over 12 months and we had a chip heater in this place and I I filled up the bath with very hot water and I had been on atebrin [anti-malarial drug] for nearly 12 months and I was quite yellow in appearance. So I got into this very hot bath and soaked myself over and soaked in this thing for the best part of

16:00 an hour I suppose and when I got out the yellow had disappeared by half but there was a very dirty yellow ring around the water line in the bath, which I had to scrub off. So I had several days off there because when we left Darwin we were given a travelling time and a period of leave before we had to report for

16:30 discharge and the discharge depot at that time was in the Exhibition Buildings. I reported there on July the 1st and went through the rigmarole of discharge, handing this in and handing that in, saying you could keep this and you could keep that and generally getting shot of the place.

17:00 Medical examination, dental examination and then I made probably made one of the worst mistakes I’ve ever made in my life. I didn’t put any time with the rehabilitations officer. All I wanted to be was shot of the air force and get out and didn’t really have anything to do with rehabilitation courses. “No” I said

“not interested in this.”,

17:30 and the fellow to his credit, tried to persuade me otherwise but being young and stupid and what have you, I didn’t listen to his advice. So about 4 o’clock on the afternoon of the 3rd of July I walked out, discharged from the air force. Looking back on it I have

18:00 mixed feelings about it. I stand in awe of the fellows who were up in the front line, who were up in the pointy end of the aircraft, up in the sharp end and the things that they did both in bombing raids, fighter attacks and being in dog fights and all that sort of a thing and I still

18:30 stand in awe of those fellows. I think, or at least I tried to do my stint in the air force to the best of my ability. I signed up to go anywhere in the world and I did that, at least around Australia. So whilst I’m sorry in some regrets – in some regards I really have no other regrets but my respect for those fellows is

19:00 unbounded at the end of the air force time. So I had a bit of time off. My mother had never flown. My younger sister Moira was training at the Crown Street Hospital in Darlinghurst, in Sydney, so I said, “Would you like to go up and see her?” So for all the things that my mother had done for me over the years,

19:30 I took her to Sydney. We flew up, I went in my uniform because even discharged you still got a discount, paid full fare for mum and we stopped at a place in Darlinghurst quite close to the hospital and we had 2 or 3,4, 5 days perhaps with my sister. Any time

20:00 off she had, she joined us. She had her great friend Norma Matthews who was there and we went around Sydney. We did all the things that tourists did in those days and we flew back to Melbourne in a bitterly cold day. Essendon was out of use as a civilian airport at that time and the airliners were using Laverton at the same time. But

20:30 we got home safely and then I had to think what I was going to do for a job.

Sorry Mac can you just be careful with the mic…

And so my father and I had discussed the farm situation even before I had been to Darwin and there had been some correspondence while I was in Darwin

21:00 and dad who was still knocked about with this leg injury, said “What do you think?” and we decided then that no, I wouldn’t go back on the farm, so it was sold. It was sold to the property next door who enlarged on it and a matter of fact it reverted to being part of the original property, the Strathdene Property. Dad then bought a

21:30 small run down orchard out at Diamond Creek and we thought we might make a go of being an orchard. So we moved from Coburg out to there and the orchard was past redemption and was actually condemned and had to be pulled out.

22:00 But we loved living out there and another fellow and I started a dressed poultry round. We had a lot of fun in this, we didn’t make any money but we had a lot of fun. And on this little farm I had a horse and cart and we used to go out early in the mornings and knock up the poultry farmers in the district, often we’d seen them the day before or the night before and they

22:30 said “Oh yes, we’ve got a few boilers that we’ll get rid of.”, and we bought these WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s at the live weight. My partner, Rick, he was a bit keen occasionally and he’d slip into a layer’s pen and might grab a layer at the same time and come out and we’d drive home and hopefully there might’ve been an egg rolling around in the bottom of the car, which we had for breakfast.

23:00 But we then plucked and dressed these WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and loaded them up in an old car that we acquired and we had our rounds in the Kew area. And, oh we did pretty well there for awhile, we had our streets, we had our houses and things like that and we were quite regular turning up once a week. One house we pulled up to

23:30 the lady was a bit irate and she said “When I went to stuff the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK last time” she said “I found these.” And she pulled out the two legs and the giblet of the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . The legs had been dressed, you know cleaned up all that sort of thing, they weren’t unsightly, she said “I didn’t want them.” “Oh” we said

24:00 “don’t you make chicken soup madam?” She said “No.” I said “Well that’s what they’re for, you boil those up and you’ve got your chicken stock.” “Oh” she said “oh, I’ll try it. Are there any in this WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK ?” And we said “Yes” alright she said “That’s fine.” And so quite often we met this little bit of buyer resistance about finding the legs and the giblet in a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . So we didn’t argue, all we did was

24:30 take them out of that WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK and put them in the next one and that person got 4 legs and 2 giblets and we kept on going sort of business. Oh we did this for 3 months. As I said we didn’t make any money but we had many many laughs and a lot of fun but that didn’t seem to be doing anything for the bank balance. So I hunted around and I answered an advertisement for the Post Master General’s Department and I went to

25:00 the Postal School which was in Little Collins Street I think and there trained to be a postal officer. In another words a counter jumper in a suburban Post Office and my first posting was to Carlton North and I enjoyed it there. Had to work Saturday mornings which was a bit of blow and I was still getting malaria

25:30 and I used to get the shakes and have to go home and be treated or you know, just sit down or lie down in the Post Office for an hour or so until I recovered from these attacks. But they were fairly constant you know you'll have your next one in three weeks time or something like and they were pretty severe I might add. But after a while I then got

26:00 posted to the Collins Street Post Office which is near the corner of Collins and Queen Street. It's now a banking museum and it was a very very busy busy post office. It was underground and I was the Mail Officer and there were hundreds of

26:30 parcels posted and letters were posted by the bucket load and there were nothing for it to have 30 or 40 bags of mail at the end of the day to go out. Whilst I was young and fit and all that sort of a thing, I didn't really mind it but I did yearn to get back to a suburban post office and I made this known to the old post master at Carlton North and lo and behold,

27:00 I get finished up back at Carlton North and we were a pretty good team there. Mr Knight was the post master. Dot Callaghan was the senior clerk and she lived just opposite the post office, had been there all her life. A Mr Hanson was the telegraphist and a Mr Northhouse Hanson was the

27:30 money order clerk but we all worked together very very well.

I'm going to have to pause you there, although that's great information I need to ask you a few questions because we're running out of tape as well, I'd like to ask you a few more questions about the war and after the war. You really don't have to continue any further than you. Thank you. Firstly, did you find it difficult to settle down psychologically after the war's over.

Well

28:00 I probably didn't recognise it as being psychological but yes I did have difficulty in settling down. Some of my first efforts of getting a job was driving buses you know, all those sorts of things and this is where it started to hit back at me not spending some time with the rehabilitation officer. A friend of mine who'd been with me had done some work

28:30 at the Agricultural Science establishment and he got into Doukey [?] and went through Doukey and got a Diploma of Education and I could've done it just as easily, just as simply and when he came out he had the offer of 37 jobs he had to choose from, that was the sort of the labour market at that time. Strangely enough he didn't accept any of them - he went into business on his own.

I wish we

29:00 **had that choice.**

Well that's very true, quite different to what today. But it was an opportunity, I did try and make amends, I went to night school and I got my Intermediate and I went on and I got a Leaving Certificate and some few years later I also attended night school at Swinburne

29:30 Tech, where I did subjects mainly of an industrial nature, because by this stage I was in personnel in Industrial Relations and I did subjects akin to that profession. Yeah.

Did you find yourself dreaming about the war?

No I didn't, never had any difficulties of that nature, no.

It was more or less, are you are suggesting that it was the change of lifestyle

30:00 **that you found hard to...**

Yes, yes, the lifestyle was different – and you know I went away a boy and came back a man and I lived at home. I had great respect for my parents. I helped around you know, outside on this small block you know we had a wood fired stove, an open fire and there was a little bit of an orchard with that

30:30 and I pruned that and I cultivated it and did all those sorts of things on weekends you know but that to me was just a follow on of respect for parents and pulling my weight you know, in a family sense. I suppose the other salvation of it all was in I think it was in late 1948 which was only a couple of years after the war was over,

31:00 I met my wife and we were married in 1949. She's been a you know, a wonderful person to have as a wife and to live with. We've got two great children and four great grandchildren and you know we've sort of gone on from there. And anything that I've ever done she's always been a great support, well what's it getting on for now 50,

31:30 50 odd 55, 56 years of being married and it's still a great institution. No family should be without it.

What about during the war, the interactions you had with the Americans, you did mention some, but what were the things about Americans you didn't like?

One thing I didn't mention was I was on leave

32:00 one time and it's not very widely known but there was a battle of Elizabeth Street. It was when either the 6th or the 9th Division returned to Australia, so that would have made it 1942 and I think it might've even been before I joined the air force, I can't quite remember the date but the

32:30 usual animosities between the two groups manifested itself and an enormous brawl broke out between the army, the 9th Division fellows and Americans who were on leave. The Americans had a big camp on Royal Parade which they called Camp Pell and our fellows were probably at Broadmeadows or something of that

33:00 nature. And this was a big fight, it spread right up Elizabeth Street past Collins Street, along Flinders Street up almost to Queen Street and there were thousands involved in it. And I went into town for some reason, it was a Saturday, and I was into town I was either going to the pictures or meeting somebody, I can't

33:30 remember what and I got out of the tram – the tram driver said he's not going further. This was the intersection about Collins Street approximately in Elizabeth Street and I got out of the tram there and this big American Negro charged at me. He was literally foaming at the mouth and he swung a punch and I ducked and he broke his hand

34:00 on the side of the tram and I just got straight back on the tram and went out of it again but there was a huge outcry about it all. And the Military Police from both America and Australia they were here in their dozens separating them and what have you and they weren't too kind on using the batons to get the

34:30 people. Apart from the famous Battle of Brittain – sorry Battle of Brisbane, where arms were involved, it was probably one of the biggest fights between Americans and Australians. I wasn't directly associated with it so I can't add very much more to it there. But my parents had Americans out you know for meals

35:00 at home in Coburg. I met them there and we chatted away. There was, as far as I was concerned, there was no real great animosity. I mentioned the business about the major who wouldn't win the war and the other one was that we always used to wait on American ships to come in to Darwin Harbour and we would save our beer and we

35:30 would go down to these ships – American navy was dry, was then and I think it still is and we would bargain for their beautiful shirts, cotton shirts. You know one bottle of beer for two shirts and things like that. And I even bought a camera off a Yank [Americian], three bottles of beer for one camera and that camera served me for

36:00 oh… 15 or 20 years. It was a box brownie and it's probably still in a box or a drawer here somewhere and I would imagine if you could get film for it, it would still work. But, apart from that no, I had little or no other contact with Americans.

From what you just said, did you actually see any sort of racial tensions in the Americans?

No, no, no

36:30 I never saw it at all, yeah. Once when we made a trip to America, you know when we went on a trip in the 1980's sometime, there was only one time that I ever felt any animosity, it wasn't severe but you know we were in a thing that goes up the side of the mountain in Georgia, near Atlanta.

37:00 The Stone Mountain it was, and there was a group probably about 20 Negro youths on board and there were 5 or 6 of us from this tour party and we were the only whites and we were looked at a bit, sort of a business and you could sense a bit of an undercurrent. Oh I started chatting with one of them and there was no real problem. You know I didn't feel

37:30 threatened, I just felt there was a bit of tension there.

And also you served with the Dutch, NEI [Netherlands East Indies]?

Oh no the Dutch they were flying their countrymen who had been captured by the Japanese and had been imprisoned mainly in Java and Batavia and the cities around there,

38:00 and they were flying them back to Sydney. They were using Catalinas and the pilots were under contract and they really pushed those aircraft. The Dutch came down and had three months accommodation etc paid by their government and they were accommodated in Sydney. I don't know what they did but there were men

38:30 and women and children and everything else like that. And they hammered away and we refuelled the aircraft and they were off and gone. The children, they might give them a leg stretch to take them on to the pier and they'd run up and down the jetty at East Arm but that was all. As far as the Dutch service people, the Netherlands East Indies as they were called there in those days, no, my contact was minor,

39:00 literally nil. The other bit of a contact with an American was at Malalar when a Kittyhawk landed and we were you know after hand pushing these old Avro Ansons and Oxfords around this, this Kittyhawk, a real war plane had come in you know had guns and all that sort of thing and we all crowded around it sort of business

39:30 and the pilot got out and he said “Where am I?” and we said “Malalar” “Oh” he said “is that in South Australia?” We said “Yes”, he said “I want to go to Mount Gambier?” and somebody said “You’d better go up and see the duty pilot and you know get your compass bearings and all things like that.” “Buddy,” he said “I wouldn’t know

40:00 what they were talking about.” He said “Don’t know anything about those,” he said “just point.” He took off in the direction that we pointed. We never ever heard that he crashed or whether he ever got to Mount Gambier or not, we’ll never know.

Now we are absolutely out of time we’ve only got about a minute and half left. Is there anything else you’d like to say for posterity, for the historical record that you haven’t mentioned to us?

No, I think that now I’m getting a deal of satisfaction out of life, by being a volunteer guide at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance. I go in there every Tuesday morning for 3 hours and give guided tours to anybody who comes along. There are organised parties,

40:30 unorganised parties. There are people just come, drift in and I find that I hope I’m doing something worthwhile for e the sacrifice that was made on behalf of all Australians in that regard. Yes, I get a lot of pleasure out of it as a matter of fact and particularly I like teenagers,

41:00 just at a good impressionable age and many school parties come in and they’re very good and they say thank you and go away, so I think I’ve done a good job.

Okay, we’d like to thank you very much for your time today. Good on you.

INTERVIEW ENDS