Australians at War Film Archive

Earle Evans - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Can you give us a summary of your life?**

Yes. I was born on the 16th of August, 1924. There's a bit of controversy about that date. My mother swears it was then, but my father didn't get to register me until the 17th, I believe. So officially

01:00 it's the 17th. Anyway I was born in the country in a small house on a farm at a place called Burran Down about 50 miles west of Kingaroy. It was on a land grant under the soldier settlement scheme that came about after World War I. We lived there until 1928. We were forced to leave the property due to the drought and poor circumstances and the family moved

01:30 to Sandgate down near bayside Brisbane where I grew up. I went to school at Sandgate at the Sandgate state school and in 1936 we moved up to Wilston. I went to school at the industrial high school and the state high school. I left school at the age of 15,

02:00 went to work. My first job was that of a cadet draftsman with the then City Electric Light Company. It lasted 12 months. From there I went to the State Public Service and worked in the Public Curator's office in Edward Street. I was there working when war broke out. At that time

02:30 I spent most of my weekends in summer surfing at Mooloolaba where I was a member of the surf club, along with my brother and many of our friends, and many of them, well all of them actually, joined the services and some survived, some didn't. But I joined up in 1942 when I became 18. I was a volunteer in

03:00 the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] under the Empire Air Training Scheme and went into camp at Bradfield Park [Sydney] in early October. I was only there for four weeks and went from there to Maryborough where I trained as a wireless operator. That finished after six months in May of '43.

03:30 I did a gunnery course at Evans Head, which was a month long, and qualified as a wireless air gunner and was immediately promoted to the rank of sergeant which I found rather amusing really because my impressions of sergeants were that they had a lot of responsibility. Well I didn't have any at all. I was too young

04:00 to be posted overseas, strangely enough. You had to be 19 and I was not 19, so I was sent to Cootamundra in central west New South Wales in the dead of winter which was pretty hard on a sunny Queenslander, and my job there was to fly as a crewman on Avro Ansons [twin-engined transports/bombers] and assist in the training of navigators. I was only there for a short while when I was then posted to

04:30 East Sale in Victoria to undergo training on Beaufort bombers. The assignment for the squadrons was that they were to join torpedo bombing, which I didn't think was a very good idea. Anyway, fortunately for me the wharfies [waterside workers] went on strike and before I left Sydney I was sent to the wharves to load the bombs for New Guinea along with all of my friends.

05:00 During the night after all the exercises and strenuous efforts of shifting these 500 pounders around, I developed a cramp in the stomach which turned to be acute appendicitis. So fate intervened and I didn't go to East Sale, which was jolly good for me because, after two weeks' recuperation from the operation, I did go to Sale but I was grounded on medical grounds; but in that intervening period two of my friends were already

05:30 missing, dead, very sad. Many of the chaps didn't survive. Anyway, they sent me then to Mascot, which was a much kinder posting. I enjoyed Mascot. Sydney was a lovely town in those days and it was all new to me. I really enjoyed living there. My time off was very good. The duties at Mascot were mostly related to army

06:00 cooperation, flying as targets for the military installations along the Heads, Botany Heads and Sydney Harbour, and we would fly in Avro Ansons and they would shoot at us but fuse their shells [to explode] 1,000 feet short [of the aircraft], which was rather disconcerting. But none the less, it must've been

successful because they either missed or their fuses were right but we're still here. For the later part of my time there

06:30 I was crewed up with Billy Wiltshire and Ray Soden and we went to Darwin in the Anson, and we did some calibration work on the Darwin radar. After Mascot I was posted to Rathmines to do an OTU [Officer Training] on Catalinas [flying boats] which took us a month and from there I was posted to 20 Squadron in Cairns. Later to 42 Squadron

07:00 in Melville Bay, from which we did mine laying in areas right throughout the Netherlands East Indies as it was then known [now Indonesia], and after six months there I went to Madang as a member of the newly formed 111 Air Sea Rescue Flight. In Madang we were detailed to cover the Beaufort bomber strikes around New Britain and

07:30 New Ireland. At the end of my tour of duty I came back to Brisbane, came back to Rathmines, came home on leave and it was while I was home on leave that the war finished. I was in Brisbane the day peace was declared and I remember seeing that fellow dancing down the street [famous press photo]. After the war, or after the cessation of hostilities, the Catalina squadrons were employed

08:00 travelling up to the Netherlands to return service personnel who'd been in hospital or who had been injured, and we did a few flights each, bringing back about 30 at a time to different parts of Australia. I was discharged then in February of 1946. I had met my wife while I was on leave prior to Christmas and after I got discharged we were getting a bit serious

08:30 and we got married in July 1946. While I'd been away my home had sort of been decimated in a way. My two sisters had married and moved out of home. My mother had died and my brother was married. So there was only Dad and I, so it was quite a change for me. That was one of the reasons I thought I needed a home of my own and entered into an early marriage, which

09:00 contrary to popular opinion has seemed to have lasted quite a while. I didn't go back to the Public Curator after the war. I wanted to be more technical and work with my hands, so I sought a job with the PMG Department [Postmaster General's] which is now called Telecom I think. Anyway we were posted to Rockhampton

09:30 before we were married and that sort of brought the event forward a bit so we could go together and we spent a couple of years in Rocky [Rockhampton]. Our daughter was born there. We came back to Brisbane and I stayed with the PMG as a technician until 1952 when I joined the Civil Aviation Department as a clerk. The opportunity presented itself for me to

10:00 apply for air traffic control and eventually I was accepted and the rest of my working career was spent as an air traffic controller. I worked in control towers in Sydney's Mascot Airport, Brisbane, Coolangatta and Cairns. I progressed through air traffic control to, I suppose you'd call it the highest rated position, of active air traffic control and when I retired I was in charge of the regular

10:30 shift at the radar centre at Brisbane Airport. I retired at age 60, it was compulsory. They were very kind to me because I was lucky to be on the superannuation scheme and I've enjoyed my retirement immensely. So all in all I suppose you could say, even though people talk about the hardships of the early days of the '20s and '30s and the intervention of the World War, my life's been rather kind to

11:00 me. I survived the war without serious injury, without any injury really, and without any trauma. My period of operations was successful and I suppose you could say uneventful. So that's me in a nutshell.

Can you take us back to your

11:30 **early years on the farm? Can you describe your childhood and family life?**

Well I can't take you back to the farm because I was only four when we left there, but from what my parents told me it was a happy childhood but a rather poor circumstance. My Dad was a very industrious fellow and he accepted this 1,000 acre grant from the government and sold up his small holding

12:00 close to Kingaroy and gave up his school teaching job and moved his wife and I think maybe one child out to the property. The property was just bush and scrub, no home, no fences and it had to be cleared and the house built and the fences built, labour hired. All of that costs money and a lot of hard work. My father

12:30 was a veteran of Gallipoli and Flanders and he had a pretty severe handicap in as much as in the last month of World War I he was shot and half his left hand was blown away. He received a small pension for that for all of his life actually, which was of great benefit to us during the Depression years, but it was quite a handicap

13:00 as far as physical labour was concerned, and he worked very hard on that farm. He brought it from virgin scrub so I'm told to a dairy herd of 126 with milking machines and a couple of cultivated sections growing cotton. The cotton was a failure. It flowered and bloomed and all that sort of

13:30 thing but the costs of picking was too intensive and you had to replant every year. A lot of problems with growing cotton on that area in those times, Dad told me. So that was a waste of money and a waste of

time. The dairy was very good. It was successful until the intervention of the drought. The property was on the banks of the Boyne River which is at best a western Queensland

14:00 river of sand beds and waterholes. It deteriorated so I'm told to the stage where our only water came from a sink that Dad dug in the river bed, which was 30 feet deep. That's a big heap of sand to dig out, and in the bottom of that hole they had an ordinary washing up dish. In those days they were made of tin plate with holes punctured in the bottom so that the water

14:30 that was there could seep up and Dad said they used to collect one dishful of water a day and that was to look after the family, washing, cooking, all that sort of stuff. The cattle just died of thirst. Anyway, to cut the story short they walked off the property in 1928 stony broke [destitute], no stock left and no equity in any of the things that we had to leave behind. So we came to Sandgate

15:00 where we lived in a small house in Todd Street. I don't remember that. My first memories are when we moved from Todd Street to Gowan Street and I was a little over four. I remember that quite well and I remember then after about six months there we moved to a house just up the road which was bigger and large enough. It had three bedrooms and an open verandah all around which was quite pleasant.

15:30 My childhood was a happy childhood. I started school at the age, I wasn't even five, and in those days they were very modern. They had this preschool and we used to have what they called babies' classes, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th babies. You could start 1st babies at 4 and you did six months in each one until you got to five, you know, a year of five, and then you'd go to school. Well I started at four and a half. My brother, I had

16:00 two sisters and a brother all older than me, they would take me to school and I thoroughly enjoyed it except that some of the lady teachers must've thought I was cuddly and wanted to take me into their lunchroom at lunchtime and cuddle me and talk to me and I thought, "To hell with this!." So I said a few swear words, which I knew a lot of,

16:30 and I got chastised. I got my mouth washed out and I was never invited back there again, to which I was very grateful. Nonetheless, school was pleasant. I remember taking one of my childhood friends for his first day at school. He was four and I was going on five and I thought I was really good, really clever. Anyway, school was great. As I got a little bit older I learned to swim.

17:00 Naturally, we lived at a beachside place and my sisters and my brother, they could swim. So my life was spent school, swimming, canoeing, boating, scouting, riding bikes, catching birds, getting birds' eggs, you name it. It was a wonderful free and easy life. My parents were strict parents. They really taught us a good sense of moral values, respect

17:30 for elders, respect for the law and as long as we maintained those principles we could come and go just as we felt pleased to, and I had a really free and easy life. By the time I was nine I had a canoe which my brother and I had saved up for. We paid for it. It cost 30 shillings to have it made. It was made out of lathe frame and canvas and painted

18:00 and it was 12 foot long. We stored it under the house, we carried it on our shoulders to the creek and we paddled all around the shores of Sandgate. We had a wonderful time.

How was your family affected by the Depression?

We were affected quite markedly in as much as my father had a lot of trouble getting employment. He ended up settling down as a wharf labourer.

18:30 Under the conditions of those days, once you became registered as a wharf labourer to get employment, you had to go to the sheds on the wharves and wait until something turned up, and then if you were lucky you got the job. If you weren't, you went home. I can remember him being away from home for as long as three days to bring home one day's pay and he was very very thin I can tell you, especially with his crook [crippled] hand. He said loading the wool bales was the worst because

19:00 they used a metal hook and it was all right handed for him because he couldn't hold it in his left hand and he'd come home and he'd absolutely had it, [exhausted] but he was a happy man and he was a very keen lover of birds. He had a lot of caged birds. He always managed to get some money and with his small pension we survived the Depression quite well. We were never hungry, although the food was plain. You hear them talk of

19:30 bread and milk and sugar for breakfast, and bread and dripping with pepper and salt, well, we had our share of that. Most of the meals were either stews or things like that. I can't remember as a child eating steak or bacon. We had poultry. All the people raised their own poultry in their yards and we had home grown vegetables and fruit so we did

20:00 pretty well. Our neighbours didn't fare so well. The next door chap, his name was Charlie Lee. Charlie was an expert fitter and turner and he was unemployed, which was a tragedy. Well they lost their home they were renting. They had to leave and they went and settled on the banks of Cabbage Tree Creek at Shorncliffe. There they joined in the tent city

20:30 which was comprised of approximately 500 families I should imagine living in home made tents made out of everything, bits of canvas, bits of flat iron, half tanks and these families lived there for quite a few

years. All the families were recipients of what they called relief; they were issued with a voucher by the police and they

21:00 could cash that voucher at the grocery stores. They were in desperate straits, they really were, and quite often some of Mum's friends would borrow money from her because we did have some income and she would gladly give it to them. It was really a wonderful society. Everybody knew everybody and everybody were friends. They were all friends. There were no religious boundaries, nothing like that.

21:30 Amongst my circle of boyhood friends, I'm by birth I'm a Protestant, Church of England. I had friends from all denominations, Catholic, Jewish, some friends were from families who'd come from I think Pakistan. I'm not sure, but judging by their names they came from that area. There was one group called, their name was Ramkeema

22:00 I should imagine that would either be from some part of south east Australia, but we didn't take any notice. I didn't even consider at the time that they just were different to anybody else. That was just their name. Their skin colour was slightly different but that made no difference either, and I think you'll find that boys and girls of our generation were like that, and possibly it was due to the influence of our parents' involvement in overseas travel during the war in World War I. They met all sorts of people and did

22:30 all sorts of things. So all in all, my childhood was very very pleasant.

Can you tell me about some of the games you used to play?

Yes. Traditional sports of course were in vogue. There was cricket and football which were played both privately and at school. The schools were poorly equipped and at our school there was one cricket pitch which was made of concrete,

23:00 but with a school of hundreds and hundreds of kids that was too small, so we prepared pitches for ourselves in the surrounding grasslands, just mark them out and they were cricket pitches. We played there most of the time, the younger ones. It wasn't until you got into year 7 that you could use the cricket pitch, but we played at home, on the streets. Of course there weren't many cars about, and also

23:30 on the Sandgate golf course there was a cricket oval, we played there and we used to play the 'tent mob' as we called them. They had a team and we had a team and we were the 'top mob' because we lived at Shorncliffe which was hilly, and the people who lived at Sandgate, they were the 'bottom mob', maybe in relation to the height of the hills and that sort of thing, and the people from the tents were the 'tent mob' and we had quite a good competition. We had no gear, anybody who owned a bat and wickets was captain and

24:00 that was the way it went. So that was cricket. Footy was much the same, but in those days things used to come in cycles. The children at school, suddenly someone would turn up with a spinning top and then tops would be it for a couple of weeks and there'd be kids playing tops all over the place. They're very dangerous because they had sharp points, some of them, and they'd wind a piece of string around them and let go, and if it worked right they'd hit the ground and spin. If it didn't, they'd go anywhere. So

24:30 you had to have your eyes about you.

Were children injured by those?

The odd couple, but kids were pretty resourceful. You'd be surprised how quick you can get out of the way. Very good training, I think. I think possibly the difference today, the children of today are a little bit too cloistered and mollycoddled [sheltered] a bit. God, if my Mum and Dad had seen some of the things we got up to when we were out in the bush they probably wouldn't have let us go again, but we all had these short axes called a tommy axe,

25:00 and knives, and we'd get out in the bush and we'd chop down trees and we'd build humpies [huts] and all sorts of stuff. But we weren't vandals. We were pretty careful with what we did, and I suppose they wouldn't like it today. Most of the things we did we did on the Boondall Wetlands which are so famous today. But we didn't do it any harm apparently. Anyway, they were the tops and then they would have marbles.

25:30 The girls, I don't know what games, they had some funny games they played. But the boys would play bedlam. Have you ever heard of bedlam? Well the way you play bedlam is you draw a square on the ground and that's bedlam and you're either in or you're out. Now if you're out, if one of those that are in are after you, you've got to run like hell. If they catch you, in you go, and you stay in until one of the 'outs' can run right through the middle

26:00 and let everybody out. Well it's a terrific game. It was non stop running and it was really good for your level of fitness. All of the children that I went to school with could run for miles, really run hard for miles and miles. I noticed when I joined the services we had to march, not march, we were rabble, we had to walk from the rail station

26:30 at Lindfield to our camp at Bradfield Park, which was about a mile and a half or two miles, I suppose and we had to carry our belongings. Well our belongings were just our clothing and that which we had

in our ex-school cases. Well I'm off walking along thinking, "Well this is good, we'll soon be there and get started on this business", and I turned up as fresh as a trout with my school case and there were blokes straggling all along the road behind me and I think

27:00 they were the suburban kids who hadn't had the sort of rough and tumble of childhood that we enjoyed so much. Anyway those were the main games we played. As I say they were sort of seasonal things and they would come and go year in, year out. Another game we played was called 'cat' and it was home devised game by children. You'd take a piece of timber an inch

27:30 square, you'd cut it about five inches long and sharpen the ends, and you'd mark 1,2,3,4 on the sides. You had a piece of broomstick, you'd dig a small hole in the ground and lie the cat on it so that one point protruded over the hole and you would whack that with a stick and cause it to jump up in the air and you would belt it or try to, and it would go. And of course if one of the others caught it you were out. If it didn't,

28:00 one of the receivers would go and get it and he'd say, "It's three," which meant you had three more hits and they would take the stick and they would measure from the hole to wear the 'cat' landed and that was the score. You keep that, and then you would have your remaining turns. After you'd had that number of turns you were out and someone else was in. I tell you that was a dangerous game too because the points on the cat could be quite sharp and when you'd hit it, it would

28:30 be travelling and spinning over and over and over and you had to catch it, but we caught it. Nobody seemed to get seriously injured so it wasn't too bad. It was a very good game and by gee, your coordination improved no end. Anyway those were the games we played.

What about movies or going into town?

Well, movies were a treat. Money was a premium and we didn't go a lot, but when we did there

29:00 were four theatres at Sandgate. Our favourite was known as the Beach, obviously it fronted onto the beach and it had those double canvas chairs and we'd go and sit in those and watch the shows. The movies were Tom Mix which was a cowboy thing. Rin Tin Tin was a dog like Lassie only an Alsatian.

29:30 Detective stories, spooky stuff, and a serial that was on I remember well, mainly because of my sister, it was the Dr Fu Manchu. Now Dr Fu Manchu was a Chinaman, would you believe, and he had this most dreadful droopy moustache and pigtails and he was evil. He was, and every chapter ended up where the heroine was in dire peril and about to get eaten by a crocodile

30:00 or something and the hero was fast approaching and then you'd have to wait until next week. But my sister, she was so terrified that she would sit with her little coat over her head and she'd watch Fu Manchu through the sleeve, and the first signs of any real calamity she'd close it up and scream. Wow, I'll never forget Dr Fu Manchu. But anyway, the movies were good.

30:30 The advertising for the movies , apart from the billboards, was often done by aerial advertising. A small plane would come around and throw out millions of pieces of paper, pamphlets advertising the movies, and on one in a million there would be a free pass. So that was a great thing for the kids. As soon as that plane came over we were trying to get that free pass, and of course

31:00 you'd pick them up, have a look, if it wasn't the free pass you'd just let it go. You didn't crumple it up because that would give someone else an unfair advantage, and the place was a mess. Anyway, I didn't ever get a free pass. My brother got one but I didn't. Anyway, anytime you could go to the pictures they would give you a little ticket when you went in and they'd have a raffle and that was a big too.

31:30 Sometimes people, well every week someone would win. I remember one Christmas my brother won a whole ham and I don't think we'd ever seen a ham in our life. So that was a thrill, and blow me down, a year later he won a lounge suit, so that was a big thrill. But that was the local movies, but as I say we didn't go a lot. I used to go, I remember before I started school, I was very young then, my mother had to go to the city

32:00 by train to collect my father's pension. So that was the only time she ever went to the city, so she'd get all togged [dressed] up and me too, and off we'd go on the train which was a real thrill again and we would on those days, we would normally go to the Regent and see a movie. The movies were silent, silent movies. I remember Charlie Chaplin, Felix the Cat, those

32:30 sort of things, and the highlight of the day I'd have a pie and peas at MacDonald's Café in Queen Street. I think my mother splurged once in a while.

Can you remember what Brisbane was like when you were a child?

Oh, yes, the trams. The trams were a great institution. You always knew where you were going with a tram because they had the name written on the front. I had trouble with them because my first experience on my own

33:00 on trams I went over to the state high school in South Brisbane and I'd never been by myself and I had the responsibility of catching the right tram. I got off the tram, went to school, came out of school and I'm standing there waiting for this jolly tram and they're all going the wrong way. I didn't realise that

you had to cross the street. Anyway, it only took me a short while to wake up to that and from there on in I was alright. I had to catch the tram back to the city and then walk to the rail

33:30 station and catch a train to get home.

How long did it take from Sandgate to the city?

Yeah, well from Sandgate to the city was approximately an hour's journey, 13 stops, and they were steam trains of course and they used to make a lot of noise and blow out a lot of smoke and if you had the windows

34:00 up you'd get coal dust in your eyes, and it used to hurt. But from when we moved up to Wilston, from Wilston to the city was only about 12 or 15 minutes, same trains. That's where I actually first met my wife. She was a young girl going to work and I was a young boy going to work and we used to talk to each other on the train and that was the extent of our association. We would just see each other

34:30 on the train and have a bit of a chat and that was it. It wasn't until I came home from the war that I thought she mightn't be too bad.

How old were you when you met?

I'd be 16 I suppose, but we had no association with each other in any way at all other than that and we didn't meet up again until I came home on leave and I thought, "Well, I might ask that young lady out." So that's how that happened. I was lucky my Dad had a car and

35:00 I had a friend who had a friend who knew a garage proprietor who was prepared to sell black market petrol, because you couldn't get petrol, but through this double jointed association I managed to get a tank of petrol every now and again at a most exorbitant price of five shillings a gallon. You know, just imagine that. You know what five shillings is worth today. Well I suppose the equivalent money value is 50 cents, but

35:30 five shillings in those days was a lot. I think our service pay was six shillings a day, but I could get this petrol and we'd go for a day's outing down to Coolangatta, wonderful.

Can you tell us a little bit more about your father, what he told you of his war experiences?

Dad was a volunteer in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and

36:00 he sailed from Australia on that fleet that assembled and left from Albany in West Australia. I've since been there and they've got a wonderful set of memorabilia there, with pictures of the fleet. I was very interested in that. Anyway, he went from there. He went from there I think to Egypt, somewhere in the Middle East and they stayed there for quite some time. His

36:30 stories of the people of that area were wide and varied. Some were complimentary, some uncomplimentary. He had visited the pyramids and the Sphinx and typical of Australians, he'd brought home a pyramid about two and a half inches square on the base, and it was made out of alabaster stolen

37:00 from the alabaster on the peaks of the pyramids of the day. Apparently the pyramids in their original state were covered with alabaster which is a white substance something like ivory, and our family had that pyramid. I don't know where it is now, probably my elder sister has it, but it was used as a paper weight and it was a beautiful thing. That was one of his souvenirs from Italy. From there he went to Gallipoli

37:30 and he went into Gallipoli as the first reinforcements. He survived Gallipoli without any trouble. He told us many many stories about the Turks and their ferociousness, their weaponry. They used to send over things, [missiles] a type of mortar - one was called a whiz bang, mainly because of the noise it made. Apparently it went "whiz bang!." You could

38:00 hear the whiz and then you'd duck. The other one that was a skirmish thing was called a Mangelwurzel, I think Mangelwurtzel? It was a type of a mortar, just like a drum of explosive they'd fire out of a mortar, and it would land and blow everyone up. Anyway he told some pretty sad tales about many of his friends getting wounded and that sort of stuff. From there he went to France

38:30 and he served in Flanders. He told us stories about Bullecourt and Poisiers and Vimy Ridge, Villers-Bretonneux, places like that. So the life in the trenches, how all the people used to get trench foot, how they had to take great care of themselves living in the mud and slush most of the time. They went to and from everywhere on sort of duckboards. [plank walkways] If you got off the boards you were in big trouble.

39:00 He told us stories of charges, what they used to call going over the top, where they'd get out of their trench and run like mad at the enemy, people falling all around, brutality, having to put a bayonet into another human being and to get it out you either had to stand on his chest or fire the bullet to blast the gun out of the dead body. It was pretty crook [bad].

39:30 Even though he told us all these stories, the emphasis on them all was how horrible war was, and how he never wanted to see another one or see his family involved, and I suppose in that sense it was a real

education for us, particularly for the boys. As I say he was wounded towards the end of the war and

40:00 was in England when it finished. He was lucky, he wasn't killed and he had relatives in England. See, my great grandfather came to Australia in the reign of Queen Victoria and his job was to assist in the development of the Queensland railways and that's how all of his sons became involved in rail.

40:30 End of tape

Tape 2

00:33 **OK, can you tell us a little bit more about your father's war experience?**

During the campaigns in World War I it was quite common really for the officers and the NCOs [non-commissioned officers] as well as many of the others to lose their lives or be taken out of battle because of circumstance, and the custom was then that the

01:00 most senior person would promote somebody so that they would have the line of command still intact. In those circumstances my father went from private to corporal to sergeant and back again a few times. It was during one of his periods as sergeant, acting mind you, that he came across those binoculars I showed you which were lying in the mud beside the body of a German officer, and of course

01:30 only officers had binoculars, field glasses, and so my father must've thought, "Well, I wouldn't mind a pair of binoculars because they come in handy." He was a pretty good shot and often did what they call sniper duties and the binoculars came in handy for that. It must've been pretty crook [bad] to be a sniper and line up on some poor sod and put him out of his misery, but

02:00 strangely enough there was never any hatred or animosity that my father showed towards either the Turks or the Germans. His philosophy or his attitude was that, well, they were just soldiers like him. They had a job to do and they did it to the best of their ability and he didn't necessarily have any personal animosity towards them as individuals. He enjoyed telling us about

02:30 the stories of the war and about the aeroplanes coming over with their bombs and about the aerial battles between the British aviators and the Germans and about seeing the Red Baron [German fighter ace] and all that sort of stuff. It was quite exciting stuff for kids, very good. Anyway, that's about the summation of my father's war experiences as I know it.

We've met quite a few people whose father's didn't seem to want to talk about their war experiences, what sort of person was your father?

03:00 Well he was a great narrator. He did work sometimes a school teacher. He was quite well educated for his time and he had a good command of the language. He could really speak well and he was a great reader of poetry and things like that, and in those days we didn't have the entertainment of television. We didn't have radio as such. My first memories of radio,

03:30 we had a crystal set. You may not know what a crystal set is. Well, it's the most elementary type of a radio receiver that you can get and you have to have earphones to listen to it, and to tune it in you have a crystal made out of silver lead and a little tiny connector which was called a cat's whisker. It was a little tiny coiled piece of wire.By carefully placing this on the

04:00 silver lead crystal you would get a little electrical cell coupled up to a tuning coil which was usually just a lot of wire tied around a piece of cylindrical paper with little pieces exposed every now and again. And you would hook a connector onto that with an alligator clip, and that gave you your tuning, to tune in your station. In connection with that there was a tunable condenser.

04:30 So you would put the cat's whisker on, select which coil you wanted, and fiddle around until you got some voice. And we used to listen with great interest to the cricket, from England mind you. We didn't know at the time, but it was that fellow McGillvray [commentator] and it was all sent from England to Australia by telegraph, telegram and he would interpret it and he would give a ball by

05:00 ball description of Don Bradman making 100, or Ponsford or Oldfield or Kippax, [cricket heroes] and we loved these men, but we had to take the headphones apart. There were four of us and my father. We only had two sets of headphones. We had to take them apart and have one each. Take turns, and you'd hear this click, "And Ponsford scored another four," he'd say, and we though it was great. He'd give you a very graphic description of the cricket, but it was

05:30 always in the middle of the night because northern hemisphere and always in the middle of winter and it was bitterly cold, but we had a heater. It was a kerosene heater. It was an upright thing like a vacuum cleaner standing on end, and the heat came out of the top. Well Mum would put a pot of milk on there and eventually that would warm up and we'd have some nice hot cocoa and listen to the cricket and go to

06:00 bed tired, and think life was wonderful. But because of the lack of other entertainments parents

entertained their children by either reading to them or telling them life stories, playing cards. We played all sorts of cards as kids. My mother and Dad were keen bridge players. They used to have friends around and they'd play bridge, we'd play all sorts of stuff.

06:30 But there was never a dull moment, and really I think we were more fortunate in many ways because we had a real close commitment of family. We really were a family. Everybody was involved to the enth degree in everything that went on. We helped out around the house. We helped out around the yard and our parents

07:00 encouraged us in our sporting activities. They'd encourage us in our little cricket games and even umpire for us and all that. My Mum and Dad played tennis, we'd go and watch them. All in all it was pretty good.

You said your father was a great reciter of poetry?

He was. His favourite was Banjo Paterson of course. I've got some books here I'll show you later on if you like. In those times, a wedding present, a book of the works of

07:30 Byron or Longfellow or Wordsworth would be considered an absolute gem of a gift to give somebody. Well I've got those, they've been in our family for a long long time and I treasure them greatly. My eldest sister wants them but she's not going to get them, they're mine. But anyway, that's it.

Do you remember any of the poems that were your favourites as a boy?

Yeah. I used to love The Man From Snowy River and Salt Bush Bill and what's it, The

08:00 Man From Iron Bark and The Sentimental Bloke, CJ Dennis, have you read that? Yeah, it's lovely, isn't it? Well those were Dad's favourites. He could recite Banjo Paterson hour on hour if he wanted to. I know a few of them but I'm nowhere near as good as him. He was really terrific.

You don't want to recite your favourite for us from those days?

Well, I don't think so.

OK. What about your mother, what sort of person was she?

She was a very lovely gentle lady.

08:30 She had a tragic life, in many ways. She loved her family and she was descended from middle class English folk. Her father worked in India with the Burns Philp shipping company and came to Australia and took the job as manager with Burns Philp Cairns.

09:00 His name was Hansford, and they were quite well to do, but unfortunately he liked a drop of 'the beer that cheers' or whatever it was. Of course being in that industry and mixing with those sort of people I suppose it was only natural. He died in the period I think around, about or just before or just early in World War

09:30 I, and the family always told us that he was a distinguished gentleman. Of course he was, and that he died from the flu. We finally, some silly coot did the family tree and we found out he died from cirrhosis of the liver, which I suppose was fair enough. That's probably why I like beer myself so much. Anyway, he was to all accounts

10:00 a very distinguished gentleman and my grandmother was a very nice elderly ladylike lady. She brought her children up well. She had a number of children, three boys and two girls. They all had families, so there are a lot of them around. Mum went to school in Brisbane, to a school that was

10:30 called the Normal School, and that was in Edward Street where the public curators and state government insurance offices eventually came to, and God knows where they've gone now. That building's still there, but the Normal School building isn't, that's where she went to school. They lived in Toowong. She met my father when he was a student at the Brisbane Boys' Grammar School

11:00 and at that time they were living on Petrie Terrace in one of those terrace homes, and that's where Mum and Dad met. Anyway after World War I, like me, he went and got himself married pretty quick. So it seemed to be the thing for our family to do those sorts of thing. But Mum was very kind, very gentle. I have no recollection of my mother ever saying a cross word to me or my sisters or brothers, but she had a pretty

11:30 good weapon. She would say, "Now you know that's wrong. When your father comes home I'm going to tell him what you've done and he'll decide your punishment," and by crikey sometimes he did and sometimes it was pretty severe, but usually it was just a reprimand. Like for serious infringements it was usually a good whack which didn't do us any harm I think. I've got a lot brownie points [credit] for the whacks I should've got that I didn't. So I think maybe 'spare the rod's' a pretty good

12:00 adage, isn't it? But anyway, that was Mum, she was a lovely lady, and her and her friends used to enjoy morning and afternoon teas together. They'd visit each other, take their littlies [children] along when they were pre-schoolers, and they would play the piano. They would eat the hostess's cakes and scones

of which they were all famous and all competing with one another and have a lovely chat.

12:30 If you happened to be dragged along as a child it was most embarrassing because you either had to sing in front of the piano or say a piece of poetry or some stupid thing and be dressed up. It was always an embarrassment for me. But anyway, that was Mum and that was the way she liked to live her life, and she had it pretty tough. She had four children. Three of them were born in hospitals, the elder three, but I was born in a house out in the bush with no medical assistance

13:00 at all. Mum was attended by a lady from the neighbour farm. Her name was Pankhurst, and many years later strangely enough her sister came and lived in the house at the back of us next door; and that's where I learnt about the fact that her sister, Mrs Pankhurst, was midwife to my mother. But as I say, Mum had a pretty rough life in those days out on the farm because she was a city girl. She had no idea of this country life. But she survived it and

13:30 she survived the Depression, but she didn't survive World War II. My brother was missing in action in New Guinea. He'd got cut off by the Japanese at around about Wau on the north coast and my mother took the news very hard. As a matter of fact it wasn't long after that that she passed away. She had high blood pressure and

14:00 she was very busy with my aunty, they used to do war work, making things and knitting socks and all that sort of stuff, and anyway the shock of my brother's apparent death must've been too much for her. Fortunately my brother wasn't dead. He walked from the north of New Guinea, right across the Owen Stanley's [Ranges] to Port Moresby, keeping away from the battle area where the Japs were advancing towards the Kokoda Trail

14:30 and he made his way back and rejoined his outfit in Port Moresby. Finished his time up there before he came home. So it was pretty tough for Mum. As I say, you don't take any notice of your parents when you're young.

As a boy growing up what was your view of war from what you'd heard from your father? What was your impression of what war would be like?

15:00 Pretty dreadful. I didn't want to be in it. In the late '30s, from 1936 on there was a lot of propaganda. On the newsreels there were always pictures of the German military parades, of the Hitler Youth and this mass hysteria that used to go on. You probably don't know about it, but they'd stand in their thousands and they'd shout, "Sieg heil!

15:30 Sieg heil!" and salute, and Hitler would stand there with his hair over his eye and screaming and shouting. We used to think he was a bit of ratbag in reality. But the signs were there and things were happening. I remember in 1936 it was that Mussolini, they were doing the same thing in Italy, same sort of mass hysteria stuff and they invaded what was then called Abyssinia and marched over them and it was heralded

16:00 throughout the papers, the world, such a marvellous military victory, whereas the poor coots [Abyssinian people] had nothing to defend themselves with anyway. But as I say, the signs of international conflict were there for all to see and on the radio every weekend there was a chap, his name was Dr Goddard, and Dr Goddard used to give this serial The Book of Time, and he would give a current affairs situation of the world and how

16:30 the nations were building and preparing and what he thought would be the outcome, that there would be war. There would be a war with Germany, there would be a war with Italy and Japan, and he kept saying that every weekend month after month after month, and his slogan was "500 planes for the defence of Australia", and he repeated that and repeated it and I think the message finally got through to the government because

17:00 at the time the Japanese came into the war, like at the beginning of the war when the Germans and Brits went to war, we had a very very limited airforce. But by the time the Japanese came into the war we had an airforce. We had 24 Catalinas [flying boats] plus other things, but we had 24 long range reconnaissance and bombing capable aircraft, it was the first of the Catalinas that came out. We had 24 of them,

17:30 and I think it might've been people like that Dr Goddard and others. Obviously he had many contemporaries, those that probably influenced the government of the day that they had to get some sort of preparedness. So that's how that came about.

So as a teenager what were your thoughts about what was happening?

Well, before the outbreak of World War II we were saying, "No, it won't

18:00 happen, they'll settle down. They must be like us, who wants a war anyway? Who's going to win, what's it all about?" So we didn't take much notice. We spent our weekends up the beach surfing and having a good time, and when it did start, my brother was old enough to join up. I wasn't, but he was and there was quite a lot of controversy between him and Dad because my brother wanted to do what his father did. He wanted to go and join the AIF and Dad said, "You're not going. I'm not

18:30 going to sign your papers." You had to get signed up because you were under 21. He said, "You're not

going Bob, you're not going." So my brother was quite upset about it. Some of his friends had already gone and you can imagine how he felt. Anyway they formed a defence corps called the National Service and my brother said, "Well, can I join the National Service and sign up to

19:00 defend Australia?" And he said, "You can do that, I'll accept that, but you're not going to join up and go over there to fight for them. If you want to fight for anybody fight for us." So he joined that and unfortunately the men who joined the National Defence Corps as it was called, were in a way ridiculed. They were more or less classified as cowards and

19:30 well, if there's one thing my brother wasn't, that was a coward. He was much bigger than me, much stronger and much tougher. He came to my rescue many times, but he certainly wasn't a coward. Anyway he'd only been in that service two weeks and he was in New Guinea. He'd never fired a service rifle. Mind you he'd fired plenty of small arms like small rifles, like so had I as a kid. My Dad was keen on us knowing all about guns so that we wouldn't shoot one another. So

20:00 there's my brother Bob, he's in New Guinea after two weeks. He had a lot of training, as you could well imagine. See, he was a draftsman surveyor, still a cadet, but that was his caper [role] and that's what the army wanted him for, and he found himself on the northern shores of New Guinea as an advance party doing terrain surveys and plotting out places for suitable

20:30 gun emplacements for defensive purposes, that sort of thing. And of course he was immediately chopped off when the Japs arrived. He never even had a gun. You can't fight the enemy with a tripod. So that's how he got back to Port Moresby, joined his outfit and then he went on that Kanga Force that went up the Kokoda Trail and they got called cowards there. They had to retreat, they had no hope.

21:00 No hope at all. They had to retreat but they retreated with some dignity and they held up the Japanese advance for quite some time and probably, if history's real, they probably saved the day, those fellows, otherwise the Japs would've been in Port Moresby and it would've been too late. But anyway, that was Bob's effort and I've got a great respect for him. Unfortunately he's passed on. He died of a heart attack.

21:30 **Can you tell us about leaving school and what you did prior to actually getting in the war?**

I left school to go to work. As you know the Depression had receded somewhat and employment was available but it was more sort of along the lines if there was a job there

22:00 you took it. Anyway, I was quite happy going to school, I was in sub senior year and I had some good friends and I was progressing slowly but surely along the road towards some sort of an education. Anyway, my brother God love him, saw an ad in the paper for a cadet draftsman at the Electric Light Company and applied in my name and I got it. I came home from school one afternoon and he said, "What are you doing tomorrow, Blue?" I

22:30 said, "I'll be going to work I suppose, going to school I suppose." He said, "No, you're not." I said, "Why, what's on?" He said, "You're going to work." I said, "Come off it, I haven't got a job." He said, "Yes, you have." So I turned up at the Electric Light Company at half past 8 the next morning in my short pants and long socks and signed on.

What did you think about working instead of going to school?

Well the money was good, I enjoyed that bit, but I was still going to school. I had to go to night school three nights a week.

23:00 I was getting 13 shillings and that enabled me to go to night school three nights a week to study for a diploma course. So that I could go to the surf club on Friday afternoon I would walk from the bight, half way down the valley, from there to the gardens at the bottom end of George Street. I would forsake my evening meal of a meat pie on the way

23:30 and I would walk from there home to Wilston and that saved my tram fare and my tea money, and at the end of the week I would have three shillings left, which I spent on going to the beach. For three shillings we would get a ride up to Mooloolaba on the back of a truck. No seat belts in those days, just sitting on the tray about 10 of us, and we would get breakfast,

24:00 lunch, evening meal, breakfast, lunch Sunday and come home Sunday afternoon. All of that for three shillings, and we spent the whole weekend on the beach surfing and running around. We really enjoyed it, it was a lovely life. There were about 30 boys in the club. We had a dormitory in the club house. The first club house was just a bit of a shed no bigger than this room and the beds were just wooden platforms along the walls,

24:30 low level, middle level, about 18 inches wide. We had no blankets, we had no pillows. We just slept on these bare boards and we had a little annexe which was our kitchen and cookhouse where we dined, and another little bit of a shed this big, with the boat in it, but that as our club house. It was in about, I forget when, but towards the end of the time

25:00 there just before the war they built the new club house which was a two storey fibro cement place. Look at it now, it's a great big massive thing. But I think those days were better for the boys in as much as we

were all the same age from 16 to 20 and of those whole lot of boys, there was not one boy that drank alcohol. They were all simple easy-going kids really.

25:30 **What about girls, were you interested in those?**

Now that's a silly question. Of course. But I wasn't ever very fortunate. We were all very moral and the idea of inviting a young lady to go out was well, you'd either go to the movies or to a dance. Well we didn't have any dances and I couldn't afford the movies. So naturally the girls were out of bounds. We used to talk to them on the beach and that sort of thing, but that was it.

26:00 But I like them. There were some pretty ones and they used to get me a bit excited, but still, that's life.

So where were you when war finally did break out?

I was at work. No, I was at home. I was at home at Wilston when it broke out. I remember the family, particularly my mother and father, were quite horrified about it. I was at work when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour

26:30 and I remember thinking to myself, "They're stupid, you know, they're really going to get themselves into big trouble doing that, and people were saying, "They'll come down here," and I thought to myself, if they come down here they'll find themselves in big trouble too." That's when I decided I'd have to get into the services anyway. I was getting close to 18 and I'd join up, and I decided on the airforce, mainly because I thought my father would let me join the airforce because he was always glowing in his terms of how

27:00 these planes used to come over on the Front in France. I thought, "He'll be right, I'll get in there." So I thought, "I'll make good, I'll do some pre-training." So I joined what they call the Air Training Corps. That was a scheme they had for boys interested in the airforce and a couple of nights a week for three months you would go to a school and they would teach you navigation and the elements of flying and things like that. A

27:30 little bit about the airforce, chain of command, airforce rules and things like so. And so I did that and I did quite well at that. I did excellently, in fact. For the period I was there I got the highest marks in the whole of the state, which made me feel very pleased with myself, got a little certificate to prove it. Anyway, so the day I was 18 I trotted, and the recruitment office was in the Commonwealth buildings there on the side of Anzac Square.

28:00 I went in and showed them this and told them what I wanted to do and why I wanted to be Bluey Truscott or Tin Legs Bader [Australian, British fighter aces] or somebody. I wanted to get over there and shoot the hell out of everybody, but that didn't eventuate. But anyway I did get accepted, accepted under the Empire Air Training Scheme to train for aircrew and I was accepted and enlisted within a couple of weeks. So when I joined

28:30 up I was just a little over 18. When I got into uniform I was about a month over the age of 18 which is quite young for a volunteer.

Can you tell us a little bit more of your recollection of that day that war broke out?

Not really, not really. I more or less told you the effect on my parents, but to me it just

29:00 seemed pretty stupid. I remember the period when it broke and when the Japanese came into the war because I spent most of my days, my spare time, trying to dig slit trenches in the backyard. They used to have air raid drills and air raid siren drills quite regularly. This siren would go off and you could hear it everywhere and then you'd down tools and dive in the slit trench. Well, where we lived was on the top of a hill and it was all shale, very

29:30 hard ground to dig, and I don't know, I think I got half way to China before I came up. I don't think my poor mother would've been able to get out of the damn thing if she ever got in there, but we made a beauty. The old man saw to that. Yeah, he was a pretty good foreman. Anyway, that's what we did, we built that. And we entertained a lot of servicemen at our house. We had a piano and

30:00 my mother could no longer play. My sister hadn't learnt so the piano sat idle. Anyway Mum and Dad were in waiting to go into the Regent theatre one night and apparently Mum said to him, "Look Bob, I think that's a Japanese soldier over there. Looks like a Japanese to me, what do you think?" And he said, "I'll find out," so he went over and spragged [grabbed] this guy. It turned out he was an

30:30 Indonesian. He'd escaped from Java along with a number of Dutch pilots. He was a pilot in the Dutch Airforce, very nice young chap he turned out to be. Anyway, Mum was so pleased that he wasn't a Jap soldier that my Dad brought him over and introduced him to her and she invited him to come out home, you know, have a home cooked meal. Well he accepted but he made a provision that he'd like to bring

31:00 some of his friends. So it turned out there about six of them, and they were really bonzer. They'd come to Australia, you know, turfed [ejected] out of there and they were forming up into an airforce squadron out at Archerfield and they'd got B25 Mitchell bombers and they were flying those. Anyway, they came to our house regularly, those boys. Men, they were really to me. They were older than me. One of them,

31:30 a fellow by the name of Hank Van Den Burgh, was a brilliant pianist, brilliant. Anyway he used to talk to

Dad about how he loved to play the piano, and he did play our piano until it almost fell to pieces, but he also was an organist and Dad said, “Well, if you’d like to play an organ I’ll organise it for you,” and at the time the organ in the Regent theatre, I think it was a Wurlitzer pipe organ, and it used to come up out of the

32:00 stage at the beginning of the night and Wilbur Cantwell would get on the chair and he would play this organ, and he was magnificent. Well my old man knew Wilbur and he put it to him that he had this friend who was serving in the Dutch airforce who could play the organ and could he possibly have a go at it? And old Wilbur said yes. So Dad took him in and he played the organ. He played it so well that Wilbur permitted him to play one night at the opening of the theatre

32:30 which was quite a thing. But Hank was a gentleman. He used to compose. He composed, I don’t know what you’d call it, some sort of a musical piece while he was here. He played it on our piano and he made a record of it. You know, the old fashioned 78’s. We had it for a long long time. I don’t know where it ended up, but it was good. It was nice, lovely soft piano music. That was Hank.

33:00 He had a number of friends, a number of Dutch friends and the little Indonesian fellow was a bloke named Louie Skolk. Louie was a married man, he was full blooded Indonesian. He was obviously one of the more fortunate ones, came from upper class Indonesia I suppose because he was in the airforce, he had a wife and child. He was a very sad lad that he was away from his family. I don’t know whatever happened to his family but Louie lost his life in the Northern Territory.

33:30 Hank lost his life attacking a Japanese destroyer in the Timor Sea. So those boys, they didn’t do too well, but they were serious and they were dedicated to what they were doing. Anyway, that was the period.

How did life change in your family at home during that war period?

Well, as I say, that was the change up until I left. From being a free and easy sort of kid going to the

34:00 beach, but entertaining these people, being entertained by them. It was the period prior to my joining up and when I left home there was my mother and father and my two sisters. My brother was away as you know.

How much did Brisbane change?

Tremendously, tremendously. The American invasion took place as you know, countless thousands of

34:30 American servicemen. They were received in different note. Some people were really happy to see them, others weren’t. There was some friction, but they didn’t bother me. I suppose I was too young. They interfered in a lot of lives in a lot of families, as service people tend to do when they’re displaced, but anyway that’s life, that’s history. But I welcomed them in many

35:00 ways because I knew we needed them, no doubt about that. They were assembling aeroplanes at Eagle Farm. They had a number of engine test facilities there that they would mount these engines on a frame, put a great massive wooden no thrust propeller on them and they’d run them 24 hours a day. There was never a day for months and months and months without the roar of an engine, or a number of engines. You could hear them over at Wilston

35:30 where I lived. The noise level from them was quite high. It must’ve been really horrific closer to the airfield. My friend and I, a chap named Dick Litherland, he was a contemporary of mine and he went to the air training school with me. He was dead keen to get into the airforce. He wanted to be a pilot, but unfortunately for Dick he wasn’t allowed to leave his place of employment because of the Manpower Act and he never got into the services and it

36:00 really affected him. It made him quite distressed. But anyway, we’d ride our bikes down to the airfield at Eagle Farm and sit and watch the fighters coming and going and really enjoyed it. It was exciting.

Why did you feel so strongly about joining up?

Well, I don’t know that I felt strongly about it, but I do know that there was a sort of a sense of compulsion.

36:30 When you grow up with a whole lot of youngsters and you see them going off to war and you’re standing back waiting and waiting until you’re old enough, you think well, when my turn comes I’ll have to go. I’ve got to go. Things weren’t going too well as you can imagine, and you get that feeling that there’s no option. You don’t like the idea of it but it’s got to be done.

37:00 Probably that’s another reason why I chose the airforce. The stories Dad told about hand to hand combat didn’t sit too lightly on me. I didn’t like that idea one bit. My thoughts on it were I’d be so loathe to sort of kill somebody that I’d probably get killed while I’m making up my mind. So I thought, “No, I’ll try something a little bit less personal”, and I thought, “air combat would be better.” I could sort of salve my conscience by saying, “I’m not shooting

37:30 at that fellow, I’m shooting at his aeroplane and if he’s smart enough to jump out, well good luck to him, he’ll survive, but if he’s not, that’s tough.” The odds are the same. So I suppose, I don’t know whether you’d call it a sense of, I don’t know what it is, but I just didn’t really want to be involved in hand to

hand ground fighting. My father put me right off that,

38:00 I can assure you, and I'd had a few fights in my life and I knew what it was like to lose. I knew what it was like to win, but still you weigh them all up and decide which is best and the best is not to fight at all. So that's why I chose the airforce. I liked the navy. I'd always been fond of boats and that sort of thing but I didn't like the idea of confinement at sea. I thought that would be pretty dreadful. You know, take it or leave it it's great, but being stuck there where

38:30 you're just penned up in a boat is not too good. So the airforce it was, and that's what I did.

How did your parents react when you finally did sign up?

Well, they'd had a lot of time to get used to the thing and they were quite resigned. You know, Dad said, "Yeah, I'll sign your papers," and Mum said, "Well, I hope you're alright son," you know, and I said, "Yeah Mum, I hope so too," but to be quite honest I was fully resigned to the fact that I would not survive the war,

39:00 and I think most chaps who joined, joined the RAAF felt the same. You know, tales were coming through about the losses in Britain, about the bombing raids where so many planes would not come back and where so many would come back and the crews would be mutilated. It was pretty tough. Like some of the boys that were in the surf club who'd gone overseas only lasted a very short time,

39:30 shot down. Shot down over the sea missing, shot down or shot up, hosed out, all that, bloody awful. But well, it was just one of those things you sort of had to look at life more or less as a fatalist and say well, if it's your turn, it's your turn. Dad used to say, "You never hear the bullet that hits you. If it's got your number on it it's no good ducking." Best to keep your head

40:00 down. That was it. So I suppose I wasn't any different to anybody else. I didn't join up with the idea of being a hero really. I certainly wasn't, but I survived.

Tape 3

00:31 **I didn't quite get a sense of how your father was injured. Can you tell us that story?**

How he was injured?

Injured.

As I recollect he said he was in a trench. I'm not just sure where in Flanders but there was a battle going on naturally, as you would

01:00 expect, and he was actually manning a machine gun, a Vickers water-cooled machine gun, he said it was. I don't know if you know those or remember them, but they were mounted on a tripod something like these camera ones and they had a, they were a .303 [calibre] barrel with a water jacket around them to keep the barrel cool and they had a hand grip on the right hand side with a trigger,

01:30 and a hand grip out to the left hand side, so that you could steady it and the sights were along the top of the barrel in the direction of the enemy trenches and firing at whatever he could see. The bullet hit him on the left hand where he was holding this hand grip and took off his third and fourth fingers. Took it off there right through .

02:00 So he just had a little hand like this and I remember he often used to say, "Well." I said, "Did it hurt?" And he said, "No, it didn't hurt at all. I didn't know it had happened. As a matter of fact it hurts more now than it did then." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you'd be surprised the number of times I get a pain in my hand where there's no fingers." He said, "You'd go like that and feel it where it's all," and he said, "You're looking at a ghost, there's nothing there," but apparently that's

02:30 common for people who lose part of their limbs to suffer pain. The nerves think that the limb's still there and he used to say it was pretty crook at times. He'd have to put up with this, but apparently that's how it happened. Just what happened to him afterwards or not I don't know. I suppose he just said, "Oh God, look at this," and they carted him off. But

03:00 he was a fairly stoical sort of a fellow. One story he did tell me, one of the battles they were making a charge at the enemy lines and one of his friends got shot, and Dad found him lying in a shell hole wounded and carried him back out, back to his own lines. That chap, his name was Young and he lived at Young's Crossing on the Pine River. Like the returned

03:30 servicemen of World War I seemed to know a lot of people that were there and they'd quite meet and talk, but anyway, that was one of his many exploits I suppose.

Did he march on Anzac Day?

My father? When we were children we used to march at Sandgate. The children, like Dad would march along with his cobbers [friends] and we'd march,

04:00 the children would march in the Boy Scouts or the Girl Guides or the Brownies so the children participated even then and when we moved out of Sandgate that Dad gave that up. I suppose a different association, different circumstances now, and he didn't march anymore. After the war he didn't march. I suppose with my mother passing

04:30 and the family going and that I suppose his life took on quite a different outlook, you know. So he didn't bother with his RSL, but that little badge I showed you before, that's his RSL badge and that's one of the early ones. It used to be called the Royal Army and Sailors Association. It wasn't

05:00 until many years later that it became the RSSIALA [Returned Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Imperial Association] for that, which included the airforce blokes and everything, but it was just the army and navy in the early days, and his badge was one of those. It's quite a rarity actually, not many of them about. That's why I treasure it and keep it. But to get back to your question, I don't know anymore about his wound other than that.

05:30 My uncle, my mother's brother, was in Canada when World War I broke out and he joined the Royal Canadian Army and Uncle Fred, he was shot too, but he was worse off than Dad. He got hit in the chest and the bullet went in his chest and out through his jaw bone. Actually it didn't go out, it lodged in under one of this teeth, one of his molars in his mouth and he used to wear it. He had it mounted on a silver chain

06:00 all polished up and he used to wear it around his neck as a sort of a reminder.

But he lived?

He was a poultry farmer down at Kalangur for many years, had a big family. It didn't do him any harm.

Did your Dad talk about how it might've, or did you know of how it might've changed him, that war?

I don't think it did change him, other than he hated war. He was,

06:30 like as I say, as a young man, his parents lived in the bush and he lived in the bush. He was an expert marksman. He was self-taught but by gee, there wasn't much about the native life of Australia that he didn't know. On the farm in Burran Down and even at our home in Sandgate we had many many floor mats from animal skins and my

07:00 bed cover, I slept on an open verandah under a tin roof and the bed cover was made out of kangaroo skins, just the small patch off the stomach and it was beautiful and soft. Well Dad shot all those critters, cleaned up the farm a bit, and had it made into this big rug and I tell you what, it was the most beautiful warm rug

07:30 that you could imagine. I really enjoyed my winter's nights under there. As a matter of fact it was so good the blasted cats wouldn't leave me alone. I used to have to keep kicking them off. Mum had cats, she liked them, and they liked my bed. So you know, he was quite a character my old man, quite a character.

When your brother went overseas –

He went to New Guinea.

When was that?

Well that's overseas. When was it?

Mmm.

08:00 Let's see. Bob's nearly three years older than me so he would've joined up not long after the war started, and when they started sending people to New Guinea, that's when he would've gone there because he was very early in the piece. So I suppose it would've either been around about 1940 or so.

Did you receive much correspondence from him?

No. None of us boys are good correspondence writers. No.

So what would the family say about him

08:30 **in his absence in the early years?**

We used to talk about him a lot and hope he was OK, and Mum would say, "No news is good news." So it was alright. We thought he'd be OK, and as I say, he was a bit like my Dad. He was strong, resourceful, he could do anything that bloke, really good.

What are some of the early memories of your mates from Mooloolaba joining up?

09:00 Well there was no real sense of tragedy or anything. We'd say, "Yeah, good, that's the shot, that's what you've got to do." It's just that they weren't there or weren't around anymore, but we'd just talk about them in the normal course of events, but not anything particular. But it was always sad if you heard of

someone that lost their live. That was really bad news. A couple of them did. The first one I remember to go

09:30 out of the club was a lad named Carol Daly. Billy Daly worked for Eager's, Eager's Used Cars, and Eager's were big time in Mooloolaba in those days. Old Man Eager had a big game boat and a nice home down on the river front and he was our patron, and that's how we got this truck at such a good rate to go up of a Friday, and Bill was his foreman. Carol was younger than Bill and he

10:00 was dead keen. He joined up straight away in the airforce and off he went and I think he lasted about a month. He was shot down over the Atlantic. He was the first of them and everybody was quite upset over that. We lost a few of our friends. Like these boys weren't in the club, but my neighbours at the back, joining our back fence, their name was Hornibrook. They were related to the Hornibrooks who built the

10:30 Hornibrook Highway and they had three sons. There was Keith and Kevin and Gordon. Keith and Kevin joined the airforce and they both got killed. They were both pilots actually. But Gordon joined the navy and he survived, but he's since passed away. So you know, war affects everybody even though it's not your own family, it's your community and

11:00 it does affect you and you feel about it

Another thing I didn't tell you about pre-war Brisbane when they built the air raid shelters. Do you remember that? Have you seen pictures of them? Well in hindsight they were the most ridiculous thing that we ever did. They were concrete block houses about the size of this room with an entry at each end through a sort of a zigzag. They were about eight foot high and I suppose the walls were about six inches thick, and they built them all along the

11:30 centre of the streets that didn't have tram lines, Elizabeth Street, Chalmers Street, Edward Street. Down the middle they had these silly looking things, and of course when the air raid sirens would go off everyone would get in there, but I tell you what, if there ever had been an air raid I think it would've been a death trap. Really you'd be better off to stay in the buildings, because those things, I don't know how well they were anchored to the ground. I should imagine a decent blast would just slide them along. It would be like in a tram, you'd have to run like hell to stay off the shelter. But they never used

12:00 them thank God, but they were most ugly looking things and they became quite a source of annoyance later on until they took them away.

When did the air raids start and what happened?

We didn't have any, not in Brisbane we didn't have any. As far as I can remember Darwin and Broome had a lot. Rumour has it that they dropped more bombs on Broome than they did at Darwin and really there was nothing at Broome. So they wasted their time there, but Darwin

12:30 got a hiding. Townsville got a couple. Sydney got attacked by mini-subs [Japanese submarines], but that was about the extent of raids on the mainland.

But when you say you had those shelters, you were practising?

No no, I never went in them. But they were, like we had slit trenches at home like I said, but the city was ready. We had these bomb shelters. If they ever bombed us you could get in there, but as I say, they didn't bomb Brisbane.

13:00 **Where were you when Darwin was bombed?**

I was at home. I was in Brisbane. That was before, I think, I'm not sure. I just can't quite remember that. I certainly wasn't there and by the time I got to Darwin the air war had sort of moderated quite a lot. There was still a bit of enemy activity around but the short time I was in Darwin with the Anson on the

13:30 radar cal [calibration trials] there were no raids, and we weren't actually based at Darwin. We were based about 100 miles down the road at a place called Batchelor and we used to go from there to do these flights. We didn't do many, but just enough to sort of recalibrate the radar. It had trouble with it and they wanted it re-checked. Apparently it was because of the incorrect radar

14:00 imaging that they scrambled those Spitfires [fighters]. Do you know about the Spitfires? They scrambled 23 Spitfires to confront an oncoming Japanese bomber force, but instead of being about 100 miles out they were actually over 200 miles out, and of course by the time the Japanese arrived the Spitfires had all run out of fuel, 23 of them. So you know, it was pretty sad. So anyway the radar had to be recalibrated, but it wasn't so much the

14:30 calibration. Like it was, that caused the problem. As I understand it, it was abnormal reception conditions. Up until then people believed that radar was strictly line of sight and it just kept going out into space. It had an elevation to it because of the earth's curvature and once you got far enough out it was above the planes. But the type of radar that was

15:00 in use was subject to incorrect ranging and now and again you would get these ghosts that would appear and the aeroplane was actually twice as far away as the radar indicated it was. I actually

experienced that type of thing when I was at Rathmines [RAAF base]. We used to watch on the radar when we knew we had Catalinas coming from America on delivery, and they'd look for them and

15:30 they actually got this incorrect ranging on one in the period I was there. But that's what happened at Darwin and of course the poor old chap that was on ops [operations] control scrambled all the Spitties [Spitfires], he sort of got burnt a bit over that and it wasn't his fault.

Can you tell me about the day you enlisted? What happened on that day?

Well it wasn't really very exciting. I remember just getting dressed up as tidily as I could. I wanted to make a good impression

16:00 and I went into the recruitment office and presented myself and wondered what would happen, but there was nothing to it. I was successfully received. But I do remember one thing, many many years later I met a chap, actually a fellow I worked with, and he said, "I remember you." "Oh yeah," I said, "Where do you remember me from, Kenny?" He said, "You and I were in the recruiting office on the same

16:30 day," and I said, "Well what was so outstanding about me that you remember me." He said, "You were the only bloke that had shiny shoes." So you know, appearance does matter.

Do you think that was from your training that you were doing before?

No, this is from home. My parents were like that, they wanted us to always be as tidy as we could which was, you know, in our limited circumstances not too bad. We didn't have

17:00 a lot of stuff but what we did was usually well kept. I had a lot of second hand things handed down, shoes in particular. Most of my early school boy days I went to school barefoot, but I always had shoes to go to Sunday School. You can tell, can't you? Little angel.

And were there many other blokes in the office that day?

No. No, only a handful.

17:30 **What was happening in the world at that time when you were recruited?**

Well, like it was September of 1942. The war in the Pacific had hotted up quite considerably. I told you before about the Dutch people that used to come home. They weren't the only ones. There were a lot of Australian service personnel came too. One I remember particularly well because he had a shine on [attracted to] my eldest sister, his name was Frank Roberts, and Frank was a

18:00 really lovely fellow and he was a radio operator on aeroplanes, wireless operator, and another was a bloke named Sid Grantham, and Sid was a ground staff radio technician and he worked at Archerfield on the HFDF [high frequency direction finding] direction finding station. Now shortly after Frank went up north and was involved

18:30 in the aerial battle of the Coral Sea, and Sid was on duty in the HFDF station at Archerfield, and Sid copied the distress message from Frank's aeroplane and Frank didn't come back. So you know, that's just something that sticks in your mind. Frank was a really nice bloke, really really nice gentlemanly sort of fellow, and so was Sid. Sid wrote a book on 23 Squadron which was a Beaufort Squadron

19:00 and he asked me to help him with some of the editing, the reading of it, because it was a tedious job and I did, but he put a lot of work into it. He gave me a copy which I've got hiding away out there somewhere. Anyway, that was so much for that around about the time when I joined up. There was such a lot going on, there were so many servicemen in the city. The war was all around you, you just couldn't escape it, and the news was full of tragedy

19:30 and despair. Like we were getting belted overseas and they'd sunk the Prince of Wales, and the Hood [British warships] off the coast of Malaya. Singapore was gone, you know, it was bad news, really bad. But things were starting to take a turn for the better. I remember the Battle of the Coral Sea was a victory to the Allies because the Japs got towelled up [beaten]. History may have been considerably different had it not transpired that way. But shortly after that there was another battle, air naval battle in the Bismarck Sea, which as you know

20:00 is to the north east of New Guinea, and that was another victory but it was not fought mainly between ships but mainly between aircraft and ships, and they sank the whole of that Japanese fleet and actually I felt, and I know a lot of other people did too, we felt rather depressed by it in the sense that they sank the ships but then they sank the supports and they really decimated about 5,000 or more Japanese troops, just wrote them off.

20:30 It must've been hell, but anyway no doubt in reverse circumstances they would've done the same to us. But anyway that's what was going on.

So what happened after you signed up then? Did you go straight away to training?

Yes. Like as I say I went in just on my 18th birthday and I think it was on the 10th of October I was on the train to Sydney and I'd never been passed Coolangatta. I'd been to Mooloolaba

21:00 in the north and Coolangatta in the south and here I am on a train going to Sydney. Why the hell they sent me to Sydney I have no idea, because we had a good facility for the same service at Kingaroy, at Sandgate really for that one. I could've just gone back home, but no, off I went. I was the only Queenslander that they sent down on that and I wondered later if it was because of my involvement in the Air Training Corps and what I achieved there, but apparently

21:30 I don't think it counted for anything. But that's where I went, Bradfield Park.

Can you describe the train trip down?

It was great. I really enjoyed it. It was, there weren't many service personnel travelling south and there were always seats. I had a seat to myself. Much later in the war when I had some opportunities to come home I had to either stand up or sit on the floor. That was common.

22:00 You couldn't get a seat for love or money, and as far as sleeping was concerned on the interstate train you either slept standing up or lying on the floor or if you were lucky you could get the luggage rack. In those carriages there was a luggage rack at the end of the compartments on either end but it was up about six or eight feet and it was only about 18 inches wide, but there was a battle to get that I tell you, and you know what it would be like sleeping on a barbed wire park bench, but the blokes reckoned it was better than the floor. The only reason being of course that

22:30 everybody going to the toilet would walk over the top of you, and not too kindly either. But anyway, we managed it and we were glad to get home any time we could.

So who was on the train when you were going south?

Mostly civilians. I didn't see anybody else that appeared to be in my circumstances, a smattering of military personnel throughout the groups but mostly civilians. Why they were travelling, I have no idea.

23:00 But anyway, I enjoyed the trip down. The custom in those days for all service personnel was like: on each major rail station they had a transport officer and you'd arrive at your destination and go and see the transport officer and they'd issue you with tickets for the next thing and tell you how to get there. So that's what I did. As you know, the interstate train pulls in at City Central. It's also the electrics there, so I just got a ticket and went over to an electric train to the

23:30 North Shore and hopped out at Lindfield. By then there were quite a number on the train going to Lindfield. They'd come from everywhere. So we all walked down to camp and that's how it started. The big, the early training was as I expected it to be. It was a bit of theory stuff, mainly about law and order, nothing really scientific. A lot of "left, right, left, right" stuff,

24:00 parades, which didn't sit too easy. I didn't like that much, it wasn't my cup of tea at all.

Why was that?

Well I don't mind law and order, but I hate discipline. I'll do as I'm told under the normal circumstances but I hate this, it seemed to me senseless, the drill bit. I knew what I was there for. "Why don't we get on with it?" was the sort of attitude, and I think most of the young blokes felt the same way, but when you're older you realise that

24:30 not everybody's the same. Perhaps the aircrew blokes were from a slightly different section of the community and a bit more law abiding and a bit more sense purpose, maybe. I don't know, maybe I'm being unkind, but anyway that's the way it was. As I say later on I became a non-commissioned officer but I was never a non-commissioned officer in the sense like those drill instructors and warrant

25:00 officers, discipline everywhere.

Can you describe some of those guys for us?

They were unfortunate. I know I'm going to hurt some people's feelings if this ever gets out in the light of day. But see, they were all permanent officers, permanent airforce fellows and they were imbued with this strict disciplinarian code of behaviour of saluting, whereas we were just kids and we didn't believe in all that jazz, but no doubt they had their job

25:30 to do, to get the rabble and make them into some sort of team. And they did it to the best of their ability. It involved quite a bit of shouting. So we just had to suffer that.

What were some of the disciplinary actions they used?

Well you were always under threat of getting up before the boss and getting some sort of penalty like mess duties or parading around showing how good you were at it, and things like that. But I didn't, I was lucky. I was a good

26:00 boy, I didn't have any trouble at all.

Toed the line?

Well, I was smart enough not to get caught. I had a little bit of trouble. That's just because of pettiness I suppose, but I never had a charge.

What happened there?

Oh, I'd prefer not to go into that, but I was never charged with an offence that stuck. In other words, I never had anything recorded against my record that was

26:30 detrimental. I got a few minor punishments from time to time, but if you found a serviceman who didn't then you'd found one who didn't join up, I'd say. But it was pretty good.

Can you describe the camp? If you were walking through the front gates what would you see?

Well it was just a whole lot of huts. The huts were about 40 foot long, about 15 feet wide, two feet off the ground, hip roof, corrugated iron, fibro cement

27:00 stuff. Not much, the main drag [road] was a sealed road. The parade ground was sealed with bitumen, but in those days the rest of the camp was just unsealed ground and it had only recently been cleared from bushland and it was all red clay soil, and we got all nice new blue clothes and it rained. The airforce clothes would've been the same as the rest of the services.

27:30 There was only one size, too big or too small. I looked absolutely ridiculous, I can assure you. They gave me these blue overalls, the legs were at least 18 inches too long and the sleeves, and I was foolish enough to complain and I got told what to do. I had to take them up myself, which I did. They gave us a sewing kit for this purpose. Well you've never seen such a lot of cobble [nonsense] in your life. It was absolutely

28:00 ridiculous. Anyway I cut mine off and cobbled them up and made myself look presentable, and then it rained and then I washed them. When it rained they got covered in red mud and they looked pretty bad so I washed them and they shrunk. So then the legs came half way up my shins and the bloomin' crutch was down past my knees. I looked an absolute dill [fool]. The hat was too big, it used to fall down over my eyes, one of those slouch hat type things, only the airforce didn't make them into slouch hats. You just wore them with a dinted crown and

28:30 flat brim. They looked pretty bad and I looked stupid. I used to wonder to myself, well maybe you are stupid, you wouldn't be here if you weren't. But anyway, it was supposed to last for two months, but they told us a pretty good story. They came along and said, "You're a bright looking bunch, you blokes. We think you can do this course a lot quicker than two months. Would you like to volunteer to finish it inside of a month and join

29:00 the group in front of you?" There was 32 on my course and 32 on the course in front of me. So everybody said, "Yeah, sure," because we didn't want to hang around there. It was pretty dull. So we all promoted ourselves up into the class ahead and finished in record time. Out of the 60 odd blokes there were two blokes categorised as pilot trainees. They already had a private licence. There were about half a dozen categorised as navigators

29:30 and the rest of them were categorised as air gunners or gunners. I probably would've been a gunner and only learnt to fire guns and gone to Britain if I'd been older. Most of the fellows on that course were destined to become tail gunners in Lancasters. They needed a lot and they wanted them in a hurry and that's why I think we got this marvellous offer to show how clever we were. Fortunately for me, luck intervened, I'd been lucky. Fortune intervened in my life a

30:00 number of times and I reckon that was one, that I was just a bit too young. So I was made into a wireless air gunner to give me a bit more time and off I went to wireless school. The others went to gunnery school inside of a month, or they went straight overseas to Canada or South Africa and learnt to point a gun out into the air and pull the trigger and then they went off to Britain and got shot down. So you know, luck plays a big part in service life. Anyway,

30:30 **Did any of those guys become mates in the short time that you knew them?**

We were all good, everybody in the hut. See, the hut had I suppose 15 to 20 men in it. You slept in rows along the sides and we were all friends. Like you knew them all after a matter of a few days and everybody had the same atmosphere, the same air about them and the same intent. So it was good harmony, it was really good.

31:00 We all hated the early morning rising and we all hated the "left, right, left – " bit. So we were a pretty good unit. They'd made something out of us anyway, whether they tried to or not. There was one bloke I remember that fell out of popularity because he volunteered to be bugler, and the bugler would get up first and go and stand on a tank stand and blow this trumpet and wake us all up. So he found out that it wasn't a good idea because

31:30 everybody threw shoes at him. The poor fellow, I often think of that. God, I think, God, he must've been upset because there he is blowing his heart out and being patriotic and getting a lot of thanks for it. But anyway, he stuck to his guns and still did it. I suppose he got some favours, I don't know, but he certainly didn't go down well with the rest of us.

And did you get into Sydney much?

We had leave, but as I say, I was only there for a month so I suppose I had

32:00 three weekends leave where we would be let out on Saturday and back by Sunday afternoon. I enjoyed it immensely. I really did, because I'd never seen such a place and even though we didn't have much money, things were cheap, fares were cheap and I didn't drink or anything like that. All I had to do was buy something to eat, and we stayed at a place called Airforce House in Goulburn Street. It was a

32:30 big commercial warehouse originally. It had a number of floors. I'm not sure how many, but probably about six. It was opposite Anthony Horderns, big store, and it was run by volunteers. They used to have a couple of young ladies who would man the desk and they would register you in and allot you a bed and if you had any possessions that you wanted to leave, they'd put them in the safekeeping thing for you. It wasn't

33:00 too safe because later in life that's where I lost my camera and my album. Somebody else claimed it. But it was good and it was free. So at least you could get a bed which was really good, and then of course you were free to make your way around. Well I cobbered up [made friends with] with a couple of young guys and we travelled the Manly, on the Sydney Harbour ferries a lot, because that was so spectacular. So anyway that was Sydney.

What was the atmosphere in Sydney like at that time?

Among the civvies?

33:30 I don't know.

Generally, what did you think?

Everybody was cheerful. Like if you'd go to a restaurant, a café as they called them in those days, to have some meals everybody was cheerful and everybody was polite and spoke to you, mostly women, old women, elderly women, or to me old women. But they were nice, like Mum. They'd sought of welcome you and be pleased to see you.

34:00 You were never any trouble and there were nowhere near as many service personnel wandering the streets of Sydney as there were in Brisbane. There were a few but as I say, Brisbane was crowded out by service personnel, but Sydney wasn't. So it was more or less like Sydney in peace time except that all the young blokes had gone away and all the mothers were pleased to see other young boys coming along, and it was good. I liked it.

Did you go in in uniform?

34:30 You had to. Once you join the services you're not allowed to wear civilian clothes at all, or you weren't in those days. If you were seen without your hat in public you'd get charged with an offence. They were pretty strict in that sense. The uniform was a uniform and you wore it and respected, which was fare. Like everybody seemed to have pride in it. I almost got into trouble. I went to Manly and they

35:00 had a bit of an entertainment thing on the pier. One of the articles was the octopus ride. On went on that with my mate and lost my hat. I had to go back to camp without a hat. I lived in mortal terror that I'd get caught. I was only 18 and a bit green, wet [immature], I suppose, still it was OK.

What happened after that first month, where did you go from there?

Well from there I went to Maryborough, another train trip straight through.

35:30 Didn't get time to go home and see my folks actually, but that didn't matter. They knew I was going by and the camp at Maryborough was much the same except it had an aerodrome with it as well. It was actually on the airport at Maryborough and it was a lot different. We still had the left right left, but we were in class every day. We were learning radio theory and Morse code and practising all that up

36:00 and we'd go flying, so it was really good. We didn't fly early in the training. We had to wait until the end of our course because we had to learn how to use the stuff first, but once we got that set we were right.

What did you find you enjoyed about the training, the classroom stuff?

I was very interested in the radio part of it. Like I didn't want to be a radio operator. I wanted to be a fighter ace, you know. Everybody

36:30 did, didn't they? You would've too, wouldn't you? Yeah, of course. But that wasn't too be so you just made the best of it, and I quite liked the radio. As a schoolboy my favourite subjects were the manual arts. See, I did an industrial course. I did 13 subjects for my junior certificate and half a dozen would be manual and the other would be academic, and I really enjoyed the

37:00 mathematics and the chemistry and physics, especially the electricity side of it. So the radio fell pretty naturally to me. I understood it well and I liked it. So I did quite well there. I was lucky I did quite well in all my courses, mainly because I was interested. I find that with most young men, if they don't succeed at things academic or manual it's because they're not interested. Get them interested and they do well.

37:30 And all of the boys that I was with, they did well too. We didn't have any failures. So that air training scheme, the Empire Air Training Scheme was really a wonderful success in my point of view, produced some very fine airmen and a lot of very courageous people. Did a lot towards producing a victory for our

Allies.

Did they bring people out from

38:00 **the UK to train in the Empire Air Training Scheme?**

No, not that I know of. At least I never saw any. I didn't see anything other than Australians. In fact the system seemed to be that a large number of Australians would go to Canada or South Africa for their training. They would go at the time say, when I went to Maryborough. I went to a training camp in Australia, they would go to training camps in Canada and South Africa, and they

38:30 also went there, not just for wireless work, but for navigation training and for pilot training. The wireless operators, the wireless air gunners, we did a wireless course and then we did a gunners course and then we got our wings [badges for aircrew], half a wing because we couldn't fly too well! The pilots, they did what they call an elementary flying training school and then an advanced school and then they got their wings. So the same with the navigators, they had a three tier arrangement.

39:00 So once you qualified and they gave you your wings you got your sergeant's stripes.

How did your training progress then after?

Well from Maryborough we went to Evans Head and that was an airport camp specifically for training gunners, and the aircraft we flew in there were Fairey Battles. They were ex British Airforce stuff that had seen

39:30 service over there. They were pretty old and pretty rotten but they were the best we had, and we trained on those. We had to learn about the machine guns, how to load them, how to unload them, how to stow them, how to clear them.

Can you describe that process?

Which process is that?

Of loading and unloading?

Well,

And the gun for that matter?

Yeah, well the guns we used there were .303 calibre.

40:00 They were a single barrelled gun called a Vickers, Vickers GO ['go gun'], gas operated and the gas operated part meant that the actual automatic mechanism of the gun was determined by explosive gas from the cartridge being fired. The bullet would go out the spout [barrel] and the explosive gas would recoil and that would force the breech, the breech is what holds the

40:30 firing pin, the firing mechanism, and causes it to recoil so it can then spring back and take another round of ammunition off the clip from the magazine. The magazine was a drum magazine where the bullets were all loaded into this circular drum which had a spring in it. You just kept pushing them in the slot and they would just keep compressing the spring and then when it

41:00 got full of course the spring was fully coiled. As soon as one bullet was taken out another would slip into the slot and as the gun fired, the mechanism would pick that bullet up and ram it up the spout and of course then it would automatically go off, as long as you held the trigger. So you could fire quite a few. The gun was mounted on a gimble; imagine a semicircular piece of metal that you could swing

41:30 from one side of the aeroplane to the other and at the centre of the hemisphere there was a pipe which you put the spike of the gun into. Then you could swivel the gun anyway you like, up or down. You could swing it over and swivel it the other way, pretty primitive sort of stuff. It was World War I. It was a World War I gun actually. But that's what we did our training on.

Tape 4

00:32 **Can you describe the loading and unloading process as well? Did we go through that? Not completely?**

The magazines were already loaded when we got them. There were two trainees on each flight and you would be issued with the magazines that you had to fire. Now the cartridges were all identified by paint marks on the point of the

01:00 cartridge. So some would be blue, some would be red. They used a number of colours, and some would have no colours at all, and if you were lucky you got the ones with no colours because then you got the best score, because a lot of the paint did come off. If you fire at a moving canvas target like a drogue and you hit it and if the paint doesn't come off, the bloke that's got the plain ammo, he wins. But anyway, they were a pretty crude

01:30 gun but they were the best that we could get for our training. I don't know whether you know it, but machine guns, they scatter the bullets everywhere and it's very hard to get many hits even though you're aiming at the target. If you were spot on all the time most of them would probably miss anyway if the target's not very big. A lot of people would've thought OK, there's a machine gunner in an aeroplane, he's got all those bullets and a bloke comes around who will shoot

02:00 him down, real easy. Well it's not so easy. Apart from the fact that accuracy is required, you've got this natural scatter bit .Say you've got 1,000 rounds, you can only fire them in bursts of about 10 at the most. If you fire them any more than that you overheat the barrel and the barrel will droop and the bullets will go through the side. So it's a lot of complications to contend with apart from the relativity of

02:30 the different speeds. But all in all. most of the lads on the air to air would average, well you had to get six percent pass. Some would get up as high as 12, but not many, and they were the ones that were lucky to get the plain ammo I reckon. But you just imagine, if you fire off a burst of 10 and you get say two hits, you've done real good. It means you're on target. Because of the scatter

03:00 you've probably done it as well as you can. When you consider you can only say, get about say eight percent hits out of your 1,000 it really doesn't give you much chance to shoot a bloke down, does it? The fighters were better off in the sense that they aimed the aeroplane and they kept coming in. They got real close. Mind you, the closer they got the better chance we had, but I didn't have to shoot at them so I'm only

03:30 speaking from sort of my own reasoning, but that's the way it worked.

What were you shooting at in training?

Well, we did what they call air to ground which you'd shoot at targets on the ground and they were sandpits, like a child's sandpit. They'd lay them out in rows and you'd fly along the row and you'd have a numbered target. They had a small number tacked onto a bit of cardboard somewhere. You'd fire at your own one and of course if you were lucky

04:00 some blokes would mistake the number and fire at yours for you. It was all pretty efficient anyway. We all managed to score and maybe I got a few goodies that were free and maybe I gave a few away, but who knows. And then the air to air, they used to tow a canvas drogue [cone shaped target] along behind another aeroplane and you would shoot at that.

Any misses that hit the aeroplane?

Oh no. The string was pretty long, but some of us were pretty good. I shot

04:30 the drogue down twice before I qualified. Hit the wire with the cone of fire with the scatter. That's what happened. Maybe I was just leading a bit too far and firing ahead of the target and hit the wire. So then you have to go and do it all again, which wasn't too good.

What did you like about it?

Well, what would any boy like about it? Just the excitement of flying and guns and noise and smoke, companionship.

05:00 You know, it was great. Training was great.

Was there talk amongst the blokes about what was coming up ahead?

Never, never. Probably understandable I should imagine. Why would you worry that far ahead? You've got to get passed today for a starter. Those planes were pretty dicky [in bad shape]. Some of them were pretty old and while on my course we didn't have any crashes, but the course after they did, a couple crashed in. They were real bombs [wrecks].

05:30 **Can you describe the plane?**

Yeah. It was a single engine monoplane, quite large. The engine was a similar engine to what we used in Spitfires. It was a glycol cooled in line engine and the glycol radiator was situated just underneath the belly of the aeroplane right close to the forward

06:00 navigator's hatch and all the fumes used to come up into the cabin. It was quite unpleasant. Well, you combine that with a training aeroplane that sees people airsick just about every day of its life because of this smell. They didn't smell too good. They were quite unpleasant things. The only pleasant bit about them was when you were half out in the slipstream with the gun because then you're in nice clean air, but when you're waiting your turn down inside the thing, it was pretty rotten, pretty rotten indeed. But the actual gunnery part was

06:30 exciting because you stood on a bit of a platform with about a third to half of your upper body out of the air and a clip onto your harness, your parachute harness with a wire holding you into the aeroplane just in case you got a bit unhappy or something and fell over the side. You couldn't do that, but you were tied in

07:00 and it was OK, and the gun going off inside your ear wasn't too good. But anyway, I quite liked that part of it. I liked the gunnery.

Did it take you a while to get used to being right there on the edge like that, or did you feel unsafe?

Never, no, never. No, that's just the way it was done. That's what you did, so no problem, and I didn't find anyone else who did suffer

07:30 any trauma or anything from it either. All the boys that went in all came out at the other end qualified and happy and off they went. So that was it. It was a good station, Evans Head. The only thing wrong with it was the water. It had that well water and it had an awful smell. I don't think I drank any water. When I accidentally drank some I was having a shower. I usually always used to drink soft drink. But it was a good camp,

08:00 good station. I enjoyed it immensely.

What happened after that?

Well, from there the normal progression is you either go to the embarkation depot and get sent overseas to do an operational training course and posting to a squadron, or you go to an operational training course in Australia and then go to a squadron. The OUT [operational training unit – OTU], as they call it, is usually based at an airport where

08:30 the squadron is formed up. But in my case as I was young, I got sent to another training airfield at Cootamundra in central west New South in July of '43 and it was as cold as hell. The water used to freeze in the taps overnight. We slept with all of our clothes on and the weather was dreadful. We flew there

09:00 in Avro Ansons and I flew as a crew operator assisting in the training of navigators. The caper [task] was you'd have usually three trainees trying to get the pilot lost and the pilot trying to put up with them, and me waiting for something to happen. As a matter of fact when you were a wireless op [operator] during the war that's what you did most of your time. You waited for something to happen. In the active areas there was all radio silence. You couldn't talk to

09:30 anybody. All you had to do was listen, and I tell you what, it's pretty hard to listen to nothing for hours on end. But that's life, and as a crewman it's pretty dull in a sense that other people can see outside, you can't. Other people know where you're going, you don't. So you get in, you go and you come home and that's it. Not very exciting at all.

Were you disappointed that you weren't sent to one of

10:00 **those other training depots?**

To Canada or Africa? At the time I thought well it would be nice to get the opportunity to travel around the world a bit before you cash your chips [die], because as I said before, that was the expectation, but I wasn't disappointed. I didn't know the reasoning at the time. All I knew was that other guys got posted overseas and I got posted to Cootamundra, but probably it was the intervention of fate once more. I'm here, a lot of those guys

10:30 aren't.

Did anyone go with you?

To Coota? Yes, there were about a dozen young chaps of similar age that went out there and later on when they thought we were at an age when they could put us through an OTU [operational training unit] we were all posted down to East Sale to train on Bofors and that's where fate intervened on my behalf again. I got appendicitis, because

11:00 they really copped it rough, the guys that went on Bofors. They were in a poor circumstance. If you think about young boys learning to fly and they train on a very docile aeroplane like an Anson or an Oxford, slow, low wing loading, pretty easy to fly really, and then they send them to a place in winter time where probably the weather is as bad as you

11:30 can possibly get in Australia. You know, along the shores of Bass Strait for argument sake, close to the mountains, and fly an aeroplane that's a real dog, high wing loading, fast landing speed, you know, everything new. Add all that together with the weather conditions and those boys, they had their hands full. On top of that at that particular time, at that airport at Sale, there was evidence and strong rumour of sabotage.

12:00 Some of the aeroplanes that were lost, it was unexplained as to why they were lost, and sabotage was very much in the minds of people. It turned out that it really wasn't. It turned out to be a design fault of the aeroplane and combined with inexperienced pilots and bad circumstance, you know, it produced a lot of losses, but some of my friends that went there didn't last more than a week or 10 days but I

12:30 did. I didn't actually fly in the rotten things, thank the Lord. So I went there, said goodbye to the rest of them and went back to Sydney. But that's the way life goes.

Before we go onto Sale can you describe Cootamundra?

Cold.

What was the base like?

It was the same as any other airforce camp really. It was based on an airport and the accommodation quarters were the same.

13:00 The showers of course were communal along with everything else. The discipline was quite lax as far as aircrew blokes were concerned. We didn't have to go on parades.

Was the communal showering uncomfortable?

No. I was in the surf club. Didn't worry me. They didn't have any ladies there, so no embarrassment.

Well, some blokes that we've talked to have found

13:30 **that quite an adjustment, that communal stuff?**

Yeah, well they weren't in the surf club, were they? Anyway, it was just a normal camp. The food at Cootamundra was probably better than a lot of other places. Nothing to complain about really, but we always enjoyed out Saturday's down town at Comino's Café, a feast of steak and eggs. Yeah, that was great.

14:00 And there seemed to be plenty of that around in the country. I don't know what it was like in the homes but we could always get a good feed there.

What was the township like?

Well, have you been to any of our country towns? It was just like that. Just wide streets, low buildings, not tall houses like we have in Queensland. Most of the houses were low to the ground, single storey buildings, the odd two storey building.

14:30 Just a normal rural township. The people were very nice and very friendly. It was a pleasant stay but the weather was bad. It was cold. I was bitterly cold there. I don't think I ever got warm the whole month. I had one unfortunate experience at Coota. We were out on a nav training day and our friends with the pencils [logistics staff] got it wrong and we ran out of petrol. We didn't quite make it back to camp. We landed about 15 miles short in a cornfield. That

15:00 wasn't too bad anyway. It was a little bit disconcerting when you look out and see two propellers just not doing anything. The pilot gave me the nod to send off a message which I did pretty promptly to tell them where we were and what we were doing, just a plain language Morse code message and we landed in this paddock, normal wheels down landing and the young bloke flying it was a genius. He did

15:30 a marvellous job. The paddock was small and it had a lot of trees around it and I remember seeing those trees going past underneath and they looked like about an inch away but they obviously were a bit further. We bounced down into the ruts of the cornfield and knocked the corn to hell and got abused by the farmer. He came running out and wasn't he irate. He was shouting and raving, "My corn!" he was saying. A few choice words. When we told him what was really going on, he

16:00 couldn't have done more for us. He was quite happy about the whole deal, so he helped us.

What happened when you got back to base?

Well the way they got it back, they actually flew the aeroplane out. We were told, I communicated with Cootamundra after we had landed and told them we were safely on the ground and they knew where we were and they sent a message to the pilot that he had to take everything out of the aeroplane that we could remove.

16:30 So we took the radios out, everything that we could get out we took out, and they came out in a truck. They put enough petrol in it to fly it back to Cootamundra. The pilot on his own took it off and flew it back all by himself, which was you know, a very brave boy, and we went back by truck. So it all turned out quite good except that we were late for lunch and we didn't get any lunch. Now, isn't that crazy? Isn't that

17:00 crazy? We were as hungry as a horse and we went to the mess and they said, "Nuh, you're out of luck boy. Lunch is off, you can wait until tea time." So that was it. That was the only forced landing I was ever involved in and it was quite, well it's quite exciting but not very frightening. I suppose you look at these things and you know that you're alright until it hits the ground and you just sort of wait and

17:30 fortunately it just rolled along, bumped a bit and that was it. So that's how you do that part.

Did you miss your family at that point?

Not really. I was a kid that had always been out and about. I knew they were home, I knew everything was alright, I knew they were safe. By then of course my mother had passed away and I knew my sisters were OK and my Dad was there.

18:00 I didn't miss them much.

So you Mum passed away within the training years?

My mother passed away in 1943. I was in camp in Bradfield Park going from one place to another, just waiting to transit from one posting to another and I got the telegram that my

18:30 mother had died. They gave me two days leave and I went home for the funeral, back again. I was lucky. Like Mum, the funeral service was an open coffin service and I was able to see her and she looked just normal. She looked lovely. But anyway, that was that.

A shock to you?

I reckon. Like when

19:00 you're young you think your family's indestructible. It must be horrific for people today the way the world is. It must be very bad. But as I say, you have that fatalistic approach to life at those times, you just go back and get on with it.

So after,

19:30 **how did you come to leave Cootamundra? What happened and how long were you there for actually?**

As I say, I was only there for about, I think about two months or so. That's when I got posted to East Sale but I didn't make it. I had to go and work on the wharves loading bombs. I think I might've told you that before?

Yeah. Tell us a bit more about that experience?

Well it was an unfortunate time in Australia's maritime history. There was a lot of discontent on the waterfront and,

20:00 like I can have sympathy with the wharfies in may ways, 'cause as I've said to you my Dad was a wharfie and they didn't get it too easy. Well they were using every opportunity they could to improve their salary I suppose and at this particular time they were asked to load these bombs for New Guinea, 500 pound bombs, and they wanted more money and the government wouldn't pay them and so they went on strike. Well we thought the strike was a bit thick,

20:30 you know, not really the right thing to do, but the answer of course was you just grab the nearest group of service personnel, make them into instant wharfies and away you go. Well we were pretty raw, but we managed. We trundled these bombs along the wharf on little trolleys, rolled them on and off and put them in slings and loaded them up into the boat. It was pretty hard work and night time, but anyway

21:00 we were only kids and we thought it was rather a bit of a joke, really.

What did they look like?

What, the bombs? Like bombs. A 500 pounder I suppose would be about two foot six to three foot long counting the tail fin and the nose cone and they're sort of about ten inches to a foot in diameter, so they're not very impressive things at all really. They had a bit of a hook on one side

21:30 where they could hang them onto planes, that's all. But they were a bit awkward to handle. They were quite heavy as you can imagine and you couldn't lift them up. We didn't lift any. We just rolled them and trundled them on these little trolleys and we pulled the trolleys along by hand. We didn't have tractors or any of that sort of stuff. Pretty primitive.

How long did you have to do that for?

I only did one night. I got appendicitis.

22:00 Didn't I tell you? Lucky Earle strikes again. Yes, so I ended up out in the hospital at Concord. They took my appendix out for free. That was pretty good, wasn't it? Decent of them. That's the only operation I've ever had in my life. Amazing, isn't it? Lucky again. Yeah, what do they say? You don't have to be born smart, be born

22:30 lucky or marry a rich woman. I got the lucky bit I think.

So what happened after that?

Well, Cootamundra, Sale, no good there, so back to Sydney. I got posted to what was known as the com [communications] unit at Mascot. I don't know what they were supposed to do, com units. As I said, wireless operators just did as they were told and waited for something to happen.

23:00 So we were in camp at Mascot. I'd learnt to drink beer by then and by gee, we consumed a few pints in that place, I can tell you. But the aircraft we had on station, we had one Tiger Moth [trainer biplane] pretty big time, and a couple of Avro Ansons, a Hudson and a couple of old Vultee Vengeance, dive bombers. Now they were used to

23:30 take people from points A to B, whatever purpose the services wanted. I don't know why. I don't care even, but the crews had to go along and do what they do. The other function was to do army cooperation with the artillery installations on Botany Heads and Sydney Harbour Heads, and the trick there was we'd fly along at a certain altitude and they'd

24:00 aim at us. They'd fuse the shells 1,000 feet shorter than our designated altitude and hope they exploded. So we'd just fly along looking down at the flack going off and think, well that's alright, they've done it right this time. We did a few of those, not too many. I did one, the Anson went U/S [unserviceable]. I did one in a Tiger Moth. I had nothing to do, just sit there. No radio in the thing, nothing, but I went along.

24:30 A young fellow named Jimmy Lee was the pilot, a big lump of a bloke. It's a wonder he could fit in this Tiger Moth. Gee, he was a big boy, but he was a crackerjack bloke, Jim, and we got up and we're stooging along and he said, "Can you fly?" I said, "I've never had a go, Jim." He said, "Do you want to have a try?" I said, "Jeez, if I can't maintain altitude mate they'll get shot down." They said, "When we're going home you can have a try." So anyway, we flew up and down, really enjoyed it, you know, and when we'd finished we were heading off home and Jim said, "Well have a go." So I'm flying this Tiger. I don't know if you've ever been in a

25:00 Tiger. They're fragile little things, they really are, and the controls, the pedals are just a bar across the bottom. They're very loose and sloppy, and the joy stick is like a broom handle and you can pull it out if you're not too careful and it just wobbles and the plane seems to follow it. I don't know why. Anyway, I was battling to keep this thing just going along straight and level and Jim said, "Now I want you to do a turn." I said, "Righto, what do I do?" He told me.

25:30 He said, "Turn it through 180 degrees." I said, "Oh yeah." I understood what that was, I wasn't really silly. Anyway I did a very smart 360. He had to tip the stick over and pull back on it and pull the top rudder on and whoosh, come right around. He said, "That's no good Earle." I said, "I don't think so Jim." I said, "You better fly this thing before I crash it." I wasn't too good at that at all, and really I was just as nervous as a kitten trying to do it 'cause I'd never

26:00 ever tried and they're very touchy, you know. But Jim was good, he could do all sorts of things, aerobatics and what not, which he did a few. But anyway, that was my first go at flying.

Did you want to fly?

Oh yeah. I flew the Cats [Catalina flying boats] a little bit. Not a lot because see, a lot of very quiet time on a long range flight and it's just sitting waiting, sitting waiting and

26:30 when it didn't really matter the skipper used to kick the second officer down the back for a rest or vice versa and one of the crew would go and sit in the other seat. Quite often they'd let you just steer the thing, just try and keep it level and keep it on course which was pretty dull but at least it was flying. Sometimes a bit of cloud would come by you and you'd have a go at that and what have you, but that was the limit of the flying, actual flying

27:00 that I ever did.

You said that by the time you got to that particular base you

Mascot?

To Mascot, yeah, you were an experienced beer drinker. Where did your training happen for that?

It gradually developed. It gradually developed. My first occasion one of my mates, a lad named Vic Bracken, Sydney boy, a real good bloke, Vic. It was on Saturday and we were going

27:30 into town. He was a little bit older than me. "What are we going to do in town today, Vic?" He said, "Well I don't know about you Blue, but I'm going to have a bloody beer." I said, "You're a bit rough, aren't you?" He said, "No." He said, "If you want to come you can come, if you don't, well do the other thing." So I thought, "Fair enough, I'll go and have a beer with him." Well I had, I think I had four double sarses [sarsaparilla] and then I gave in. I couldn't stand any more double sars and I remember it didn't do me any good at all because it made me

28:00 very ill. But anyway, I suppose I gradually became accustomed to this illness and now here I am today making my own beer. Anyway, that starts it.

Where would you drink beer at Mascot?

In the sergeants' mess.

Can you describe the sergeants' mess?

Well it was just the same as all the other huts that we lived in except that one end it had a small bar and a refrigerator and the other space was taken up with a few tables and stools and

28:30 the caper at Mascot was that because we were such a small unit we couldn't have keg beer on tap

because we'd never get rid of it quick enough, so it was nearly all bottled beer. We had a keg on every night, every week one night. The old airforce tradition was called 'Dining In Night', in other words you weren't allowed to go out and of course you have a confined to camp that night, so they'd put a keg up and we'd manage to consume it just out of

29:00 sheer duty, but all the other days or nights it was bottled beer. It got so bad that we had nowhere to dispose of the bottles, so we stacked them against the side of the mess and the people before me had already started this tradition, and I tell you what, the pile of bottles got to be almost as big as the hut. So it was quite a popular past time, was beer drinking. Yeah, it was good, and later in my

29:30 service career they issued us with beer up in the active service areas, we got a supply of beer which they doled out, a couple of bottles a week while stocks lasted, which wasn't too bad. That's why you couldn't buy beer when you came back here after the war, because all the bottles were up there. They really were. Crazy, isn't it? That's how we won, I'm sure. What else do you want to know?

The issue of two bottles won the war,

30:00 **you reckon?**

Well, it helped.

What happened after Mascot then?

Well, did I tell you from Mascot I went to Darwin? I think I mentioned that, didn't I?

You mentioned it but I think you were going to talk about the trip.

Yeah, well we went up in this Anson. There was myself, I was the radio operator. I young bloke named Ray Soden was the navigator, a big tall fellow, Ray. Oh, he was a strong man. And another guy named Hank Cerinni. This is at Mascot.

30:30 The sergeants' huts in Mascot had these six foot high petitions divided into private quarters, two to a private quarter, and on Dining In nights when they'd have too much beer they used to play volleyball with me over this blasted petition, which was quite exciting for them and quite frightening for me. I think that was the most feared I was ever when I was in the services, the fear the big buggers would pick me up and throw me over this petition and hopefully they'd catch me on the other side.

31:00 But anyway, they were good guys, all good fun. Well, Ray and I got crewed up with this guy named Billy Wiltshire, and Billy Wiltshire was a legend. You may have heard of people like Gerry Pentland, Doc Fenton from the Royal Flying Doctor Service, pioneers of aviation in Queensland and the Centre, well Billy Wiltshire was a contemporary of theirs. In fact, one of those blokes, that where he sort of learnt his trade and when

31:30 Bill came to our unit he was already a squadron leader, you know, that's a very senior officer, and he had 10,000 flying hours to his credit which was an unheard of amount of hours. Really, an unheard of amount, and he put all that time in flying around western Queensland and the Northern Territory. Anyway, Bill was a character. He really was a character. He had a moustache that covered most of his face

32:00 and it was a natural bow and arrow type of moustache. It just sprinked out past his ears and made him look real wicked, real evil. Anyway, we got introduced to Bill when we were told that we were going with him to Darwin, and it would only be a matter of days while the plane was got ready. Bill had to have it perfect, he wasn't going in any old Aggie [Avro Anson]. It had to be spot on [perfect]. Anyway, they introduced the nav to him first, Ray. "Sir, this is

32:30 Flight Sergeant Soden, navigator," and he looked at Ray. He was smaller than Ray and he looked him up and down and up and said, "You won't have much to do. I know that country like the back of my hand." He said, "I suppose I've got to take you." That made Ray feel real good. I thought God, what's going to happen to me. So they introduced me to him and he said, "And what do you do, sonny?" He looked down at

33:00 me see, because I'm a giant. "Radio operator, sir," and he snorted and said, "Bloody new fangled things," and that was it. I didn't speak to him again until we left. We didn't have a shake down cruise [trial flight] or anything. "Righto, get in, you're going."

What did you think of him at that point?

I thought he was a legend. I knew how many hours he had and I thought well God, he must know what he's doing, but he's a bit rude. But then

33:30 wing commanders have got the right to be, haven't they? So anyway, he gave us a right royal time. It took us two weeks to get to Darwin which is a bit of a record I reckon. We stayed overnight a couple of nights at Coolangatta because he had some mates there and we went out via Dalby, Roma, Charleville, Longreach, Winton, Cloncurry, Camooweal.

34:00 Then we went up the north south road, Daly Waters, Katherine, Brunette Downs, Newcastle Waters, Gorrie, Batchelor. Anyway all those places we went to and it took us a long long time, but it was great.

The highlight of the trip was, a couple of days at Coolangatta wasn't bad, Brunette Downs cattle station.

34:30 I'd never been on a big cattle station. I'd never been on a cattle station in my life, and you know where Brunette Downs is? It's in the gulf country about half way between Mount Isa and Tennant Creek and it's a big cattle station, thousands and thousands of cattle, and the most fabulous food. We had our lunch in the dining hall with the station hands

35:00 and we had roast beef and roast pork and I've never tasted roast beef and roast pork of such quality before or since. It was fabulous. But of course old Bill knew them you see. That was his stamping ground out around there. So we'd become quite friendly by then because on the way to Cloncurry we ran into a dust storm and Bill got lost. The back of his hand got dusty and he couldn't see where he was going. So

35:30 he got lost, and Ray came and spoke to me and he said, "He doesn't know where we are Earle. Could you get me a couple of DF bearings and I'll give him a course and see what happens." So sure enough I got a bearing from Archerfield and another one Cloncurry and one from Dubbo I think it was, and that gave us a really good position fix and old Raymond put it on his maps and trotted up from and said, "Here

36:00 Willy, have a crack at this." Sure enough, spot on time there's good old Cloncurry and Bill was astounded. We'd earned our keep. Anyway, as I say we'd become quite pally [friendly] with old Bill. He was a real human being, you know, after all hiding behind that moustache he was quite a nice fellow and we had this wonderful entertainment and meal at Brunette Downs and I was quite enjoying the trip.

36:30 Anyway, we got along a bit further and the idea, Bill's idea, was that he would fly west and when he came to the north south road which linked Alice Springs to Darwin. He knew he would turn north and follow that. So pretty easy, anyway, we did that and we were going along quite nicely. We landed, I'm not sure in which order it was now, but one of

37:00 our landings, I think was Daly Waters. We stayed overnight and we stayed at the local pub and it was an interesting stop. The beer I think was about a shilling a glass and the water was five shillings. They were having a bad time. It was just on the start of the wet season and everywhere was dry. The tanks were all empty

37:30 and the hotel was charging for water. I met a gentleman on the verandah. I went out on the verandah. I was sitting there, Ray and I, and this gentleman was sitting there and we introduced ourselves and his name was EG Theodore. Have you ever heard of him? Well, he was a member of parliament in Queensland years before the war. He was Minister for Mines I think. Anyway, after the outbreak of war

38:00 he was appointed by the Commonwealth Government to head up the civilian service called the CCC [Civil Construction Corps]. Now a lot of people won't know about these guys but they recruited a whole lot of people into the CCC and they went over into the Northern Territory and under the direction of that man they bitumenised the road from Alice Springs to Darwin and they did it in pretty

38:30 good time, which you know, quite an achievement. The man he was a real smart cookie [clever]. He knew what he was about. Anyway I enjoyed meeting him and talking about the road and that sort of stuff, but as a sideline they also built along that road, they built all these fighter strips. They were just actually part of the road. They just widened the road out a bit and it was an airfield and that's where the fighter planes, they were based all along that north south road inland a bit from Darwin

39:00 so they would be safe from the bombing raids and yet close enough so that they could intercept, and they had lots of them. They're still there to this day. If you go that way you'll see them. They're all named. Anyway, that was just one thing. I knew about Mr Theodore. My father had spoken of him and I knew of his political career and I was pleased to meet him because he turned out to be a surprise.

39:30 Not too many pollies [politicians] do, but he did. He surprised me, he was quite a smart cookie.

What sort of things was he telling you?

About the construction of the road and troubles with the blokes and all the troubles with supplies and just general conversation about what was going on around the joint, and I appreciated it because I was only a kid and he was an old man. But anyway, that was that.

What were the troubles that he referred to?

Well, there's always troubles when you've got a large lot of blokes

40:00 away from home, and hard work and not much tucker, and they were civvies [civilians]. Not like the services where you had sort of discipline and you could be disciplined properly. But construction workers, you just more or less had to take them like unionists I suppose, and they were pushed around a bit, but it worked out OK and they did a grand job. As a matter of fact, the chap who lived next door to me at the back here, he died about five years ago, a bloke named

40:30 Dudley Newberry, he was on that construction of the road and we used to often talk about it.

And what did he think of Theodore?

He didn't actually know him personally, but the thought the CCC were a much maligned mob who did a damned good job and didn't get much recognition, and I suppose that's right too, because they were the back end of the business, like they weren't the heroes. But they were the heroes really. They did a grand

41:00 job. Every person in Australia I reckon did a grand job during that war. Like right through, right through. Like I had my cousin, a young girl, she joined the Land Army and she used to drive around in big five ton trucks and she was about as big as threepence. She really was a dot. I think she had to have a box to sit on to drive them, but she did, and a lot of girls did that too. My brother's wife, the girl he eventually married, she worked in the munitions factory at Rocklea making bullets.

41:30 My Mum, as I said, she worked with the Red Cross and other ladies doing various things, making kidney bowls for the hospital out of papier maché. Have you heard of papier maché?

Tape 5

00:32 **All the mothers used to do war work of some sort and one was making kidney bowls for the hospitals and they made them out of newspaper. Now the way you make a papier maché, is you tear the newspaper into small pieces and put it in a bucket of water or whatever**

01:00 **and leave it until it goes into a pulp and then you mould it into a shape, dry it out and then lacquer it, and they were very effective. They were waterproof and they were sent off to the fronts and that where the hospital people used them all the time. They were very successful, but Mum used to make those. She also was in the knitting circle making socks, sewing socks. All the ladies made socks. The Red Cross sent them up to us. We'd wear them once, we'd wash them**

01:30 **and they'd go from khaki to multicolour because the ladies used all the bits of wool they had left over and they were the craziest socks I ever saw. I wonder, like the Japs must've got some of them. I wonder what they ever thought about these multicoloured socks the young people used to issue, and that's it. They were terrible, they'd always shrink.**

As you were moving around the country did you come across other

02:00 **things that the women were doing that helped you out?**

No, not really.

When you were travelling by train , some people told us about the auxiliary ladies who were providing meals and things like that.

I didn't do much train travel other than in my early days. Once I got on the squadron we travelled by air all the time, but I did find that any towns you came to there was always somewhere you could go and get some sustenance, but

02:30 we mostly headed off to the pub.

When you first started flying, in fact that very first flight. Can you tell us about that?

Well, it was nowhere near as exciting as I thought it would be. It's not really much of a thrill at all because it's quite safe, you just rumble along, take off and up you go and then you muck around a bit and then you come back. So

03:00 no, I suppose being a passenger would be different to actual, being the pilot. I think I would've got more excitement and more thrill out of it if I was master of my own destiny, but as a passenger, well it was pretty mundane really.

What about when you were training as a gunner, wireless gunnery? What was involved in that exactly, what was the role?

They're two separate things.

03:30 As a wireless operator, you had to undergo a number of exercises to prove that you could communicate over radio by Morse and that you could manage the equipment. Now those exercises are all laid down. So you'd take off and you'd tune your equipment and you'd go a certain distance out and then you would communicate and pass messages back and forward. You would be scored on your results, both as

04:00 a transmitter, the instructor receiving the message would rate you as to the speed and accuracy and the suitability of your hand work and you would be scored on the accuracy of the message that you brought back. That was the main thrust of it. The idea was to get you used to the equipment that we used, which actually that was the only place we ever used that equipment. It was that rotten and primitive, but still that was what we had.

04:30 Another exercise was to tune into the Brisbane high frequency direction finder and request a bearing

and to go through the procedure so you could receive the bearing and then receive his answer and take it out of the Morse and write it down for assessment. If you could pass those exercises you'd finish your flying requirement and nobody seemed to fail. Everybody got

05:00 through, it was OK. It was quite interesting. As a lead up to the direction finding we also had work that we did on the ground in panel vans. They had a direction finding loop on the top of the panel van and they used to drive you out in the middle of the mulga [bush] somewhere and say, "Righto, now find the radio station at Maryborough and give me a direction to go," and then you would keep giving them directions to get them back

05:30 to this radio station. It was pretty silly really because the roads don't run straight and you were forever having to be changing things, but we all seemed to get back home. So they were basically the exercises that we did. The bulk of the time up there was taken in learning radio theory, how to fix your radios if you had to which we never did, how to tune them in and how to do Morse code and handle the

06:00 airforce codes of the day. We had to learn how to do that and that was pretty dreadful, didn't seem to make much sense. Anyway, we managed. That was the radio school. The gunnery school was altogether different. It concentrated solely in gunnery. You learnt about your guns and how to fire them and you were scored on your results. So all in all it was pretty comprehensive.

What it was like to be in a plane actually doing that kind of thing, what the conditions were like that you were in?

Well, for our exercises for a start, we always flew in good weather. It wasn't too bad and you could see what was going on. The thing that surprised me most really was with the air to air firing, you very soon become accustomed to the relative speeds

07:00 of the target and yourself and that's the essence of air to air gunnery. If you can assess the sort of relativity than you can relate it to your gun sight and you lead the target by a certain amount, and that enables you to hit the target. If you fire at the target of course you miss it. So you've got to fire ahead of it, and that's what you've got to judge. The sights on those guns were very primitive. They were what you call

07:30 a ring and bead sight which consists of a little bump on the front end of the barrel with a little round ball on it which you call the bead, and at the back end of the barrel there's a spike with a ring on it and a dot in the centre. The ones we used were, if memory has it right, I'm not sure if we used different ones at different times, I think it was a 50 mile an hour ring sight.

08:00 In other words, it might've even been 100. It might've had an inner ring and an outer ring. If you led the target by putting the bead at the head of the target, and the ring, the edge of the ring on the front of the target, then you led the target by either 50 or 100, OK? So you had to more or less assess and to help you, like they would load the gun with some tracer ammunition. You could actually

08:30 see the bullet going through the air. It has some sort of a phosphorous compound in the back end of it which burnt it as the bullet went along so you could actually see the path, and that gave you extra guidance if you wanted to correct your lead. You'd work it out whether the relative speed was 50 or 100 or somewhere in between. You could get pretty good at it really, but we didn't have a lot of

09:00 time. Like in the OTU I probably fired off about maybe 800 rounds, that's all. Not many, but you get quite good at it and you actually do hit the rotten thing. On the air to ground it was different. As I say, you could see where the bullets would impact upon the ground and you still did the same thing. That's a stationary target so you lagged the target. You fired behind it to take into account the

09:30 travel of the bullet. It was surprising how good you get at that too. I recall on our first day up they'd send, normally they'd send about four aeroplanes, five aeroplanes depending on serviceability, out on the range at the one time and they'd have a whole string of targets, maybe as many as 20, and they'd give you an allocation. You might have 1 and 10, and the next bloke would have 2 and 11 or something like that, and the aeroplanes

10:00 would form a circuit and they'd go around and in turn you'd have a go at this target. The first day we went up, the lead aeroplane had a lad in it. His name was Les Fang Wan, a little Chinese bloke. Les was a great little guy, always smiling, came from Cairns. Anyway, Les and I were pretty could cobbers actually, and he's in the lead aeroplane and I'm in about number 4 or so. Anyway, Les went flying along. He shot at his targets.

10:30 The plane did a turn at the end and came back the other side. Les got the message wrong. He thought he had to go from there. So he put his gun over and starting shooting. Of course we were coming through on the inside you see. Well, did I give him heaps [of abuse]. I put my gun over and pointed at him and I shook my fist and he stopped shooting just like that. He must've got the message. But yeah, some funny things, but I think, Les is still alive. He lives at Atherton. A

11:00 nice lad. I met his brother in Cairns many years later, a bloke named Jimmy. Jimmy and I used to go fishing.

Apart from that forced landing you were involved in, did you observe any other accidents during all the training that you did?

I saw a rather horrific crash at Mascot. The Vultee Vengeance had just been adapted for drogue towing and it was

11:30 fast. You know, it could go along at a couple of hundred [miles an hour] whereas our other planes were only about 90 knotters [knots per hour], and the army wanted something a bit quicker. So they put this machine in the back of the Vultee to stream the drogues and it's quite a dangerous task. A drogue is a pretty big wind sock and it's got a lot of force in it. When you drop it out in the slipstream and you're going fast there's a lot of power and if you get your hands in the way of those steel cables you've got big troubles. Anyway,

12:00 the army wanted a demonstration and so they sent their brass [high ranking offices] out and our flight put up this Vultee and they streamed the drogue over the airport and showed them how it came out and how it towed along nice and straight and nice and fast. Then when they finished that demonstration they came back over the top and released the drogue and dropped

12:30 it and they had a drop zone to land it in and they got it spot on. It was a very beautiful piece of work, very clever, and everyone was clapping, great. We were all standing there and watching and taking the bloomin' credit for what our mates were doing, and then they finished their circuit off and came into land and a very serious accident happened. The Vultee Vengeance were a big lumbering aeroplane to land

13:00 and according to my friends who flew them, like the caper [plan] was to come over the fence around about 10 knots up your sleeve [in reserve] because they were pretty sort of dicey [difficult] at stall, and very hard to control. Anyway this young bloke that was flying apparently brought it in at the recommended speed which is pretty close to stall and a bloke ran across the runway in a vehicle.

13:30 Anyway, the pilot tried to go around. He put on full power and he didn't have time to wind the trim off and the plane climbed up and stalled out and fell down right in front of our eyes. It landed right on top of a Tiger Moth that was parked on the tarmac, which subsequently became Ansett's [commercial airline] tarmac. You know that part of Mascot Airport? Anyway, of course it crashed and it burnt and it was dreadful. These two young boys were killed. One

14:00 of them was thrown out of his harness and landed on the wing. The pilot was still strapped in and we watched them. You couldn't do a thing. You couldn't get within 50 feet of it for the intensity of the heat and those bodies burnt. They just burnt in front of our eyes and that was pretty bad, pretty bad indeed. That was the worst mishap that I saw in the whole of my career, so I suppose I was fortunate there. But

14:30 that was sad, that was a bad day. I was lucky again because I was supposed to go on that flight and it got changed right at the last minute and I didn't go. I went in the mess that night to have some meal, and one of the stewards fainted. He thought I was a ghost. He did, he passed out. When they brought him to they said, "What's wrong?" He said, "How come he's here, wasn't he killed? Didn't I see him getting

15:00 burnt?" Yeah, so just like that. That's what happens. It's fate, isn't it? Got God on your side and you can't lose.

Did you think you had God on your side during the war?

I didn't give it much thought. I wasn't very religious really. I'd had religious training as a child, but you know, I didn't really ascribe it to that. I just thought it was good fortune.

15:30 **What about lucky charms or anything before you took off on a flight?**

Never had any. Later on I had a mascot, but I'll tell you about that after.

Can you describe a little bit more about that situation with the wharfies [waterside workers' strike] ?

No, I don't know the politics of it or anything. All I know is they got us and made us go in there and work, and work we did.

16:00 **How many of you were there?**

I suppose there would've been four or five truckloads of blokes. We were waiting there for posting overseas and they used to send a shipload away at a time, so there would've been a lot. There would've been a lot of guys. I suppose there could be anything up to 1,000 men at that camp waiting to go overseas and they'd all go and I'd get left behind.

Why did the wharfies

16:30 **not want to load the bombs?**

I don't know. I think it was their business. I don't know.

Was there a danger factor involved?

Well, they weren't fused. They could certainly, maybe, I don't think explode. No, I don't think there was

much danger to it at all, unless they fell on you. That would be the dangerous part. I don't know of anybody having

17:00 an exploding bomb with all the loading of aeroplanes and that that was ever done. I don't think so. I don't think the bombs dropped on the ground and blew the aeroplanes up. I've never heard of it. I don't think there's any danger at all.

How many men were needed to load one of those 500 pound bombs?

Individually, I don't know. We just grabbed them and rolled them along and trundled them on the wagons and it took more of us to pull the wagons along once we loaded them up, but a couple of blokes would wrestle one up onto the wagon

17:30 up a little ramp thing, you know. But that was it.

And then you got appendicitis. Can you tell us a little bit about your stay in hospital?

No, nothing much at all. I just woke up and I'd had my appendix out. I spent a lonely four or five days and then they sent me off. They sent me to camp would you believe with my kit bag to go down to Sale, which I did and it wasn't too easy because I'd been

18:00 at overseas posting school and the kit bag, the overseas one, was about nearly as tall as me and pretty heavy. Anyway, I dragged it and pushed it and got it down there and then they said, "You're not fit," so they sent me back home to Brisbane for a couple of weeks leave, and I had to lug it all the way up there. By that time I'd recovered, but no, hospital was just hospital. It was a bit dull really. They were kind to me, they treated me alright.

You didn't come across any servicemen who'd been overseas

18:30 **while you were in hospital?**

No. I don't think there were any there at Concord. I think they were mostly blokes like me, and you didn't have much to do with them anyway. You know, just like any other hospital. Anyway,

You said that some of those blokes from Sale actually ended up –

Getting killed?

Luck was on your side again. How close were you to any of those?

Well we'd been at Cootamundra together for

19:00 a period of six weeks or so, and we were pretty good mates. We used to go out and have a beer and lunch and we were all going to the one squadron. We thought we were forming some good friendships. I did, actually one boy, his name was Jim Hanley, Jim had the chemist shop here at Nundah for many years. Jim's passed away, but a couple of them, a couple of the boys from Coota actually came up to Rathmines with me when we went

19:30 on Catalinas and they were pretty good guys too. One of my good mates was a lad named Ray Reid. After the war he went and did medicine. He was a doctor out at Randwick.

So when you received news of some of these mates being killed, what do you think it was that gave you the strength to just keep going on?

Well I hate to say this, but just, "Thank Christ it wasn't me."

20:00 Like there was a fatalistic approach right through life in those days as far as we were concerned. All us airforce guys were the same, and well if you bought it, you bought it [killed], and if you didn't you'd thank the Lord it wasn't me. You still felt pretty sad for them, but nothing you could do about it. There was no great trauma or sort of need for counselling that they go on with these days. No time nor room for it either. I think it was that's life.

20:30 **Where were you when you heard that your brother was missing in action?**

That was late in '43. Not long before my mother passed away and I would've been probably at Mascot or at Bradfield Park in between transfers. I was at Bradfield Park in between transfers.

21:00 **You were pretty close to your brother. How did that news affect you at the time?**

Well I didn't actually know. I didn't know he was missing until I came home, like until much later. Nobody told me, I didn't know. So when I found out I thought, well, that's Joe. His name was Bob but everybody called him Joe. I don't know why.

21:30 I thought that's him, couldn't kill him with a meat axe, yeah.

So making that amazing journey up to Darwin, what happened when you arrived, or to Batchelor I should say?

Well before we got there we ran into the weather, the bad weather from dust storm at Cloncurry to the

intertropic front going up the north south road and Bill

22:00 got lost again because it was so bad that he couldn't even see the road, and I reckon we were flying at about 30 feet. You know what tropical storms are like, those heavy downpours and that monsoonal rain? We're in there and of course under normal circumstances he wouldn't have gone in there. Like he's not that stupid, but of course war time, you've got to do what you've got to do, and so Bill thought, "I'll be right. I'll follow the road, I'll get through here", and of course he didn't. We were

22:30 hopelessly lost. He lost the road and of course from there on in like you're flying around in the dark, so it was back to the old DF [Direction Finder] again, and sure enough we managed to get bearings and give him a course to an aerodrome called Newcastle Waters, and Newcastle Waters was a funny little place. It's just a little tiny town and one pub, a couple of houses and a river

23:00 and the aerodrome is on the other side of the river and of course the rain had been going quite a bit by then and the river was running quite strong. Anyway we landed on the airstrip. There was no one there, it was an unattended airstrip and we just taxied down to the side and got out. It was dreadfully hot and we got out and we sat under the wing out of the rain wondering what we could do, lamenting our fate because we could see the pub across the river and we had no way of getting over.

23:30 Anyway a cove [man] comes along on a horse, gave us a bit of lip, wanted to know what we were doing. I said, "Well we're thinking about going over to the pub for a beer mate, but we can't find a dinghy." He said, "I'll get you over." We said, "Righto, how?" He said, "Well if you can hang onto the tail of my horse I'll tow you over one at a time." We said, "No thank you. We'll stay right here where we are," and so we did. We stayed until the weather broke and then we continued our journey and eventually arrived safe and sound.

24:00 The job was a funny job. I don't know if you know anything about radar, but it doesn't see fabric aeroplanes very well, and of course the Aggie was 99 percent fabric. So they'd given me a piece of machinery which was called an IFF set, identification friend or foe set. This special

24:30 piece of secret equipment that they gave me, I was told to guard it with my life, to take it out of the aeroplane when I went back to camp, to keep it close to me and not tell anybody about it. They said be very careful with it because if you drop it it will explode. Well that was rather frightening. It turned out a lot of rubbish. It did have a detonating device inside it which if it was subject to a

25:00 certain amount of rough handling it would destroy the contents of the box but not necessarily sort of rupture it or do anything really bad, but that was the way they were made and they were secret. It was a radar device, the first of its kind really, and it was like a combined receiver transmitter and instead of the

25:30 radar signals coming and bouncing off aeroplanes this little gadget would receive them like a radio and that would key off a response and it would send a signal back. That signal was much stronger than an ordinary aeroplane signal and it had a sort of a pulsing to it and that way the ground operator could identify that the reflection he was getting was from a friendly aeroplane. They also had it in aeroplanes so that they could tell aeroplane to aeroplane that you were seeing a friendly aeroplane and it was

26:00 quite a discovery really, and I felt quite sort of important that they'd entrusted this thing to me, but I was a bit scared of it. Anyway, we carried it around. We took it in and out of the plane and we used it and apparently the results were successful because we only had to do a few exercises and we were allowed to go back home.

So this was a calibrating of this radar?

Well, see,

26:30 as I said, because the Anson wasn't a good target they had to have a good target and a positively identified target. Well with this piece of equipment that's what they achieved, and of course then they could track from the courses and position fixes that Bill had to fly over, they could see that the radar return was going where the aeroplane actually was, and that way they could see that their bearing and range

27:00 of their radar was correct, and that was the purpose of the exercise, to achieve that so they could have faith in their radar signals as being where, the signal would be where the aeroplane actually was and I suppose in a way it was quite important, but it was towards the end of the air activity in Darwin. I think we more or less had air supremacy around about by then so probably it didn't achieve a great deal,

27:30 but if the Japs had been a bit stronger it would've been important. As I say, I was young when the war started and my career sort of followed along just on the rear end of most of the activity. So once again I was lucky, wasn't I?

Doing these exercises you were doing with that equipment, was Bill still with you?

He was flying. He was the leader.

So how did he respond to this new equipment?

Bill ignored it. It was something that

28:00 the scientists had thought up and all he had to do was fly it around the place and he ignored it. I had to look after it and that was that. I know it was pretty dull. I had the radio tuned in and listening out but I wasn't allowed to use it, radio silence again, just a passenger. Anyway, I was bit bored there one day flying along at about 10,000 [feet] it mightn't have been quite 10, pretty high for an Anson anyway, I know,

28:30 and I think Bill was sort of feeling a bit naked because we had absolutely no defence on this plane at all, no guns, nothing. Our most potent weapon was the Very cartridge [signal flare] and we were flying out over the Timor Sea. Well if there's anybody coming along to make a pest of themselves that's where they'd be coming from so you didn't feel too happy about the situation.

29:00 But fortunately nothing happened. But I think Bill was sort of keeping an eye on the little bits of clouds that were around just in case he needed to find somewhere to go and hide, and there wasn't much communication, not much talk. Ray was pretty busy with his navigation and checking that things were as they should be and I'm sitting there bored stiff. So I picked up a piece of equipment which they used to call a

29:30 computer. It was a navigational computer. It was just a circular slide rule but it was made out of aluminium and quite solid. I picked it up and I fiddled with it a bit and I got a bit bored with it so I tossed it up in the air and caught it in the other hand. You know what kids are like. I bloomin' threw it too far and it went clunk and landed on the bloomin' back of Bill's seat. Well, I've never seen such a violent reaction in my life. I think Bill thought someone was firing at us because he really did some violent evasive action. I've never seen an Anson undertake

30:00 such amazing gyrations. Off track, anywhere, up, down, sideways, and when I told him what it was didn't he tell me off! I suppose I deserved it. Later on when we got to the mess, like of course Bill being the officer, went to the officers' mess. Ray and I, being NCOs, went to the sergeants' mess. We were having quite a laugh over that. Ray's still alive, he lives up at Hervey Bay.

30:30 **What happened to Bill?**

I don't know. When we finished that exercise Ray and I came back to Sydney. We came back with Qantas. Bill stayed there with his Anson and probably went on to other important things. He was more or less, as I say, he was a legend and a very experienced bloke and no doubt the airforce had plans for what they wanted Bill to do within his sort of area of expertise which was

31:00 the Northern Territory and outback. So off he disappeared into the wide blue yonder and we came home with Qantas.

Were you a bit unnerved when he was flying in this incredibly evasive manner?

How do you mean?

When he reacted to what you had done?

No, I knew what had happened. I wasn't worried. Once again the fatalistic approach, like we had no defence and I was hoping and praying that the powers that be

31:30 would send us into an area where they didn't expect us to have any trouble, and I was right again, we didn't have any trouble. We just went out and flew around and came home with our faithful little IFF set.

Just talking back about that flight, I guess it was a cyclone.

No no, an intertropic front, the monsoon.

The tropic front, the monsoon. Can you describe a little bit more about the conditions, what you were seeing and hearing and what it was like inside a plane?

Well,

32:00 like Bill was trying to maintain visual contact with the road and of course he had to get lower and lower and lower, and really you couldn't see much at all because it was raining cats and dogs, really raining bad, and I was looking out trying to see where the road was too. A few low stunted trees going past and glimpses of the road, but you couldn't see very far. Sublime faith I suppose. I reckoned Bill would be alright, he managed to stop it from hitting the ground, which he did.

32:30 It wasn't very turbulent because in those real heavy rainstorms like that it's mainly a downdraft you've got to worry about. Just the rain wants to keep pushing you down onto the ground. There's not a lot of cross wind or head wind or anything like that, it's just raining, really really heavy rain, and so it was just like dark and stormy, so we just went along. Anyway, we survived that one too. Been pretty lucky, as

33:00 you've gathered, hey?

When you met Bill you already knew him as a bit of legend?

No. We knew he was on the station. When Bill arrived of course people said, “Hey, this guy, Jesus, he’s got some hours up,” you know. Ray and I didn’t know we’d be flying with him and of course he was the buzz word around the town. “This really experienced old bird, he’s been about, this boy.” Well we got the shock of our lives when we’d been selected to go with him. We didn’t even know what he was there for.

33:30 It wasn’t until we’d been introduced to him that we were told what we were to do. So we didn’t give him much thought other than, OK, a legend’s arrived.

Do you know why you were selected?

Pretty obvious, wouldn’t you think. I was the smartest kid in the world. No, I don’t know why. Just the luck of the draw. I was thankful afterwards that I did because it was a wonderful experience.

34:00 At least I’d done something.

And flying with him through those quite exciting adventure, how did your opinion about him change in any way?

It never changed. I liked him right from the word go, because I admired him to start with. I admired his record and I knew that he’d been an intrepid airman as they say, and so like any viewpoint I had to form was one of respect. I liked the

34:30 man and he was a good bloke. He was a bit of a bombast to start, you know, he never really thought out too much because he was much older than us. He really was. He was much much senior to us. Wing commanders don’t talk to bloomin’ flight sergeants much, but he was good.

To what extent was he really a legend pilot? Seeing him actually fly, was he everything that you thought he had been?

Well, he didn’t do anything silly. He flew well. Like he did everything

35:00 that a pilot’s supposed to do. He took the aeroplane off nice and smooth, he flew it from A to B and he landed it really good. So what more can you ask? But I had no doubt that in an emergency Bill would know what to do because he’d been around. He really had.

But he didn’t have much faith in the new technology?

I think he might’ve been having us on, wouldn’t you reckon? You know, his era would’ve been one where you’re navigated by visual reference to the ground and local knowledge of

35:30 where you were. His knowledge of the weather would’ve been quite vast because he’d flown lots of distances in areas where there were a lot of different changes. So fair enough, you’d expect that he’d know what he was up to there, and it’s just the sheer weight of time in the air, you’ve got to admire him, you’ve got to respect his abilities. You don’t last up there that long if you’re a mug. Something’s

36:00 got to go wrong.

When you were in the Northern Territory did you have the opportunity to go into Darwin itself?

On that occasion, no. I went back to the Territory later when I got on Catalinas.

So when you were up there at that time during the war, was there still a sort of palpable concern about Japanese invasion? Did you sense that in any way?

No. I don’t know,

36:30 I don’t know that we really expected the Japanese would invade the north west. The thinking was that they would probably invade New Guinea and then come down the east coast. Of course the north west is a terribly inhospitable place. It would’ve been to their advantage as far as having a remote post from which they could sort of operate with some degree of safety, if they’d been able to land there. But they had a hell of a long way to go

37:00 from there to get anywhere that mattered. So I don’t know, we didn’t really think, well I didn’t anyway. I don’t know what the brass thought, but I didn’t think that they would ever land at Darwin or down the coast. Have you been up there? Well that north west coast around the Kimberleys and further down, it’s bad news I tell you. Really bad. There’s hundreds and hundreds of miles with no water at all. Pretty hard to maintain an army.

37:30 But anyway they didn’t come there. But they certainly bombed the hell out of the place.

But you didn’t see any evidence of any of the bombing that had gone on in any of the Northern Territory?

I did later on.

You did?

Yeah. See, I went back to the Territory when I went on Catalinas.

So after that job with the IFF, where did you go from there?

Well, after Mascot I went to Rathmines on Lake Macquarie.

38:00 You know where that is? Just near Newcastle. Lovely place, beautiful part of the world, and Rathmines was the Catalina Flying Boat base and Operational Training Unit, preparing the lads to go north to the squadrons, and our period of time there was only a month and that was in late '43. After finishing

38:30 at Rathmines I was crewed up, and the way they selected the crews, normally they would line up all the pilots, all the navigators and all the gunners and then the armourers and the engineers, you know. See, there's nine men on a Catalina. There's six different categories of air crew and the pilots would be either selected or called out

39:00 in some fashion, I don't know which, but they would then go through the process of selecting their crews. A lot of the things were prearranged. Like blokes would say, a navigator would get to know a training skipper and they would say, "OK, if we can we'll crew together," and so on. Well when it got down to our level, the wireless air gunners, there were two on a Catalina and you'd put your bid in to share crew with one of the

39:30 wireless operators that you had been with for the month. Well, a fellow named Jock Hannis, he was a dairy farmer from Gympie, and I, we were the only two Queenslanders in our lot and we shared our accommodation and we were quite compatible and friendly toward one another. Jock was quite a bit older than me. He was a married man, but we were good compatible mates. I put it to him, "Well, what do you reckon Jock,

40:00 are you happy if we crew together?" And he said, "Sure, you'll do me mate." So that was that. So we're standing there waiting, and the crews, the numbers dwindled down, the crews formed and as they formed they'd move to one side and the ranks would get thinner and thinner and we're standing there. I'll never forget this day, and the skippers are disappearing fast and they were a fairly motley lot. Some were handsome and some were ugly and some were big and strong, you know, and

40:30 amongst them was the man from Snowy River [legendary Australian hero]. No, he wasn't!. It was a tall skinny bloke from West Australia and he was a character. He was as fair as fair. His skin was fair, his hair was fair, slightly ginger but very fair and very fine hair and he had this most stupid moustache that didn't want to behave like a moustache at all. It wanted to sort of sag down and look draggly, and he'd let his hair grow a bit long which was strange for airforce

41:00 because they made you keep it pretty short. I think he was the first of the bloomin' long hair brigade. He had it down over his collar. He really looked strange and I said to Jock, "Get on that bloke, will you?" And he said, "Yeah, he doesn't look too likely, does he?" We'd never flown with him. I said, "What's the bet we cop [get] him?" He said, "Yeah, I reckon we might," and sure enough, last out of the row there's this Flight Lieutenant Cutherbertson. I said, "God, Cutherbertson, doesn't sound

41:30 too good Jock." He said, "No, it doesn't, it's a funny name and he looks like a funny bloke." Anyway we got Alan and he turned out to be a crackerjack too. He was an amazing man, and he could fly. He could really handle those aeroplanes. He was great. Really luck again, and our navigator was a bloke in his mid 20s come from Ballarat, he was a journo [journalist]. Good bloke, too, and smart as paint. Really good nav as it turned

42:00 Out. End of tape.

Tape 6

00:31 **Can you tell us again about the story about the Spitfires losing fuel and where you were at that point because we kind of glossed over that story a little bit?**

Well that was during the time when I was up Batchelor in the Darwin area doing that radar cal on the Anson. It was just before then actually. Let me see, it would've been

01:00 late in '43 I should imagine now when I think about it. Maybe early '44, very early, but it was during the time of the Japanese raids on Darwin and the radar produced, as I told you, an untrue echo which indicated that the invading force was fairly close.

01:30 The operations officer scrambled the fighter cover and unfortunately the radar proved to be wrong and the aeroplanes were a further 100 miles out and they weren't all that fast in those days as you would imagine and the Spitfires' fairly limited duration, so as a result the 23 Spitfires ran out of fuel and more or less crash landed, some on airfields but most in various parts of the Territory within maybe

02:00 30, 40, 50 miles radius of Darwin just out from where they were at the time. They waited and waited and waited and ended up waiting too long. So it was really a tragedy and there was a lot of controversy about it and a lot of blame laid. In reality there was nobody to blame at all.

What were people saying about the blame?

Well at the time they didn't know. They didn't know the cause. They just knew that the fighters took off and

02:30 ran out of fuel before the enemy got here, and more or less it was put down to, I should imagine, an operational mistake, but it was based on what was supposed to be fact and pretty unfortunately circumstance for the operational controller. I don't know who he was. I've got a suspicion but I don't know. Anyway, that's what happened. These things happen all the time.

03:00 There were lots of mistake made. I think the only reason we ever won the war was that we made less than they did.

So radar was pretty new?

Radar was very new. Radar was only invented during World War II and it was a pretty well unknown area. We were lucky to have it on our flying boats. We had radar. We had some good radar too. We started off with the earlier stuff,

03:30 but we had much more developed radar later which we used to very good advantage.

And with the kind of mistake or whatever happened with the Spitfires, were people suspicious of the radar?

Well it took a while I should imagine. Like as I say, I wasn't involved in that particular theatre of activity and what I say is really only what I've sort of gleaned and gathered

04:00 as sort of second hand information, but I should imagine for a while there would've been a great deal of suspicion as to the competency of the operators and to the wisdom of the operation controller, but it was rather an unfortunate thing. I think I told you before that we'd had a similar circumstance at Rathmines where we'd detected an aeroplane quite a long way out. So it can and does happen. Modern radar's got a lot of inbuilt safety features, that just can't happen.

You said you were quite

04:30 **lucky to have it where you were?**

What, the radar?

Yeah.

When I got on the Catalinas?

When you got onto Catalinas.

Oh yeah. Yeah, we had

How did it make life easier?

Well, in reality there was no designated radar operator on a crew. It became part of the duties of the wireless operator, wireless air gunner, and we had a very short course on radar at our OTU but it was not the

05:00 modern radar that we got when we got planes to go to the squadron. The radar we had in the training aeroplanes was designated ASV. It was an early primitive one with great big massive aerials. The one we had on the operational aircraft was ASB which was a much higher frequency, had antenna only about two foot long and we had two, one each side of the bow and

05:30 they were controllable through an arc of about 120 degrees.

I might just back track a little bit. How did you come to be on the Catalinas?

By chance. I'd matured a bit I suppose. I was over 19 and I was available and they were filling crews and they needed wireless air gunners, so I was posted to

06:00 Rathmines to undergo an OTU and serve my time out in the northern theatre which in hindsight I'm glad I did because it was more of a personal war at home, and overseas in Britain, like I've no disrespect for our servicemen who went over there. They did what they had to do and what they were told to do, but I seemed to gain more satisfaction in my later years that I was here on the homeland

06:30 and I'm proud of our airforce. I'm proud of our Catalina squadrons and I'm very proud of my own participation in it. It's a rewarding experience. Today I enjoy the company of some of my friends on Anzac Day, and in our Catalina Club which we have a little gathering now and again, but it's good. Anyway, where were we? We were

07:00 talking about the radar on Cats. Yeah, well these antenna as I said, were mounted on the front and we could control them through an arc of about 120 degrees from dead ahead to port and starboard and they portrayed a picture on a vertical trace on the cathode ray screen and it was related left for port

and right for starboard and we could do ranging. It would give you the distance

07:30 to an object and also by smart use of the quadrant through which you could turn the aerial, it would also give you a bearing from the nose of the aircraft and that was excellent. The navigator found it an invaluable aid. Most of our journeys were over large expanses of ocean up in the Netherlands East Indies area and

08:00 our navigation was by dead reckoning and astro navigation, star shots and stuff like that, and it's quite demanding that type of navigation. When you consider that we were travelling probably 1,000 miles at night and our job was to locate a target, but not only locate a target but then locate a specific point within that target area, and overfly that

08:30 point and track on a designated compass heading at a specified height and do a timed run to put our mines down. So that was quite precise work and to navigate over that distance at night time by those means was no mean feat, and the navigators deserve all the credit because they were really good, especially our bloke, he was a bottler [really clever operator]. Anyway, how we helped him was

09:00 simple. The area of sea up there is covered by a lot a lot of islands and with our radar, once we got a line on where we were going and we kept identifying the islands and he kept verifying his plot with the radar bearings and distances, it enabled him to keep a really good accurate track and we had no problem with our navigation whatever, thanks

09:30 to his abilities and in some measure to the assistance we were able to render to him. He was a really smart man, that guy. His name was Ewance, Goodwin Ewance, and we did a number of those exercises, laying mines. They were all designated as secret missions and as I said, wireless operators sat inside,

10:00 didn't look outside much. They were carried along, they weren't told where they were going and they were just brought back home. So where we went is somewhat of a mystery. I know a few of the places but not all, and it doesn't matter much, but Goodie's job was to find the datum point on the target area and he was astute. He always allowed himself a primary datum which was something

10:30 that he designed for himself. When he was briefed and told where his datum was, he went away from there and found another prominent feature that he could identify and he used to find that first, and it was always a little bit further away from the action. His objective was to find datum 1, go straight over datum 2 on course to the mine run and get in and out quick smart, and we never had two goes ever. We always managed to make one run successfully

11:00 and come home.

Did you ever get strafed [machine gunned]?

Well, we were lucky again. On none of the harbours or shipping lanes that we mined, did we encounter anti-aircraft fire from ships. Some people did. As a matter of fact quite a few did, but we didn't, mainly I think because our bloke was a bit too clever.

11:30 Like he helped a lot, he was wonderful.

The navigator?

Yeah. He was a genius, and well that's my theory anyway, but we did encounter practically every time we went there which was never reported much as opposition, but there was always ground fire from small arms. You know, you wake up the troops and they'll fire at you, and most of that

12:00 ground fire from rifles was fired by groups of people, what you'd call say perhaps a platoon and they would fire salvos. It might be say 20 or 30 and they would go bang and 30 bullets would come up, so they'd send them up like machine gun fire. Not just one at a time trying to pot you off, but they'd fire these little salvos and they hit a lot of planes. They were quite damaging, that type of fire.

12:30 But in most, I don't think they ever shot anybody down because they were small arms really, not even .303 size. The Jap rifle was smaller than that, and while they put a lot of holes in wings and holes they didn't actually kill anybody. Well if somebody didn't come home and we didn't know where they went down, maybe someone was shot, but they didn't kill anybody that I know of. But they did shoot one of my best friends. They shot him through the buttock.

13:00 I wasn't in his crew but he was out of action for about six weeks. The bullet came up through the floor and went through the cheek of his backside. I was talking to his cobber and I said, "What happened to Norm?" He said, "Oh, he's in hospital." I said, "Oh yeah, what happened?" He said, "He got hit with a rifle bullet." He was a gunner, he was standing out in the back at his gun position and the bullet came through and got him, and I said, "What did he do, did he yell or scream?" "No, he said, a bloody bee has stung me,"

13:30 and he put his hand down and came up with all this blood on his hand and passed out. So anyway they took him back home and put him in hospital. He was alright, back in the squadron after a while. He was a Brisbane boy, lived over at Amberley, a bloke named Normie Palmer, but that's the only guy I knew that got wounded. We lost a few planes and blokes were killed, but he was a wounded casualty.

How did you

14:00 **lose planes?**

On the mine runs. See, we mined harbours and harbours usually have ships and one thing you could say about the Jap ships, they could fire, they could shoot and they had plenty of guns. They could shoot pretty straight. Well, we dropped our mines from either 200 feet or 400 feet and when you're only going at say, 100 mile an hour and you're flying along at 200 feet, it's a pretty big target. That was the reasoning

14:30 behind our navigator's double datum business with the minimum time over the target. The runs were selected and allocated based on the suitability of a datum point to enable the navigator and pilot to locate the drop zone, and they had to be dropped. The amount of error was very small. They were dropped in a very very confined area to be effective, and so they

15:00 had to be accurate. Well, like a lot of these places are pretty nondescript and to find a suitable place that you can identify is not always easy. So some of the datum points were rather exposed. Like you might have to go over the end of a jetty or something like that. Well that's not a good idea. If you could get there quick, by that I mean without any straying off course or loss of time

15:30 due to poor navigation, and identify your target early, and get in and out, because of our altitude and the aircraft being complete blacked out, not visible and fairly quiet, it meant that if you got in first, by the time they woke up to what's going on you're gone. That's why I say that our navigator was a genius and he was, he really was.

What sort of character was he?

16:00 He was a country boy from Ballarat and he was very quiet, and you know, like the young men of the time, he would've been about 25 I should imagine so he was a real old bloke, but he was quite clever and quite a sense of humour. But as I say, he was a country Victorian and I'll tell you a little story. We had two

16:30 Victorians on our crew, there was him and there was one of the gunners, a bloke named Merv Templeton. Merv was a little bloke like me, and neither of them had ever seen a snake in their life. Now where we were camped up in the Territory is a place called Melville Bay. It's on the east end of Arnhem Land and from there we used to travel to Darwin and then do our operation from Darwin. So Melville Bay was sort of a bit back behind things and a nice quiet place, lovely swimming and fishing.

17:00 A home away from home for a young bloke like me. Anyway, I'd managed to do a bit of trade and I had four laying WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s which I had a pen for, and this pen was made from very fine wire netting and the idea was to keep out the snakes, of which there was one local resident which used to live on a bit of a hill, just a few, well not even say 200 feet from where our camp was, and on the side

17:30 of this hill lived this monstrous big python, and of course his caper was try and get my fowls, wasn't it? Which he never ever did. Anyway, to get back to our Victorians. One evening they're sitting in their tent that the two officers shared. We only had two officers.

Hang on a second. So maybe just back track a little bit to the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chickens].

Oh yeah, and the snake episode.

And the snake.

18:00 Yes, well as I say, we had two officers in the crew, that was the skipper and the navigator and they shared a tent, an old-fashioned Australian Army hip tent, pretty cramped, and we slept on army stretchers under mosquito nets Anyway, it's late in the evening and the navigator's laying in bed and the skipper, Cuthy, he was an amateur

18:30 playwright and actor. That's why he was such a queer fellow, he was actor. Anyway he's tapping away on his typewriter, he's writing a ghost story and he's engrossed in his ghost stories which he used to love to write, and the snake decides that it's heading back towards the hill and came through their tent. Now this python would've been maybe 15 feet long. We'd actually watched it mesmerise

19:00 and swallow a wallaby one day. But it was heading home and it was coming through the tent and something must've sort of caught its attention because with the clickety-clack of the typewriter it suddenly lifted its head up and came up about two foot above the ground with its head, you see, and looked sideways and the skipper let out a God almighty scream and bolted, woke the navigator up. He looked out of his bed and

19:30 saw this monster and took off and he went out through the side, mosquito net and all. It was the laugh of the camp for a long time. He just took his mosquito net and the side of, mind you, the tent was pretty rotten, and he went through it. The snake went on its blissful way and it was still living there when we left the squadron, but it was a big one. But anyway, it didn't ever get my fowls. So that was

20:00 our navigator.

What was the skipper like?

The skipper was a gentleman to the core and a very nice intelligent man and a very capable pilot. He could handle those Catalinas and they were hard. They were particularly hard to take off because you had two big powerful motors and you've got no control. See you haven't got an inboard, in the water rudder. You're only control, steering, is by

20:30 your motors and the rudders. Well once you started getting power up you've got to put your rudder full over against the torque of the engines and you've got to put the elevators fully forward to keep the nose of the thing down until you've got it kicking and you've got to put the alerons hard over on one side, and it's a fight. I used to watch him and he'd be fighting this thing and

21:00 with the bit of chop on the water and that it was quite a task until you got the thing up, where it was bouncing along on the step and you had some control. But anyway, he was good, really good and as a man he was tops. I had my doubts about him when I first met him as I've told you, but no, that was sort of childish ignorance. He, as I said, he was an amateur playwright and after

21:30 the war he went to Britain. He came from West Australia, born in Perth, his mother was English and that's as his name would indicate, and she loved him but she cursed him. She called him Alan Darling Cuthbertson, and that 'Darling' got him into a lot of trouble I can tell you. But anyway he went to Britain and he appeared in movies and if you've seen any of the John Cleese

22:00 stuff in the Fawlty Towers [English TV comedy series], you possibly would've seen him once or twice. He starred in that. He was a German officer on one occasion, and that was his forte. He could pull off that bloody pomp and ceremony easy, real good you know. He could speak the pukka [colonial, upper class] English and he could be haughty, tall distinguished looking but he was a good bloke. I was lucky to know him.

How did you all get on in that team?

Excellent. There was never a harsh word amongst any of

22:30 the members of our crew. I don't know whether it was the same in others, but I should imagine it would because I flew with other skippers on different occasions and nobody had any rank. We all called each other by our name or nick name. There was no such thing as saluting the officers or calling them sir or anything like that. We were all just blokes, and when we went on operations there were no insignias of rank worn.

23:00 We all had no sign of rank at all. We were just airmen with no sergeants' badges or anything, and that was deliberate. That was an instruction from the airforce. The idea was that if they shot you down you could lie until you're blue in the face and they couldn't prove it wrong. But we didn't get shot down. Some did. In the books I have, I was just reading the other day after talking to you folk

23:30 that, I thought I'll just read some of the things I know of and there was a crew in the tent next to us at Melville Bay. They were due to go back south. They'd done nine months tour of operations and they had one more job to do and they lost it. They got shot down over Macassar in the Celebes and we thought they were all killed, but it transpires that only a couple were killed and the others were taken prisoner

24:00 but none of them survived. So it's pretty sad.

What were you hearing of prisoners of war at that time?

Nothing, nothing.

So if you got shot down did you have any idea what would happen?

Well, I foolishly believed that I would survive the crash unwounded, that I'd make my way into the jungle and I'd meet up with some friendly people and hide away until I could steal a boat and come home.

24:30 That was what I thought. But maybe I could've, maybe I, I doubt it. I very much doubt it after having some experience up there in the tropics in the jungle, the only way you could move around was along the coast. You couldn't move through that jungle unless you followed trails. If you followed trails you got into the occupants and where we were they were the enemy. No, you wouldn't survive. The ones that survived being shot down, there was one crew from our squadron

25:00 was shot down in that same raid, but they didn't crash in the target area. They crashed a couple of hundred miles away. Their engines were damaged and they flew on one engine, I think it was for about an hour and a half or so and crash landed in the sea when that engine stopped, but they'd managed to send out a may day [help call] message and they sent another Catalina from Darwin. A 20 Squadron bloke, the pilot

25:30 was a bloke named Armand Etienne and Armand flew all the way up there in daylight, landed on the sea beside these guys. They also sent up a couple of Liberators that did top cover so should they've been attacked they could come in and put a bit of fire power on them. Anyway, Armand landed and picked up

the entire crew. They sank the Catalina and came home and he got a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] for that and I rightly think he should have,

26:00 but that's a contentious point with a lot of airmen and a lot of military personnel. Like the pilot got a DFC and the passengers they got nothing. Well they had to be there too. So in a way the medal allocation seemed to be a little bit unfair, but I suppose they can't give everybody medals, but those guys deserve one. Fly 1,000 miles in daylight into enemy occupied territory and go

26:30 to within only a few miles of the coast and within a few miles of a couple of airfields, in broad daylight and land on the water where you're very vulnerable. That's takes courage, but they did it and did it successfully which everyone was very pleased about. But the other crew I mentioned it was sad for them because they were due to come back home and they didn't make it, and it was a sad feeling for the camp because their tent was always full

27:00 of life. They were very energetic boys and great sportsmen. They used to love to play volleyball and they were damn good at it too, and even up there in that hot climate they'd get out there and get themselves fit and sweat and carry on. But we didn't, we were too lazy. But anyway, I missed their feeling of spirit when they left because they were really lively blokes. I didn't get to know them because I'd only been at that station a little while. I knew them to talk to but not very well because they'd been there a while and they were due to

27:30 go home. But anyway, unfortunate that they were just the casualties of war. The Catalinas lost a lot of planes, lost a lot of men, and they have a proud boast that they were the first, they went the furthest and they were out last, and that's pretty right. I've got a picture in there, it's an artist's impression, you may have seen it. It's called The Last Message and that's a painting

28:00 of a Catalina being attacked by a number of Japanese fighters and it's representative of the Catalina flight that shadowed the Japanese fleet in the Battle of the Coral Sea before the battle started. They were apprehended and they were shot down. They gave a good account for themselves. They took a couple of Jap fighters out with them, but the whole nine were taken prisoner. They were all taken back to Japan and they were all beheaded.

28:30 So we knew about those things and we were not really very much enamoured with the enemy. We thought they were a pretty barbaric mob. But all in all my time in '42 squadron was very rewarding. I mentioned I had a mascot. That's how I came to get my fowls. The mascot was a miniature possum

29:00 which just by accident strayed into the area where I was resting in Darwin while we were waiting to go on an operation. See, we didn't take off until late in the afternoon and we had to put in a few hours. We used to just lay on bunks and try and stay cool in the heat, it's very oppressive heat. Anyway, this foolish little possum came wandering in so I grabbed him. We took him on that operation with us and everybody loved him. He was a bonzer little thing. He was a great pet.

29:30 I had him for quite a while. I didn't take him on another flight because he tended to wander off and we don't want little critters walking around inside the wing or up behind the dashboard or anything so we didn't take him the second time, but they all liked him. As a matter of fact, the photograph, the crew photograph I've got, you might see our skipper's holding a little tiny critter. That's my possum. Anyway, there was a lad, he was one of the

30:00 maintenance boys and he was due for leave, for replacement. He was heading home to Sydney and he begged me, he said, "My mother would absolutely love that possum." He said, "What do you want for it?" And I said, "Oh, I don't know." He said, "I'll give you anything, anything you like." He said, "I've got to take it home to Mum." I said, "What about the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s?" And he said, "I've got to leave them behind, they're yours." So I had these four WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and they were a Godsend. You know like, airforce tucker wasn't all that good, but I can't complain.

30:30 It was pretty good, but the eggs were great. The WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s kept laying. As a matter of fact we used to save them up and when we got our beer ration we used to have a party of hard boiled eggs and beer. As I say, about the food, you'd be interested in that. Melville Bay is a very very good fishing area and has very big tides and we had a

31:00 fish trap. Have you ever seen the arrow head fish traps depicted anywhere? Well basically it's a wire mesh fence or a stake fence that goes out to somewhere around about the low tide mark and at the end you have a fence in the form of an arrow, the arrow head, and the point of it forms a sort of a cage with the ends turned in on itself. So that if anything gets in and swims around, if it

31:30 keeps just following the wall it will keep following the wall and stay in there, and on the end of the wings there was a little trap like that as well. But as I say, because of the tides, and the tides in the tropics are not always two tides a day. You might get a high tide and it will stay in for a week and then all of a sudden it's gone and it will all come back again, most irregular tides. But nonetheless, with the fish trap,

32:00 whoever happened to be the orderly sergeant on the day of the low tide had to go with the truck. Yeah, well, with that fish trap whoever happened to be the orderly sergeant for the day had the responsibility of taking a truck and an offsider and going down to the bay where the trap was located and bring back the fish, and believe me,

32:30 you needed a truck. You would get all sorts of fish, big mackerel three foot long, cod, all sorts of fish, sharks, an occasional crocodile. So it was excellent and when the fish trap worked the people ate very well indeed. The cuisine in the mess was top stuff. Apart from that, us privileged aircrew blokes as we were, not

33:00 that we thought ourselves such but we were, because when we weren't flying we didn't have much to do I can tell you. Maybe orderly sergeant once a time now and again, but otherwise a holiday in the tropics. So we would go fishing off the wharf. We had a bit of a jetty down on the cove where our camp was located and it had very deep water and we would fish off there and it was a simple way. All you had to do is take your 303 down there and put a few bullets in and catch

33:30 the stunned bait fish, put them on a hook with no sinker, drop it over and pull up a two foot long fish. We could catch enough fish, a couple of us fishing for an hour would catch enough fish to feed the mess, feed the sergeants' mess no trouble at all. So it was really great, really great. It was home for sharks and home for crocodiles. We had a swimming pool which we built in our spare time. It was about as big as the floor area of this

34:00 house and the width of the house would be the distance from the high tide to the low tide, which is not very far and the depth at the mess at high tide would be about 25 feet. So it was a fairly steep bank and as I say they were big tides. We never had any sharks go in. On one occasion we thought we had a croc in there, but he wasn't there. We could see where he walked but we don't know how he got out, but he wasn't in there. Some brave soul went in to find out.

34:30 Anyway, that's Melville Bay.

What did you think of the Catalinas?

What did I?

Think of the Catalinas.

I think they're the most marvellous aeroplane I've ever seen. They carried me for thousands and thousands of miles in comfort and safety.

What was so good about them?

Well they were so reliable. Pratt and Whitney engines, I don't know of anybody who actually had an engine failure. They were really great. We had the creature comforts. We had electric stove,

35:00 pressure cooker. We could cook ourselves meals, which of course we did. When you go on a journey that takes anything from 14 to 18, maybe 20 hours, you've got to have some food. So we always took along food, mostly tinned stuff which we heated up. We could make tea and coffee. Had plenty of fresh water on board. So we weren't too badly off I that respect. Had a couple of

35:30 bunks where, if time permitted and things were quiet, somebody could go and have a bit of a crash. Someone else could take their seat for a while. So it wasn't too bad. The bloke I felt most sorry for was the navigator. He didn't get any rest until we were on the journey home and he was absolutely sure that even if I was flying we couldn't get lost. But we had two pilots. They didn't get much rest either, particularly the skipper. He was a very conscientious bloke. He wouldn't put his head down.

36:00 But the second pilot used to get a bit of a turn now and again, and two wags [air gunners] and wireless ops and coming home when there wasn't any really call for us both to be on duty. The radar was not required and the listening watch on the radio was OK, so one bloke could have a bit of a turn in the bed. Was a just a cot, you just laid down on it and went to sleep, or tried to. So all in all the blokes could get a bit of a rest on the return journey but you're still available if you're

36:30 needed.

Did you get a bit of a surprise when you saw your skipper on Fawlty Towers?

Well I knew he was over there, but I did get a surprise. I really did. I enjoyed it immensely because, oh, it was just like seeing him the way he was the day before. He didn't age. People say I haven't aged, I've got bigger and fatter, but my facial features haven't changed all that much and his hadn't either, like he looked the same, and his moustache of course was much better

37:00 controlled. It was a dapper little moustache he'd developed, but that was him, snowy hair.

How did you see it?

Just by coincidence. Just happened to be watching and saw it. I went to Britain, I wanted to look him up, but he passed away.

What was the war strategy of placing the mines [anti shipping explosives]? Do you know?

Yes.

37:30 With the victories around the Solomons and New Guinea and the movement further north, the mining

was a campaign designed to harass the Japanese shipping, interrupt their supplies, prepare places for landings, invasions and that sort of caper,

38:00 and it was very successful, very successful indeed. They didn't sink a lot of boats, they sank some, but they caused a lot of disruption because they had to find them and get rid of them and that wasn't an easy task. The mines that we used were mines that sat on the bottom. They weren't tethered or anything like that, not chained. They weren't floating.

38:30 The ones that I had experience with and we dropped were mostly American. We did drop a couple of British mines but they were mostly American mines. They were either 1,000 pound or 2,000 pound. They were quite big and they had a number of mechanisms by which they could be exploded, a combination of magnetic, acoustic and displacement. So

39:00 to sweep them [find them], you really had to have a wooden row boat and a diver. They're pretty hard to shift but the Japs managed to shift them to their credit.

What did they look like?

They looked like a big fuel drum, a long skinny fuel drum, the 1,000 pounders. The 2,000 pounders looked like a long fat fuel drum. There was no shape to them. They weren't very

39:30 pretty things and we just dropped them in, plonk. They didn't have any tail fins for guidance or anything like that. They just fell off and went in and sank straight to the bottom. Some thought that that was a hazardous thing, that they might explode and you wouldn't want to be 200 feet about a 2,000 pound mine when it went off, but they had controls and the controls were in the form of a

40:00 soluble disc which could be put into a cavity in the side of the mine and they had numerous different degrees of solubility. Say, first off the water had to get in to activate a circuit, make the mine live and then it also had to get through to another part of the mine to make it dead so they could set them for an active life which they knew. They also had a

40:30 a trigger mechanism which would be set from one to ten, so if you laid a mine field in a shipping lane and you had an expectation of a group of ships coming then you could set it so the fleet could get over the mine field before the first mine went off. So in reality they were a very sophisticated piece of machinery and they did sink a few ships.

Did you see any go off?

Mines? No, well we didn't want to.

41:00 Things were kept very quiet. It wasn't until late in 1945 when I was back at Rathmines. Our crew had been broken up, we'd finished. We were waiting to see what they did with us, whether we reformed or sent us to another squadron, but we were of all there as a group of individuals, but the navigator, I bumped into him and he said, "We've got good news,

41:30 we've been credited with a ship," and they had confirmation of a ship that was sunk on one of the mines at a position that we'd laid. He did tell me the name of it. I didn't write it down and I've since forgotten it. It wasn't an important ship, it was a small coastal trader, but nonetheless it was an enemy vessel. So I suppose I feel sorry about it really for the people that were on it in many ways.

42:00 End of tape

Tape 7

00:35 **Can you tell me a little bit more about what was involved in loading those mines onto the Catalinas and then the process of taking off and so forth?**

Well I can't tell you anything about loading because we didn't do that. As I told you we had the easy road. We had armourers that did the loading. Basically the loaded the mines onto what was called

01:00 a bomb scour, which was a flat sort of a punt with a motor in it. They'd drive out, hook up underneath the wings and then raise the mines on a winch and hook them onto the wings. That was all done for us, all the refuelling, all the maintenance of the aeroplane, so we didn't have to do that. Take off was something else. All of our operations involved an overload take off

01:30 experience. It used to be called full load take off which meant that it was grossly overloaded. Now, with a flying boat, once you start the motors you've got to slip the mooring otherwise you just go around and around on the mooring and put everything in a mess. So one crew man stands out on a little narrow catwalk out the front and when the motors are started his duty is to

02:00 release the moorings, put the cables back onto the bollard on the mooring buoy and get back inside without falling overboard. After that the Catalina or the flying boat just sort of mills around and around

in a circle, haven't got very much control. So what they do is put the rudder full over to deflect the airflow from the propellers and just keep the boat turning

02:30 in a circle, and they do that until the engines are brought up to operating temperature and pre-flight power checks are concluded. When that's done it's just a matter of turning into wind and putting on the power and heading off into the wide blue. It's a magnificent sight to watch a squadron take off. Suppose there are 12 aircraft involved, well, by the time they

03:00 load all the crew some of them are getting up and getting ready to go because you all have to wait your turn to get on the boat to go out to your own particular aeroplane, which takes a bit of time. Anyway, you see the boats sort of milling around turning in the wind and heading off down the fairway and for a while they're sort of covered in spray because they're so heavy and the waves are coming up over the bow and the engines are sending spray hell west and crooked,

03:30 and they gradually gather speed and as they gather speed they rise up until they're sitting on just the point of the hull which they call the step, and it's when they get up on the step that the pilot has some lateral control. He can use his wing surfaces to keep the aeroplane level and he can use his rudder to steer. So the floats, wing tip floats are no longer necessary, so at that stage of the game

04:00 it's floats up. Well when the floats go up it adds, I'm not sure what it is, but it must be about 5 percent of extra wing area as a lift surface, and you can actually see from the shore watching, you can actually see the wings bow and the wingtips would rise up at least two foot, two foot six, and the wing would be quite curved and then the bird would gradually lift off and fly away very gracefully. It was a magic sight to watch. I really loved to watch flying boats departing.

04:30 On one of our trips we were going up to Morotai Island from Darwin Harbour and the purpose of that trip was for the squadron to go and work from a US Navy ship in Morotai Harbour, which was the USS Tangier. That was to be our base, our refuelling point and our sleeping place for a couple of nights while we went over to Borneo

05:00 to lay mines in Brunei Bay at Labuan and also at a place called Tarakan on the east coast of northern Borneo. Brunei Bay is on the west coast which was then British North Borneo or Sarawak, and that's a long way. It's a very long journey across there and with our mines on we couldn't go over the island. We wouldn't go up that height and risk the weather in the

05:30 mountainous country so we always went around the top, which added a few hundred miles. So it made it an extra long journey. Anyway, to take off out of Darwin Harbour we were loaded to the gunwales with mines and fuel and we were doing a squadron take off and we were sort of in the middle of things. Well we were heading along probably doing about 45 knots with the spray coming up in all directions and a

06:00 Catalina came past us on the starboard side and he was up on the step and he was creaming along at about 60, 70 knots [per hour] and I could see this guy. I was looking out of the starboard window and I could see this guy. I knew him, his name was Schultz, he was a sergeant. As a matter of fact that chap I told you about the book, that Bobby Cleworth, his father was on his crew and they lost their lives later on in the piece. But Schultzy was going by at a great rate and he had

06:30 this great devilish grin on his face but he was on a slightly converging heading with ours and he was going to cross in front of us which is not very pleasant. In the confusion the second officer must've taken his hand off the pitch control. Pitch control was up in a Catalina, up to your left hand side for the second officer, and the idea of holding it was because the vibration would tend to change the pitch and

07:00 that would change the power developed by the engine and you know, generally make take off uncomfortable. Anyway, Freddie must've let go and the pitch altered and they weren't aware of it, and when we got to flying speed Cuthy sort of pulled back on the prong [controls], decided to go airborne. Well we went airborne alright but we didn't have the power developed from the propellers to sustain us in flight and we crashed back. We stalled out at about 15 feet

07:30 and fell back in and bounced off. Well, we did, I think I counted, we did 23 of these rotten things and disappeared over the horizon they say, the blokes on shore when we came home, "Where did you buggers go, did you bounce all the way?" We said, "No, we got airborne," but every stall and every landing became progressively heavier because we'd go higher and harder. Anyway, eventually they found out what the problem was and fixed it

08:00 and we staggered off, but unbeknown to us we'd sprung our fuel tanks. Not badly, but we'd sprung them and we were leaking fuel. We went on, we got to Morotai and we did the operations that we were required to do, but we had a most unpleasant time because the bilge had always got a little bit of petrol in it and it always smelt badly and gave us headaches and there was nothing we could do about it, and it was a

08:30 cause of great concern because most of the boys liked to smoke and there was no smoking. It was really unpleasant. Anyway we did the work and we came back, but that was the most exciting trip because on the trip to Brunei Bay, we arrived there and on the radar I could see 13 navy ships in the bay and it was the Japanese taskforce. We put our mines in the exit to the harbour and we kept them there for quite a while, which was

09:00 something we felt proud of because they had a battleship in there, an aircraft carrier and all their support. That's a big fleet. Fortunately for us our run was out of their range. They didn't attack us and we didn't attack them. So I don't know why they didn't do something with their carriers. Maybe we were such a surprise to them that they couldn't get them airborne in time. They probably knew we were there I'd say, but they couldn't do anything about it. So

09:30 anyway, that was Brunei Bay, but coming home from that trip we had to go around the top of the island again and we had an unpleasant experience when we arrived. To approach a warship during war time you have to fly a certain procedure. In this case it was a radar procedure and on return we had to do certain manoeuvres over certain parts of the land or the island

10:00 so they recognised that we were not attacking them, and the Yanks had a big fleet in there at Morotai, a big fleet, lots of boats, and the war was still going on on Morotai Island. At night time, every day you could hear the artillery and at night time you could hear the spasmodic rifle fire and that sort of thing, so there was a battle going on there. But it didn't affect us much. Anyway, on the way back I

10:30 was asked to code up a message and get in touch with the ship and explain our predicament, that we thought we mightn't have quite enough fuel to do this radar approach, and ask for permission to dispense with it, which was granted to us. Unfortunately I don't think the navy had time to tell everybody because when we came over low lying islands surrounding the harbour we got fired upon by our friendly foe.

11:00 But I think they must've been a little bit sort of hesitant. They fired at us but they didn't hit us and I'm sure had they tried they could've. I think they were sort of thinking maybe this is one of ours, maybe it's not and maybe we should shoot them down, maybe not. But anyway, they didn't and we didn't give them much chance because as soon as they opened fire we landed. We were a long way from the mother ship but we landed. We taxied over, got to our mooring and they sent a tender out and picked us up.

11:30 It's the only time I saw Cuthy lose his temper. We went up the gangplank of this big ship, a monstrous ship it was. They could put a Catalina down inside it, you know, they're a 104 foot wing span so it was a big ship, along way up to the quarterdeck and there's the bosun with his bosun's whistle and he blew the pipes and said, "Salute the quarterdeck," and Cuthy, that pleasant mild mannered gentleman actually swore at him and told him where to put his quarterdeck. I don't know, I don't think the

12:00 bosun had ever been spoken to in that manner in his entire life. He was absolutely flabbergasted. He didn't know what to say so he said nothing and we just stormed off and went to the mess to have some food. But yeah, Alan lost his temper which was amazing because he was the quietest most mild mannered fellow that you can imagine. I suppose he was entitled to under those circumstances, but anyway, I think that's the most severe fire that I experienced and it was coming from our own

12:30 lot, yeah.

Why were they unable to identify you?

Well we were down low and they couldn't see us and we just came in from an usual angle and not all the ships were in close contact with the command and the idea was shoot first and ask questions later because the Japanese were very aggressive towards that fleet. They used to come over every night with a high level reconnaissance

13:00 plane and photograph the fleet and every morning the fleet would be in a slightly different position, particularly the big ships. The defensive ships used to be more or less around the outskirts of the sea plane tender and any other major ships that they had there. But they would shift the position of the sea plane tender and other big ships every evening after, or every night after the reconnaissance plane

13:30 had gone by and then they would be lined up ready for the surprise attack at daylight when they would come in low level over the tree tops of the surrounding islands and get blasted to hell, which is what happened. The Japs lost quite a few planes attacking that fleet and that was the reason why, because they used to let them see where they were and then they'd shift them and be ready for them and they always came from the one direction. See, we were in the Halmaheras and they

14:00 still had some land based fighters down on the northern tips of the Celebes and they used to come from there and bomb us and fight us and they'd attack this fleet but they didn't have much luck. So all in all that campaign at Morotai was extremely successful. The land battle was successful and the US services built a magnificent runway there, and they ended up they had something like 500 Liberators and God knows what

14:30 there. They had a big big airforce there.

So were they Americans who were firing at you that day?

Yeah. Yeah, we didn't have any of our ships there. We were just working for the US Navy there, working from the US Navy.

So what was the relationship like between the Aussies and the Yanks?

Pretty good, pretty good. The blokes on the ships were nice blokes. They were funny fellows, funny fellows. They couldn't understand us. We had a courtesy extended to us. We were extended the courtesy

15:00 of the chief petty officers' mess on board the ship, which was above our rank actually but that was what they extended to us and we were grateful for it, and they used to say, "You Aussies are funny guys. You go away one day, you come back the next and you go up on the deck and go to sleep." We'd say, "Yeah, we're pretty tired, you know, like we've been flying all the time." "What, you've been flying all that time?" "Yeah, that's

15:30 right, that's what we do," and we couldn't sleep on the boat, it was too hot. You couldn't sleep down in the cabins so we had a tarpaulin strung up right up on the foredeck where you could get a bit of breeze and we used to sleep under that in the daytime and of course the decks were pretty hard, but when you're tired like that it didn't really matter. But we astounded those people would have pancakes with eggs and jam

16:00 for breakfast all on the one plate, and nutmeg or cinnamon on it. Well we couldn't get over this. Fancy sprinkling a fried egg with cinnamon, but that's the way they lived. Now one fellow told me, he said, "You know, it's pretty rough here. We haven't had any Coca Cola or ice cream for seven days." Now can you imagine that, can you imagine that? But I tell you what, you give it to the Yanks, they looked after their troops. They really did, they looked after them. I suppose

16:30 you'd say they were soft, but they weren't soft. When you have a look at what they achieved in that Pacific theatre they weren't soft, not one bit. They were pretty tough guys.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the experience of being fired upon that day? I mean what were you guys saying to one another?

Well I didn't actually see it because as I told you, the wireless operator didn't see outside, but the other guys thought it was not fair and the skipper thought it was bloody stupid so he just landed. We were probably only up at 100 feet. So,

17:00 not going very fast, so it was quite a simple matter to just throttle off and put it on the water, and of course once you were on the water they weren't going to fire at you anyway.

But even though you couldn't see it, could you hear it or feel it?

Nothing, nothing hit the aircraft and I couldn't hear it. So as far as I was concerned, "What the hell are you landing here for?" It wasn't until later that I was told, and I'll never forget his reaction going up that gangplank. It was wonderful. It's a wonder he didn't get shot because you

17:30 can't, you can't insult the navy like that, you can't. You really can't. They're pretty strict on protocol. Just imagine, there you are north of the tropics in a remote bloomin' part of the world and you've got to salute the rotten quarterdeck, for God's sake. Like we didn't salute anything. Anyway, that was the Yanks. They were great, they were.

18:00 **What was it like to be someone on board a plane in that situation, unable to actually see what was happening?**

Pretty sort of mundane and boring I should imagine. I used to sit watching the radar screen until my eyes bugged out and I was very interested in the activity of the target area, if I could see any ships or that sort of stuff and my job

18:30 as the radar operator was to count the seconds of the mining, the timed run for the mines, that was my job. The navigator would say, "Datum," which meant that he was exactly over it and on the run up to datum he would actually drive the pilot with minor corrections of heading. The heading over datum was pre-established so that our mining run was pre-established. The

19:00 altitude was pre-established and was maintained by reference to a radio altimeter. See, you couldn't use an ordinary pressure altimeter because we didn't know what the datum pressure was at the target area, and pressure altimeters, you've got to have a reference and if your reference is incorrect your altitude's incorrect and in that case when you drop your mines the trajectory is all out of kilter and you're not putting them where you think you are. So we

19:30 had what they call a radio altimeter which was more or less just an ordinary VHF [very high frequency] radio transceiver which measured the time interval from when it transmitted until it received, something like a radar but in a different frequency band, and the skipper had access to the readout and he would keep the aeroplane at the designated altitude of 200 feet or 400 feet, whichever was specified for the

20:00 type of mine that we were working with, and so everything was in readiness. We would reach the datum, we'd be on course and we'd be at altitude. The navigator would say, "Datum," which meant for me to start saying, "One, two." We had very good chronometers to do this by. They issued us with really precise chronometers and I would count off the seconds. The navigator had the chart with the timings on and as

20:30 I'd reach the designated seconds he would release the mines and that was the way it was done. All of the crews had different datums, different facts and different times to release and the result would be a grid something like the squares of a crossword puzzle marked out on a map by the boffins back home.

When you dropped the mine what was the sensation on board the plane?

There was a slight tendency

21:00 to buck, to go up because you were dropping off 2,000 or maybe 4,000 pounds. But the skipper would pretty soon get it back to level and that was it. Anyway, that was a very interesting chapter of my war time experience. It was probably the most dangerous that I was in, and yet the least exciting because I had nothing to do with it. All I did was count from one to about 40. Pretty good, hey?

21:30 Just as well I learnt how to count, but that's what we did.

How did you come to terms with the idea of dropping mines which could ultimately kill people?

I didn't like it much. As I told you, I felt rather sorry when I learned that we had actually sunk one ship, but there again it doesn't pay to moralise too much. When there's a war

22:00 on you've just got to do what you've got to do and that's it. I suppose I'm a pacifist in many ways. I don't know of anybody that got any pleasure out of combat duties.

Just going back to the first, is it Squadron 20 that were on?

The first squadron I went to was 20 Squadron

22:30 and it was a famous squadron. The first two Cat Squadrons were number 11 and number 20 and they were made up of the first 24 Cats that we got and they were in action from day one in the New Guinea and the Bismarck Sea, up as far as Truk and out, well out to the seaboard to the east, and they did a tremendous amount of work dropping bombs and tagging ships and all sorts of stuff.

23:00 They really earned their crust those boys and they lost a lot. We lost more Catalinas out of that first lot than we did later on because our operations were different. We were secretly attacking targets at night where they had to often attack targets in the day time, as well as night time, and they were attacking an enemy that was advancing. We were attacking an enemy that was contained and retreating. So it was a vastly different thing for the boys of the early days in 11 and 20, very different.

23:30 They were originally based in Moresby. They were chased out of Moresby for the safety of the aeroplane because Moresby was getting continually attacked by air and the boats are very vulnerable on the water. So they withdrew them, and initially they withdrew them to Bowen, but Bowen was a little bit too far out of the action. So they moved them north again to Cairns and that's where they did most of their work from, was from Cairns. They were very popular, very well thought of by the folk in Cairns. You

24:00 go to Cairns and talk about the Catalinas and they still remember them. Anyway as I say, I went, by the time I joined 20 Squadron, they were just about to move from Cairns. I did two operational flights from Cairns which were sort of pretty easy. We didn't attack anybody. We went searching for a ship that had gone missing and we found him. He was alright and heading for home. He'd just

24:30 been a bit delayed, and we did a run out to Willis Island which is a little meteorological station out in the middle of the sea and there was a cyclone on and these poor fellows, there was no anchorage or any harbour facilities built, just a little coral atoll really, and these two, only two guys on it and they were two met [meteorological] people, and they were getting desperate for food. Anyway, they gave us the task of taking out some food and doing an

25:00 aerial drop on the beach, and it had to be precisely timed because of this cyclone that had been raging in the area for quite some days and it was expected to move slowly, and so they organised our flight and tried to coordinate that we would arrive over Willis Island in the eye of the cyclone. Now that's a pretty amazing thing to do and at the time we thought so too. Anyway, we went

25:30 out and we flew in , I suppose it would've been what you would call the north west quadrant of the cyclone for some time and then into the north east quadrant. Now if you know a bit about low pressure systems they're clockwise and the winds circulate around and they're fairly strong when you're flying with the wind. The wind was in excess of 100 mile and hour and we were flying along. Our plane would do 100 mile an hour, so if we didn't go with the wind we didn't go anywhere.

26:00 So the navigator had the task to fly a course flying along the wind and arrive at Willis Island at a time when they thought that the eye of the cyclone would be at Willis Island. We would be able to see it, we would be able to drop our supplies and then we'd slip out the other side and fly the winds back home to the coast of Australia, and we did, and it was the most spectacular flight I've ever been involved in. At the time we

26:30 set out we knew what we were in for and I'd never, none of us had flown in a cyclone but we'd experienced cyclones as young people and we knew how violent they could be, and I thought we're in for a pretty rough time here. It turned out very smooth. We were flying along with the wind at low altitude in considerable cloud and often times quite a bit of rain, but we were on the back end of the cyclone and the rain there is lesser,

27:00 and we were in this cloud all the time and suddenly bingo, bright sunshine and you could see the rim of the cyclone. I don't know how far across it was and I'd be guessing but I'd say no more than about, I

suppose, four or five miles. This island was very small, and there it is sitting like a jewel in the ocean bathed in sunlight with this circular well of cloud going from sea level up to the sky, and we're flying around in there

27:30 and it was absolutely, absolutely amazing, and once again I dips my lid [salute] to that navigator boy because how could you do that? You know, how could you do that? And he did it, and we came over this island and two fellows appeared out of this bit of a hut and they sort of were dancing around like maniacs, waving, shouting. I suppose they were shouting, and of course we came along the beach at about 50 feet. Well you'd think we were their long lost mother.

28:00 Anyway, we turned around and came back down the beach and started to throw this stuff out. Well they were that hungry they were scrummaging these corn bags that we were throwing out, getting food before we'd finished the job. We thought we'd kill them with more, and we threw out a lot of food. It was all done up in potato sacks. You know, loaves of bread and canned vegies. And anyway, we felt so bad and so sorry for them, we had a lot of stores on board this aeroplane that were

28:30 emergency rations for us if we ever were supposed to have got shot down, and they were good quality tucker. They were bonzer. They were a little tin about six inches by four by two and in there they had chocolate and dried apricots and sultanas and little tiny biscuits. You know, they were bonzer. As a matter of fact we used a few of them up just to make sure they were still alright to eat, you know, but all that we had

29:00 and some tinned food that we had for our own use because we always carried tinned food. We threw all that out as well, but anyway, we hoped they enjoyed them. But that was, those were the two trips that I did in 20 squadron, mercy missions I suppose you'd call them. But they were good and I'll never forget that cyclone, never, never forget it. I'll never forget the sight of that little island in the clear blue sea and the water as calm as calm as a

29:30 millpond. You could see the bottom, coral and all that and this massive wall of cloud just a few miles away, brilliant sunshine overhead and after you leave in a couple of minutes you're in the murk again, doing twice the speed that your aeroplane is capable of. It was fascinating. Anyway,

How dangerous was that?

Well apparently not very dangerous at all. I think we could've easily got lost.

30:00 Like that would be the danger, get out in there in that low cloud and massive waves underneath and you wouldn't, if you crashed you'd be dead. You'd never survive the seas. But anyway, it was a piece of cake thanks to some good aviators. I got out and had a look at that island. As I say, I very seldom saw the outside but that was one occasion that I did and I'm glad I did because it was really spectacular. Anyway, from Cairns, we were

30:30 only there a little while because as I say the squadrons were due to move. The theatre of war had shifted and the emphasis had moved to the north west rather than the north east and our Catalinas were destined then to become mine layers, exclusively mine layers. And so they formed two new squadrons. They moved 20 Squadron across to Darwin and they operated out of Doctors Gully.

31:00 They formed 42 Squadron which they already had established a base at Karumba in the Gulf, but it was a short-lived base because the war moved further north west so quickly they very smartly moved them to Darwin into a place called East Arm which is at the eastern end of Darwin Harbour, a desolate hole, amongst the mangroves and mosquitos and crocodiles,

31:30 a mongrel of a place. They formed 42 Squadron which I was posted to, which they sent to Melville Bay. On the eastern end as Arnhem Land there's a place that's now known as Nhulunbuy and it's the most picturesque and beautiful place in the Territory. It's really a lovely place. The Abos – or the Aboriginals – I shouldn't call them Abos, but well

32:00 what the hell, you know, that's not disrespectful. As children we called them Abos and we didn't disrespect them either. As a matter of fact I envied their children. I thought it would be bloody great to go wandering around the bush and not having to go to school, and we knew a few and I used to see them at the Brisbane Exhibition where they gave demonstrations of their art and spear throwing and boomerangs and I was fascinated by them, and also

32:30 they had a stall in the showbag pavilion and I was fascinated by that. I had the greatest collection of Aboriginal spears of any kid in Sandgate I reckon, because I loved them. Anyway, that was in their territory and it was a place that was special to them, and I can understand why. Melville Bay is a long bay that runs north south, and on the eastern seaboard it's mostly,

33:00 for 80 percent of its length from the sea entrance to the end is sandy beaches, some flat and shallow with a long tide flat, tidal flat. That's where we had our fishing trap. Others in small coves bounded both ends by rocky headlands and deep beaches and a short shoreline and that's where we had our, that was just in one of those coves, that we had our camp.

33:30 And at the western end we had our jetty from which we got onto the tenders to go to our planes which were moored just out a bit on buoys, red buoys, and the western shores of Melville Bay are low and mud flatty and are fed by a number of small rivers or creeks I suppose you'd call them, and they're all full of

mangroves and plenty of crocs. We did a few bits of local flying and

34:00 we went up those creeks a few times, fly low level and you've often see these monstrous crocs and there were lots and lots of them and they'd be lying on the banks. The first few times we went by they just didn't take any notice, but some silly coot had a shot at a few of them and after that as soon as a plane would come through they were all into the water and disappeared, but they were big, big and lots of them. And as I told you before the fishing was good, the swimming was good as long as you could avoid the sharks which we managed to. The food wasn't

34:30 too bad, plenty of eggs. So Melville Bay was a great base, a great camp.

When you were in Darwin what evidence did you see of the air raids?

Oh, plenty. We used to get briefed with the headquarters of 20 Squadron up in the Doctors Gully area. Sometimes we

35:00 would travel through the town. If we stayed at East Army with the 43 Squadron to go into those briefings we had to go past the airport or through the town or what was supposed to be the town. Darwin was completely decimated. Darwin was built like Queensland houses on concrete stumps and every house had a septic system and the bathrooms were upstairs on a concrete floor

35:30 with a bath and a toilet and there were just miles and miles of stumps with a concrete slab and a toilet sitting on top of them. That was Darwin. The rest was absolutely flattened. There wasn't a building left standing and the harbour, I forget how many, at a conservative guess a dozen or 15 very big ships laying on their side and they were big enough. They'd got scattered all around

36:00 the place trying to get away. Those lying at the wharf would be out of the water about half of their width at low tide, very deep there. They'd be laying on their side out of the water. The tide would come up and just about cover them. The ones out in the bay, they'd be mostly partly covered by the tide or standing up in the air and they were big ships, a lot of them. They were really badly damaged, they sank. So Darwin suffered badly.

36:30 Broome was annihilated but there was nothing much at Broome. I don't know why the Japs attacked it. There were more Japs living in Broome than there were in the rest of Australia. They'd been living there a long time and they were the pearling people.

What impact did it have on you personally to see what had happened to Darwin?

I was a bit saddened by it. I thought this is unnecessary, why the hell do people have to do these sort of things? But otherwise it didn't affect me.

37:00 Didn't affect me, but I saw what air raids could do. The shipping really affected me more than the houses. I suppose I foolishly thought that the people in the houses could make some plans to protect themselves by getting in shelters or whatever they might do, or get out in the scrub, anything to get away from the bombing. But the blokes on the ships, they had no chance at all.

37:30 They were stuck there. Anyway they towelled them [destroyed] up alright. But after Morotai, that exercise was the last series of mine laying that we did. Our crew, we got posted, and I think we were disappointed that we did because we had a bit of pride in what we were doing there and we thought well, OK, we're pretty close to the action here and indeed we were.

38:00 When you've got your boat moored in a harbour and you can hear the artillery in the hills and the ground fire at night, you're not very far away from what's happening and you're going well beyond the front of the enemy to drop your mines and the action looked like hotting up. Personally I was looking forward to going further. We got back home and we got posted up to Madang in

38:30 New Guinea. They'd started an air sea rescue service to cover our Australian air force bombing raids in the New Britain area and so they needed a Catalina and we got the job. So we went to Madang. It was rewarding work but we didn't have a lot of activity to do. We did a lot of travel flights. We carted some various

39:00 personnel around, for what purpose I don't know. Once again I wasn't told. We took some stores up to some ANGAU [Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit] officers who were trying to civilise the natives of the Goroka Valley. We took them up a football. These natives in the Goroka Valley they weren't even a

39:30 generation removed from head hunters, you know. They were pretty wild people and they dressed in a most peculiar fashion with grass skirts and a spike through their noses and all this sort of stuff. They looked very fearsome, big head dresses, and the men were very sort of warlike. The women were very timid. You'd come over the airstrip and all it was just a piece of land with the grass a bit shorter than the rest and you'd come over and do a circuit, have a bit of a look to see which way the wind

40:00 was blowing and it would be like flying over an anthill. You'd see all these black things going around all over the bloody place, and it was these natives and they'd be coming from all directions and they'd be all there when you landed. We'd taxi in and pull up and they'd be standing there. We'd be surrounded, hundreds of them, pretty fearsome looking fellows too. Of course they didn't know that we had a couple

of point fives there that would've blasted them to hell if we had to use them. But it wasn't like that, but they just looked frightening and

40:30 the protocol was that the senior man would get out of the aeroplane and go and approach their chief and give some sort of a signal and they'd sort of warmly greet each other. I won't describe to you, it's too peculiar, but they had the most unusual methods of making you welcome and then they'd smile, and once they started to smile everything was happy and then we could get out and start unloading the stuff. Then the two ANGAU blokes would come over and make their presence known.

41:00 But the women would stand, the circle in the front row would be the men and then back another 20 or 30 feet would be a circle of women all hugging one another and looking wide eyed and frightened because an aeroplane was a big thing for them, you know. And then behind them were the children and they're like children everywhere, inquisitive, inquisitive little sods.

Tape 8

00:30 On our second visit by way of something of interest I took up a football to these people of Goroka, and when we landed we opened up the blisters and before any of the ceremonies or the greetings or whatever, I gave this ball a kick out into the multitude and you should've scene them go. They went in all directions, and they

01:00 cautiously came back. By the time they sort of got back within sort of normal distance I was out and I was giving this ball a bit of a kick around. I'd kick it up in the air and catch it and dribble it along and kick it up and catch it, and they were all looking on wide eyed and sort of didn't know whether to be frightened or not. Anyway the children had come forward and I kicked it to one of these kids and he grabbed it and he

01:30 kicked it. Well, from there on in you couldn't keep the little coots away. They kicked it everywhere. They were chasing it around like it was a little wild animal. Anyway, they were having such a lot of fun, I don't know what the parents thought about it, but it got kicked over towards them and one of the adults shot it with his bow and arrow and that was the end of the football. But it was a most amazing experience to see the difference in the reaction between the warriors, the parents, and those little kids.

02:00 They got the message real quick that that was for fun and they wanted to be in it, and they were just like any little kids you'd see anywhere. They're bonzer little children. Anyway, that was my experience of Goroka. Goroka was a wonderful place. It's high in the mountains, it's cold, has a big river flowing through it but it's not a deep river it's like a myriad of small tributaries flowing along, interconnecting and that, and it flows through what you'd call black

02:30 volcanic type soil. It's as black as anything the soil and it's very fertile. The ANGAU fellows there gave us some peanuts they'd grown and I've never seen peanuts so large in my life. The kernels of the peanut would've been two inches long. They were massive, absolutely massive peanuts and quite tasty. But the ANGAU blokes were always pleased to see us because, as I say, there were only two white men amongst all these

03:00 hundreds and hundreds of native folk and it was only a matter of probably six months prior that they did one of these guys in [mudered]. You know, they lost their temper with him and killed him. So they were pretty close to being uncivilised completely and they were just in the process of meeting and mixing with European people. So it must've been quite something for them to

03:30 see this monster thing come out of the air and land on the ground and people get out of it and all that sort of stuff. So in a way that was one of the highlights of my time in New Guinea. It was such a cultural experience to see. You realise that they're human beings and they have wives and children just the same and they treat them with kindness. It was great. Anyway,

What about your own impressions of what was going on?

Bloody ridiculous. God, yeah, that's culture. Anyway, another interesting journey during that time, apart from the few air raid covers that we did, we went to a place in the Trobriands [islands], a place called Kirraweena. Have you heard

04:30 of Kirraweena? Another magic place. Magic place, lovely people. They were very small people. They're an island race of folk and the colour of their skin is sort of chocolate brown. They were very maritime. They bathed in the sea everyday, spotlessly clean, always smiling, always singing, lovely people. And

05:00 we were lucky, we went there and there was a wedding ceremony on and we got invited to go and see it and it was quite fascinating. They had a big feast, we had some of their tucker and the wedding ceremony consisted of the young girls, all the young men were seated along the front row of the crowd and the young girls came out and danced and shook and shimmied and sang and did funny things. They were half naked as you can imagine, just little grass skirts on. They were quite attractive too, a

05:30 bit envious of these boys. But anyway, the ceremony goes on and on and they dance a bit and when it comes to the crunch line they bolt. Some magic word is called out and they're off into the jungle and the

blokes give them about two seconds start and then they're after them, and that's how they get married. I think they might have some prearranged designated places to get caught

06:00 because they all came back happy. That was the wedding ceremony at Kirraweena Island in those times. I suppose it's changed. They were very simple native people who lived their own culture. Their only communication was through a mission prior to the war, that landed there and sort of helped them along the road, and they were very happy people.

06:30 So the war probably hurt them more than it hurt most cultures because the change was fast for them. You know, they came in contact with large bodies of servicemen from all walks of life, with all different diverse ideas, so that I don't know that I would have liked to have been a Kirraweenan adult in those days because you could see the changes would've affected them I think.

07:00 **What sort of evidence did you see of changes or that impact on them?**

We had an amphibious plane by then and we landed on the airfield and we were walking from the aeroplane to go to this wedding, and we were walking along the road and we came across two young Kirraween ladies. They looked to be about 16 years

07:30 old. I wouldn't know how old they were, but they were dressed in their traditional grass skirt costume and they wanted cigarettes. In their Pidgin English they asked for cigarettes and we teased them a bit and said, "No, we haven't got any." Anyway, they said they would sing for us. So we agreed if they sang we would give them some cigarettes, and they danced and they sang

08:00 Pistol Packin' Mama, and they sang it in Pidgin and it goes, "Putim gun long ground, meri, putim gun long ground, putim gun long ground meri, putim gun long ground," and they jigged and sang and bloody hell, quite entertaining it was. So anyway, we were so pleased with them we gave them quite a few cigarettes. That was the impact it had on

08:30 their society I'd say, like Pistol Packin' Mama! I think the Americans might've been there, but anyway, that was something else. Another experience I had in my stay, we had to come down from Madang to Lake Boga in Victoria. See we started that flight and we were the first crew and we had to supply the base really. We had no supplies, so we flew down to

09:00 Victoria and we loaded up with all the different stores that the airforce gave us to take back. On the way back we landed at Dubbo and that was in a dust storm too, and once again we used our skills to get bearings. We had a very powerful radio transmitter on the Catalina, it was a monstrous thing. The ones on the training aeroplanes were little tiny toys in comparison. The sky was full of signals

09:30 from these myriads of training aeroplanes and all the airports all around the place calling up and talking Morse code and I needed a few bearings and I needed them in hurry. So I started on this thing and, the signal called anybody, not anyone in particular, but anybody who was Morse code, the letters CQ and when you call CQ anybody who heard it

10:00 and was obliged to answer and of course I come on the air with my blooming 500 watt transmitter, well I just overpowered all this little pippers and I got answers from everywhere pretty quick smart and it was quite entertaining. Anyway, the training blokes must've wondered what the hell hit them. You know, sitting there with the headphones on, straining to hear something and all of a sudden this big powerful transmitter comes on. Anyway, we got the bearings and we got to Dubbo without much trouble at all and we had to stay there. Overnight we stayed in a pub

10:30 and it was great because we were welcomed. The people in Dubbo had never seen a flying boat, let alone one that would land on the aerodrome and of course we barrelled over the town before we landed. That was customary just to let them know you're there, not too high, all in accordance with the law, and woke them up, landed and when we came to town we were quite popular. The publican was thrilled to have us, wouldn't charge us, and we had quite a few glasses

11:00 of beer and then in one conversation we happened to ask him, did he have any whisky? Of course we knew that if you had whisky in the tropics it was like gold. You could easily trade it for American dollars or American fags [cigarettes] which you could convert into dollars. So we asked him if he had any, and he did. So we got some cases of whisky which we took back with us. Anyway to cut the story short we managed to eventually

11:30 trade the whisky off to the Americans on Bougainville and make a nice little profit and avoid the attention of our own service police who had some suspicion that we may have had some, but couldn't find it.

Is there a story about the name of that whisky, what it was called?

Yeah, there is.

Can you tell us about it?

At the time like the brands of petrol in Australia were few, there was Shell petrol, Plume petrol and there was another petrol called

12:00 COR – COR – Commonwealth Oil Refinery – Commonwealth Oil Refinery number 10, COR 10. This whisky was called Corio and it was probably just about as rough as the petrol. It really wasn't good and the blokes used to call it COR 10. That was the name of this stuff. Like you wouldn't go and buy some, it was bad news, but the American servicemen must've thought it was alright anyway because they bought it. That was I suppose just about everybody that got the

12:30 opportunity to trade some whisky would've done so, because it was dead easy money and they didn't care. They had plenty, they really did. They had more money than they had sense. I don't know why they paid them so much. What the hell have they got to spend it on up there. Anyway, they had it. They used to gamble most of it, mad gamblers.

What about yourself, were you involved in that?

No, I didn't gamble. I had a couple of games of two-up but I wasn't ever keen on it.

13:00 Money was too hard to get when I was a kid to bother with gambling, so I didn't gamble. My folks weren't gamblers either, they'd never gamble. But some of the guys did.

How important was alcohol to help people get through the war?

It wasn't important at all, it was just good if you could get some. We all liked a beer, but we didn't get a lot and I don't think it was a help really. All it was was just another headache, that was all.

13:30 The frontline people didn't get any at all, but where you had supply ships coming in at reasonably regular intervals, they always had a cargo of beer on board which was doled out on a fairly equitable basis free of charge and consumed.

Can you tell us about coming home and being in Brisbane for the end of the war?

Yeah. Well everything seemed to stop all of a sudden for me.

14:00 A tour of operations on Catalinas was nine months and my nine months popped up after I'd been at New Guinea for a couple of months and suddenly I'm on my way home, and I didn't care really one way or the other. I would have just as soon stayed there or gone back to the other squadron really. There wasn't much point in coming home, the war wasn't over. But there was no option, you just did as you were told. Anyway,

14:30 the thing I remember most about it was we had a party before we left. The crew that were to relieve us had arrived and they were in camp. We had no booze, so the doctor came to the rescue. He said, "Don't you buggers start making that jungle juice. I don't want you drinking that." So he gave us a gallon of alcohol. They had medicinal alcohol which is pretty good stuff and we had

15:00 six gallon water tanks on the boats, stainless steel water tanks. So what we did, we took a gallon of water out and put the gallon of alcohol in and shook it all up and down and we had a tin of powdered lemon extract from the American Navy, we put that in and we had gin slings. Anyway, we all got headaches from it, but we had a nice party and the next day

15:30 we had to leave. We left by Catalina. We flew down with the relief crew and landed in the harbour at Lae. Lae Harbour is very exposed and there was a monstrous swell running, about a 12 foot swell and Catalinas don't like 12 foot swells. So there were a couple of Liberty ships anchored in the harbour and the idea was to land in the

16:00 lee of a Liberty ship. That would give you a little bit of protection from the sea, and then taxi into the mooring which was quite a journey. Anyway, to land within the length of a ship is quite a feat. You've got, I don't know how long they are, probably 400 feet I suppose, and you've got to land close to the ship and

16:30 in the downwind side and procedure is to do what you call a stall landing. That entails getting the aeroplane down to slow as possible without stalling, sneak along as low as possible until you're just alongside the ship. Then take the power off and pull the nose up and it would climb about 20 feet and then fall out of the sky and go clunk, and it did come down clunk I tell you. It was quite hard. But it was

17:00 successful. We landed safely in the lee of this ship and then we taxied. Well we all had hangovers. We all got seasick before we got to shore. The swell was big and it was close. You know, very close together, the waves. The bloomin' front would be going up one wave and the back would be getting bumped by the next one and it was dreadful. So we all got seasick. Anyway, we got to shore, got into our change

17:30 camp, stayed there overnight and then we had to go and wait by the side of the strip for an aeroplane to come and take us back to Australia, which was a DC3. We waited and waited and waited and waited, just like the airforce, hanging around waiting for something to happen. I don't know how long we waited but it seemed like forever. Finally we got on this aeroplane and went over the Owen Stanleys to Moresby and spent the night there. Then we came home from there on a Sunderland [flying boat].

18:00 First time I'd ever been in a Sunderland, and it was a magic change from Catalina to Sunderland. The Sunderland as you know, is much bigger, much much bigger. There's much more room inside and it has a different hull shape and when the Sunderland takes off it doesn't make any noise when it lands. It just sort of creams onto the water, doesn't make much noise, whereas landing in a Catalina is like running

along the

18:30 side of a corrugated fence with a stick, really noisy. The Sunderland was a pleasant surprise. We enjoyed the journey home. We came all the way down to Townsville first leg and got out there, had a run around, got back on and went all the way back down to Sydney. So that got us home. Sort of doing it in style, isn't it, first class air fare, free? Yeah, well that was the end of my active service

19:00 actually because I went home on leave. That was in the middle of '45, July, late July. Went home on leave and the war stopped. They dropped the atom bomb and it stopped like that. Amazing, amazing the change from a full scale war to no war. You would think it would taper out but it didn't. It just stopped.

19:30 People went mad. They were singing and dancing and doing all crazy things. So I stayed on leave then for a little while. I think I had about a month or six weeks leave.

Can you describe the atmosphere in Brisbane?

Yes. It was very very happy. People were getting around, you couldn't stop them from smiling. Everybody would be coming home soon and all this sort of stuff. It was really wonderful, the relief that it was over

20:00 and I don't know. I'm probably not too excitable because, I wasn't very excited by it all. I really wasn't. I was unhappy at home because my home was gone. I was pleased to see my father. My sisters had gone, my brother was married and moved away. Things just weren't the same. So anyway, a lot of my friends weren't there.

How hard was

20:30 **it to adjust to being a civilian again?**

Wasn't very hard at all. Once again it was a matter of necessity. I had to get employment. I had no money. I had a few hundred pounds I'd managed to save and nick [steal] from various ways, and I wanted to keep that, I didn't want to spend it. I had to get a job. So I went and got a job and that was it. I didn't miss the services. I

21:00 was too busy.

You would've celebrated your 21st birthday that year?

Yeah, I did.

Can you tell us?

I had a big party. There was my father, my two sisters came and my now wife, my girlfriend, and me, and we had a case of Coca Cola. Of

21:30 course none of the family drank except me, and by way of a special treat I bought a bottle of cherry brandy and a bottle of advocaat and so those that wanted it could have cherry brandy and advocaat which was apparently the big in thing in those days, really top stuff, but there was no beer about and nobody cared anyway, but it was just a quiet little gathering at home. Had a bit of food, nothing special, there wasn't much food around. But

22:00 that was it, but it was enough. It was just another birthday, really.

Some people we've spoken to have said that when the war ended they actually felt a little bit disappointed in a sense. Did you?

Well, I wasn't disappointed. It was a big change, but a welcome change. As I said to you before, the disappointment that I felt was

22:30 the transfer from what I considered to be a more active area in the north west, to the north east back up into New Guinea. I would've preferred to stay on mine laying because I felt that we were really getting ahead there doing something good, but you've just got to take what comes. Some of the boys that stayed on didn't make it back. New ones came up.

23:00 The squadrons moved on. They continued to operate from the Tangier and they went up to the Philippines, they mined Manila Bay. They moved further up and they mined the China coast, Taiwan. They really got up close to the Japanese homeland and took the message to them. But well, I probably would've, if I'd stayed with the squadron I probably would've got to the Philippines raid and that would've been

23:30 the end of my time anyway. So it wasn't too bad.

What were your thoughts as a young man when you heard about the atomic bomb being dropped?

Well to be quite honest we didn't know how horrific the bomb was. We just knew it was a big bomb and the aim of both sides of the conflict was to make the biggest bomb they could to do the most harm, and frighten the other bloke off a bit, and

24:00 the big bombs we'd heard about, they had the 'Big Berthas' and that sort of thing over in the European theatre where they were dropping 1,000 pounders, the big bombs they dropped on the Mohne Dam, and was it the Eder Dam? They blew them up. They were big bombs and people thought, gee, how big can these bombs get, you know. Planes can't carry all that much, and when they talked about this atom bomb they said, "It will blow things up," and by golly when it did everyone thought, God struth, no wonder they

24:30 quit. But we didn't realise the dangers of radioactivity. See, that didn't enter the head at all. What did enter the consciousness was the horrific damage to the civilian population. You could relate it to dropping a bomb on Brisbane. You can imagine what would happen, and I didn't like that part. But I thought to myself, well the blokes that are doing this, they've got an idea of what they're up for and what they're doing it for, so. But as it turned out

25:00 it stopped the war. Whether it was a good thing or a bad thing, well, as far as stopping the war was concerned it was certainly a good thing because there would've been a lot more casualties, no doubt about that. It started the arms race and that wasn't so hot, and we're still suffering, aren't we? We talk about nuclear powers today and rogues states. I suppose anyone who's got one, if you haven't got one, is a rogue state. But people are going to try and get them, aren't they?

25:30 God help us all. So that's me, that's my war.

How would you describe your war experience in terms of your lifetime? Was it the most significant time in your life?

Well I don't think so.

26:00 I don't think so. It was just a chapter in my life that unfolded and I had no options, no choices. It just happened. There was nothing in my life of my making at all. I didn't gain any real sort of reward from it. Other things I've done since, I've made my way and made my living and cared for my family,

26:30 so I value that more really. I suppose the war gave me a lot, took something from me, but I suppose if I was asked if I had my options I'd rather not have had a war. I was quite happy growing up the way I was, quite happy indeed I tell you.

What do you think the war gave you?

It gave me a bit of maturity. I probably would've matured

27:00 over those years anyway, but I certainly grew up a bit faster than I would've. It gave me a resolution to get myself a job and try and better my station in life and stand up for myself and my family. So it gave me that. It gave me some wonderful memories and some wonderful friends of the time.

27:30 Sadly for myself and those guys, aircrews are a funny breed. See, we came from everywhere. I had people from West Australia, Adelaide, Melbourne and Queensland. No New South Welshmen in my crew, but we came from all the states of the Commonwealth and when the war was over we dispersed back to our homelands and we really lost contact with each

28:00 other because we came back to Rathmines fully expecting to go on further operational duties and we expected our associations to continue, which they didn't and everybody had gone home and we didn't even have each other's address. Strange, isn't it? People you've been close, very close to in that sense for nine months of your life and they disappear and you never see them again. If I

28:30 hadn't seen the skipper on TV I wouldn't have seen him either. So that's strange, isn't it? But that's the way it is. Aircrew is a strange mixture. I should imagine it could be different for men in the infantry and that type of service where they came from the same suburbs, joined the same outfit and survived the war together. They would remain close friends for life. Well I would always be friendly to any of the people I worked and served with

29:00 if I could meet them, but I don't and I haven't. Once chap I did a flight with when the hostilities ceased, I don't know if I told you but we picked up servicemen and carried them back to Australia, one of the chaps I flew with on that occasion was a chap named Kevin King. He was a wireless operator and Kevin came back to Brisbane. He was a member of the Catalina Club and I got to know him quite well, but we didn't

29:30 fraternise or mix, our families, mainly because I was a shift worker. All my life I was a shift worker and shift work doesn't lend itself to a social life very much. That's why I lost contact with all my war time friends, so it didn't give me acquaintances and friends that are bonding and lasting for a lifetime but it did give me a lot of other things, and I managed to save a bit of money

30:00 because I didn't have to spend any and that gave me a start to get our first home. So the war did give us something. It gave me an education in life, an education in men, education in radio communications, air planes, which stood me in good stead later on in my life in the career that I ended up settling into. So really it did give me quite a lot.

Have you spoken with your wife and daughter about your war time experiences?

Not much,

30:30 not much.

Why not?

Well, it's nothing special and they don't really care to hear I suppose. I don't know, like it's, a war is best over and best forgotten. I've never spoken this much about it to anybody. It's only because in my late years I do feel there's a need somehow

31:00 for the younger generation to rediscover themselves, and if by learning a bit about their past they can benefit, well that will make it worthwhile, but that's the only satisfaction I'd get out of it.

Do you ever dream about your experiences during the war?

No, no.

Do you take part in Anzac Day marches?

I do now and for the same reason I just mentioned.

31:30 For many years I didn't bother. I was too busy trying to make something for myself and I didn't sort of think that those that did march were not doing the right thing. I think they are doing the right thing, but as I say, I didn't have any of my close associations to march with.

32:00 So what's the point in it?. It's only in the later years that I've felt this need to stand up amongst those few people who still march and if you're at the Anzac Day or see it on TV you'll see our Catalina banner and our numbers are down to about, we've got a dozen I suppose doing well. There are more Catalina guys around but they're the only ones that march and they're dropping off like flies. I don't march. I walk along, I can't march anymore.

32:30 I didn't like it anyway, so I just amble along and chat and dodge the horsemen and smile at the crowd, salute the governor, that's it.

You helped win the war, do you think we've won the peace?

I don't think there'll ever be a time in the history of mankind where there is peace.

33:00 I feel a little bit disturbed when I think that, OK, the Germans and the Japs were our bitter enemies and they caused a lot of our people untold misery and yet they really won the peace because to maintain the peace the British and Americans had to maintain large armies

33:30 in those countries, and to my mind it's similar to those countries enjoying the most massive wave of tourism and free money that you could ever experience, and in reality that's about what happened. Apart from official reconstruction or anything like that, that may have been offered or given to them, about which we know very little. The fact remains that if you've got a couple of hundred

34:00 thousand servicemen enjoying a very high salary, compared with the standard of salary in your country, and they've got nothing to do with it other than save some and spend the rest, then you're doing pretty well and I attribute that fact of that those armies of occupation, I personally attribute that to the reason why the economies of Japan and German faired so well in the 20 years or so

34:30 after the war. In that way I feel for the people of the victorious countries like the people of Britain who had to suffer their own reconstruction and you know, without help and support an army overseas at the same time. Our own folk here and many other nations who were on the supposed winning side. That's a point of view that doesn't get expressed very often, I should imagine, but that's my point of view

35:00 and I think it's pretty valid.

Do you have a final word that you would like to say to all Australians?

God save the King. No, I don't mean that. Well, it's not really my place but I would say put the power of the family back in the hands of the family. Don't be so bloody bureaucratic and so damned

35:30 stupid with political correctness, just try and use a bit of common sense. That's what I would say.

Makes sense to me too.