

Australians at War Film Archive

James Porteous - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **So Jim can we start off with you giving us a summary of your life from start to present day?**

My full name is James Keith Porteous. I was born

01:00 in Kempsey in 1922. That's on the mid north coast. I'm the sixth of nine children. The family consisted of five girls and four boys. I'm the surviving son or brother left. We were

01:30 struck rather severely during the Depression years. I left school when I was about 16. My father was a painting contractor, so to earn my keep I worked with him on various jobs he had around the place. Then the militia

02:00 was formed in Kempsey and I decided I could make a few bob by attending the camps and parades and that sort of thing, and by the time I was 18, the war had started and I immediately asked my parents' permission to join up. After a lot of discussion by my mother,

02:30 she agreed to sign the form to allow me to go ahead. I selected the air force because in my opinion the pay was better than the army. The living conditions were a lot better. We lived in huts in the early stages and after about a couple of months I was involved in

03:00 a course which allowed me to become an armourer. After the course was completed I was posted up to 23 Squadron at Archerfield. After about 10 months I felt I wasn't getting anywhere here and eventually they came out with an idea whereby Britain and Australia signed an agreement

03:30 where they would transfer a certain number of airmen over to the RAF [Royal Air Force], and they could do whatever they liked with them. That meant then that the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] lost control of us. So we...

04:00 **Was that the Empire [Air] Training Scheme that you're referring to?**

No. That was for the air crew. After about 10 months at Archerfield I thought I wasn't getting anywhere, so this idea of joining the RAF appealed to me, so I signed on the dotted line and within a couple of months I was down at Bankstown.

04:40 We were pottering around there for a couple months before we were finally given pre-embarkation leave. On our return from embarkation leave we were put on...the squadron was divided between... some of us were going on the [HMAS] Katoomba and some on the [HMAS] Manoora. I was selected to go on the Katoomba,

05:00 which meant that I left Sydney, went across the [Great Australian] Bight to Fremantle. Whereas the other crowd went up the Queensland coast, stopped at Brisbane, stopped at Townsville, then to Darwin and then onto Surabaya. They had a real ball. We were in...when we left Fremantle we

05:30 were in company...we trans-shipped at Fremantle onto the Dutch troop ship, the [SS] Sibajak and then with two other Dutch troop ships, and then escorted by the HMAS Hobart. We made our way up through the Sunda Strait to Singapore and that was the first indication we had that we were going to the tropics. We all had hoped of course that we'd be going

06:00 over to England. So when we arrived in Singapore we were taken straight out to the RAAF station at Sembawang and the crowd that were coming on the Manoora arrived about 10 days after we did. Then we found out we were going to be a fighter squadron. We had no planes there of course,

06:30 they were all over at the RAF station at Seletar. We finally got the planes singly and in doubles and eventually we...

You're doing really well. If you're having trouble with the detail at this point, remember it is

only a summary, so we can go into more detail later.

It's just reciting everything

07:00 and you're looking at me.

What, looking too much? I was just thinking how confident you are, to all outward appearances it's going well.

Well, we found out we had to assemble our own aircraft which was the Brewster Buffalo. A lot of people hadn't even heard of the Brewster Buffalo. It was designed originally for the United States Navy

07:30 and they had tossed them out in 1937, '38 because they had been declared obsolete. But Britain at that stage, were pretty short of aircraft so they brought them up in the hundreds. Of course by the time they got them over to England...they sent three over for evaluation tests and the RAF decided they were no damn good.

08:00 But what to do with them was another matter, so they had the bright idea that they would well and truly need them for the Far East. So the other Australia Squadron, 21 Squadron and ourselves 453, were saddled with these Brewster Buffalos along with a New Zealand squadron, plus

08:30 an RAF squadron. The idea was we would assemble them. The pilots would do their conversion course because the pilots that came over with us on the Katoomba and the Sibajak were straight from their courses. They were green as far as airmanship was concerned. So they had to do a conversion course on these much faster aircraft than, the Wirraway.

09:00 Some did their training on the Wirraway and some on the old Avro Anson. But those on the Avro Anson had to learn to fly a single engine aircraft. When they were proficient at landing we would go over to Seletar up to the stop butts where we would test the guns, the harmonising of the guns, that is to say, say two hundred yards ahead.

09:30 With the four guns that were fired, they had to sort of merge like that. We eventually harmonised the guns one at a time and then all together with the engine running, because two of the guns were firing between the propeller blades, which is an old World War I invention.

10:00 Then we had the two wing guns, one on each side. So we would harmonise the gun sight as well, so the four guns plus the gun sight were all focused at two hundred yards. When everything was ok and we let the plane down off its flying position, we'd all go back to Sembawang.

10:30 **Would you like a break? Have a drink. You're going really well.**

It's trying to get everything into...

There's no need to put in so much detail...you're going fine. Remember it is a summary, so you can just move on from where you are and just pick up from where you left from?

11:00 Well things ...when the squadron was shown to be proficient in gunnery and flying exercises, it was decided that 21 Squadron and ourselves would graduate as a full active service squadron. So we had all the aircraft lined up,

12:00 30 odd. I've got a video of the thing there. After the manoeuvres and so forth we were declared an operational squadron. But at the same time the talks between the United States and Japan which had been going on for months, had broken down completely and Japan pulled out. This is back in November of '41. At the time reconnaissance aircraft were seen flying over Northern Malaya and Siam. We all knew they were Japanese but they were unidentified for political purposes.

12:30 So we were put on what they called a ...like an emergency second rate. There is a proper name for it. I'll think of it later.

13:00 We were all given our dispositions as squadrons. No. 1 and No. 8 Squadron were Lockheed Hudson squadrons so they were allocated...No. 1 Squadron was allocated to Kota Bharu which is up in the far north of the Malayan peninsula. 8 Squadron was allocated to serve on Kuantan,

13:30 which were both on the east coast. 21 Squadron was allocated to Sungai Petani on the west coast, and 453 were allocated to Singapore and for the defence of Singapore. We kept on training and on the ...

14:00 The Lockheed Hudson squadron was long range. It was a reconnaissance aircraft, so they were informed to increase their reconnaissance of the Gulf of Siam and around that area, and this they did at the height of the monsoonal season. It wasn't until the 6th December

14:30 that 1 Squadron discovered a convoy of Jap...unidentified ships which turned out to be the Japanese. So they radioed back to Singapore that they had discovered a Japanese fleet on the high seas, and they were told to continue with

15:00 their reconnaissance, but under no circumstances were they to engage the fleet. So they increased the reconnaissance until the 7th December when they came across a second convoy all heading towards

Malaya. It was then that the state of emergency

- 15:30 number 1 was introduced. So everybody then was on a war footing. In air force terms, that's 00:48 hours on the 8th December, they were informed that there were three ships coming down the coast towards Kota Bharu.
- 16:00 Wing Commander Davis informed the Far East Command that these ships were coming down the coast, they were told to, "Hang fire until something happened." We were at
- 16:30 Sembawang and we were woken at three o'clock in the morning and told to report to the hangars for duty. We warmed up three aircraft. One was the acting squadron commander and the flight commander. All three had had service in England. In the meantime, the Japanese opened fire on
- 17:00 Kota Bharu and of course all hell broke loose. While we were back at Sembawang we could hear the drone of the Japanese flying over head and we thought it was just the Pommies having another dress rehearsal. We didn't take much notice of it until we were told to get to the
- 17:30 hangars for duty...this was no exercise. Which we did and we saw the...I think it was about 27 Japanese bombers flying overhead and then there was the whistle...the bombs being released and falling. They were after the [HMS] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse, which had just arrived from England.
- 18:00 They missed the two ships and of course the rest of the day we just spent coming to the realisation that we were in the middle of a war. That day the 8th, which was a Monday, and the Tuesday we were left sort of to ourselves, whereas 21 Squadron over at Sungai Petani,
- 18:30 they were almost decimated. The 21 Squadron commander couldn't get permission from the station commander, who was an RAF bloke to disperse his aircraft and they were all lined up wing tip to wing tip. The Japanese just came over and dropped a couple of bombs in the middle of them and then strafed them and they finished up with only four serviceable aircraft. The rest were
- 19:00 all damaged. Some were on fire and burnt out.

What happened next after that initial contact that you had?

Well, I'm speaking of 453 Squadron....

And also remember that this is just a summary, so if you just say the major events that happened and up until your post war life and then we'll come back and revisit those bits that you were just talking about.

- 19:30 The next big thing of course was the sinking of the Prince of Wales and the Repulse. Now as I mentioned, the 453 Squadron was there for the defence of Singapore and convoy duty for the ships coming into the harbour. We were detailed on the
- 20:00 10th of December to stand by because the Prince of Wales and the Repulse may need some aerial protection. We had the pilots sitting in their cockpits for about three hours waiting for the signal to take off, and to do what they had to do. But it wasn't until after the
- 20:30 Prince of Wales and Repulse had been torpedoed and were sinking that our pilots were given the opportunity of taking off. By the time they got up to Kuantan, which was an area where the Prince of Wales and Repulse were being tormented, our pilots...all they could see were hundreds of sailors
- 21:00 swimming around in oil covered water. So that was our first...as a squadron...our effort in those first few days. With 21 Squadron almost decimated, a flight of our squadron had to go up to give them assistance. Then with the
- 21:30 Japanese coming down the west coast so rapidly, our fellas were only up there for a few days when they had to fall back onto Butterworth. Then by this time they were reduced to about two or three aircraft, even though they had been re-equipped with others from Singapore.
- 22:00 They were pulled out and sent back to Singapore, whereas our pilots were told to fly over to a place called Sungai Besi which was quite close to Kuala Lumpur. The ground crew were then sent up by rail from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur and this is where we found we had no vehicles,
- 22:30 so we had to go out and commandeered vehicles off the local Chinese and businessmen. On the 22nd there was a big air raid. Our fellas went up and we finished up destroying 12 Zeros. I'd like to mention though that the
- 23:00 Brewster Buffalo was out gunned and out paced by the Zeros, and there's a difference of about 100 miles an hour. And our fellas couldn't get up any more than about 20,000 feet, 17,500 to 20,000, and yet they were able to mix it with them. So we ...on the 23rd
- 23:30 we were being strafed by the Japanese at Sungai Besi and we were reduced to about seven aircraft by this time. So it was decided we would withdraw from Malaya itself and operate from Sembawang. There we were until the general withdraw by the army from the

- 24:00 Malay Peninsula. We soon found ourselves in the front line. We were in no-mans land because with the army pulling out of Malayan Peninsula there was no army between the Japanese and the airmen in Sembawang. They started shelling us.
- 24:30 The shelling went on for about three days. What aircraft we had that were serviceable were flown out to a place called Tengah, and when they landed there they found that was also being shelled so they had to get back into the aircraft and fly them down to Kalang. That was the civilian airport for Singapore.
- 25:00 So we stayed on Sembawang until the 8th December when it was decided that we should get out. The CO [Commanding Officer], an RAF bloke couldn't be found, so it was left to the adjutant to do all the arranging. He organised the
- 25:30 motor vehicles to get us down to Keppel Harbour. We were put on the [SS] City of Canterbury, a ship of about eight thousand ton. There were 1,500 evacuees, army, navy and air force and civilians and we were taken over to Batavia. On the way to Batavia we were subjected to dive bombing
- 26:00 and strafing and submarine alerts. We got into Batavia all right and we were strafed there again. We were then taken inland to a place called Buitenzorg. In its better days it was the summer residence of the Dutch Governor. We were there to about the 23rd of February
- 26:30 24th when the [SS] Orcades came in against the orders that were conveyed to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. They were to proceed to Australia whereas General Wavell said, "No, we want some of these fellows into Java." So they dropped off the 2/2nd Pioneers and 2/6th
- 27:00 Machine Gunners, I think it was, or it could have been the other way around, plus Weary Dunlop. So that made room then on the Orcades to take on some...our crowd for example. There again we were told...or the ship's captain was advised that he was to proceed to Australia. But Churchill then decided, no, he wanted these blokes
- 27:30 up in Burma. So while the Orcades was going around in circles while they were arguing as to what should happen, the Orcades was running short of fuel, so we had to shoot up to Colombo. We were in Colombo for a couple of days, and then all of a sudden the Orcades was released and
- 28:00 we sailed to Port Adelaide unescorted, because they thought the Orcades was fast enough to outrun any submarine that might be around. We arrived in Adelaide, I've got the date over there somewhere, and we were trans-shipped onto a troop train and brought over to Melbourne where we were re-equipped and
- 28:30 so forth, sent on a fortnight's leave and told to report to our local embarkation depot, or personnel depot, as it was called then. From there on, along with everybody else, the squadron was disbanded, and we learned later that it was reformed in England. But for us, we were just scattered everywhere because a lot of squadrons were being formed
- 29:00 and they wanted somebody with certain experiences. A few of us, a few of the armoured section were set aside and we were told they were going to make instructors out of us. So we did what they called a junior armament instructor's course which included
- 29:30 bomb aiming and ...
- Have another drink.**
- This is worse than the Inquisition.
- I hope it's not that bad.**
- 30:00 There was the air gunnery and the bombing that we had to do. And we were shot out to these service flying training schools. I put up with it for about two years and I thought this was no good. So I applied for a posting to a service squadron and I finished up in what they called an OBU, operational base unit. Now strictly speaking, an OBU
- 30:30 meant that we went in with the aerodrome constructional crowd when the beachhead had been secured, and while the aerodrome constructional crowd were filling in the bomb craters and so forth, we were setting up ready for the incoming aircraft. But what happened at Tarakan,
- 31:00 the airstrip was spongy...they didn't have any hard ballast to fill the holes, so that meant that the proposed landing at Brunei and Labuan may have to be postponed until... a group of us were sent up to the Philippines and we operated from there before the invasion of those two places, Brunei and Labuan.
- 31:30 So we came back and we were ready for the Balikpapan invasion. Subsequently peace was restored and I spent from August, which was when the Japanese surrendered, up to November, still on Tarakan, until an air force supply boat, which was only about half the size of the Manly ferry came in
- 32:00 and took 15 of us as deck cargo, or deck passengers. We sailed from Tarakan to Cairns and I arrived back in Sydney on 23rd December, so I just got Christmas in. I was discharged in 1946 after about five years and eleven months.

So what happened then?

32:30 **What's your life been in summary from the moment you arrived back to today?**

Well, I was at a loose end for a while because I'd been looked after by the air force with no worries about meals or clothing, or dental or medical or anything, and subsequently I got a job...I applied for a job with the Australian Wheat Board

33:00 in Sydney and I stayed with them for 33 years. And then I took my long service leave and the rest of it and said, "Thanks very much," and decided to retire. So that's about it.

And that's where we are today. Thank you so much for that summary.

33:30 It was an effort.

It was very comprehensive, especially of the war years. It's really made it very clear what took place and where you were.

After I discussed something I realised there was something else I overlooked.

That's what we're here to discover, so we'll hopefully ask the right questions and it will all come out. But thank you, that was a very good start.

The old throat started to tighten up.

34:00 **Have you got a bit of a cold, have you?**

Yes, a cold coming on.

We'll have to get you on to some lemon and brandy. Not that I want to get you drunk but apparently it suits the throat. Ok, let's go right back to the beginning because we want to get a picture of you as a person growing up and how you came to be in the war, so

34:30 **I'm interested in the beginning part of your life in Kempsey and I hope to hear a bit more about your family.**

Well, as I mentioned, I was the sixth of nine children, five girls and four boys. I left school when I was about 16.

What was it like growing up with so many brothers and sisters?

35:00 It had its problem. We had a four bedroom home. Most of us had double beds. All the girls would double up and the boys were usually out on the verandas. I went to a convent school. I was taught by the nuns, which I realised in later years wasn't particular good

35:30 because if the girls were doing sewing for example...like they had a sewing session, we were sent out to play cricket or football. There was no woodworking or anything like that.

Apparently in the Catholic system, with the nuns back then was quite a ...?

Ferocious!

Yes, ferocious is quite a good word. Can you talk a bit about that

36:00 **...about your schooling and what that was like?**

Well, I was taught by the Mercy nuns and they were pretty good with the cane. They kept us in line. I wouldn't want to say too much. There's been a lot of publicity about those days. As

36:30 somebody growing up it was good, carefree. We had ...we could play football...we were able to play cricket...one side of the street would play cricket against the other side of the street. It was a small town.

37:00 It relied mainly on timber and dairying.

So tell me a bit more about Kempsey during this time? Can you describe Kempsey for me?

At that time there was about six thousand people, one main street. It was about half way between Sydney and Brisbane by rail. We had a big black population,

37:30 Aboriginal population. We had two reserves. One at a place called Green Hill and Burnt Bridge. We had...there was always a certain amount of hostility. The Blacks would come down on pension day and get on the hops and sit in the gunner. Eat their prawns and drink their

38:00 cheap plonk. Friday night was the big shopping night. You could leave your front door open, well unlocked I should say. You could come home and still find it undisturbed.

You mentioned there was hostility towards...or not towards, but between the

38:30 **Aboriginal population and the white population, why would these hostilities be shown?**

Well the Blacks, after a few nips of cheap plonk, they would get rather abrasive to the people walking past and that caused a bit of a stir. And of course, at that time, they weren't allowed drink, so they used to get

39:00 wine by other means and sit in the gutter and drink it.

Was there any...you mentioned the hostility, was there any...?

Well, there were no big fights, no. Nothing in the way of the big brawls they have now. No knives or anything, it was just knuckles.

Tape 2

00:06 **...discussing the relationship between the Aboriginal people and the white people in Kempsey, is there anything else you'd like to add to that or any other experiences you'd like to talk about?**

No, I think that just about covers what I would like to say about that.

00:36 **Ok, so tell me more about your mother and your father?**

Well, my mother was of German descent. Her name was Kahler, K A H L E R. My father was born in Ipswich, in Queensland. His parents arrived out on a sailing boat that dropped them off at

01:00 Bundaberg. I don't know how they made their way from Bundaberg over to Ipswich but that's where he was born. He was a painting contractor, so he found his way down to Armidale at some time, met Mum and married, and then they moved on down to Sydney and the first four

01:30 children were born there. The remainder of us were born in Kempsey. Mum was, as I say, she was the daughter of a German immigrant. They got on...with nine children they must have got on pretty well. They eventually...

02:00 I was born in Kempsey because they left Sydney and eventually came up the coast, and the remainder of the family were born in Kempsey....that's two sisters and a brother.

I imagine with a family of nine children, during the Depression years it must have been quite

02:30 **a struggle. Can you talk a bit about what it was like during the Depression for your family?**

Unfortunately, I don't recall a great deal of life, except it was pretty free. We had to eat what was put down in front of us. Mum,

03:00 being the daughter of a butcher knew all the best cuts when she went to the butchers. All in all, life was much the same in any country town at that time. Dad was...

03:30 being a contracting painter, he wouldn't be at home a great deal. He would be at other country towns doing governmental work. So we kept pretty close to ourselves as a family and I think most country people were like that.

04:00 Going to school, being a country town, a lot of the outlying children would have their own sulkies and horses that they'd ride and leave in the school grounds, to graze until school was over. That's about all I can

04:30 say about my early life. My whole life changed of course, when I joined the forces and came down to the big smoke.

Were you a close family?

Oh yes, yes.

Were you close with your brothers and sisters? I imagine there must have been one or two that you didn't get on with?

We used to fight amongst ourselves but if someone from the outside came in to pick a fight then they'd have the whole family onto them.

Ok. Can you recall any incidences when that actually happened?

05:00 No, not really. But there was a saying, "If you strike one of us you take on the whole family."

Were you still at the nunnery...not at the nunnery, at the convent right through your high school years when you left when you were 15 or...when did you actually leave school?

I left at about 16. I was about 16.

05:30 Had you done the leaving certificate at that point?

No, I had to leave early because my eldest brother had been killed in an accident and I thought I was responsible to take his place with my Dad.

What happened to your brother?

He was working down here in Sydney and he was going back here to Kempsey to spend

06:00 Easter with the family, and at a place called Gloucester, which was on the old Pacific Highway at that time, he met a car coming in the opposite direction. It was a wet night and he was in one of those Morris Cowley cars, a bullet nose job. And apparently this fellow

06:30 that was driving was over the white line, or what they used to have in those times, and it struck the Morris Cowley a glancing blow and it rolled the car over. My brother Don was thrown against one of those white posts which were on the side of the road. A couple of ribs were broken and it pierced his lung and he haemorrhaged

07:00 before they could get a specialist to him at the Gloucester Hospital. With him gone I felt I was responsible to take over.

That must have been devastating for the family?

It was. In the midst of the Depression,

07:30 so a lot of unexpected expenses that had to be met. So for a couple of years I was just working for keep. And we used to work in towns up in the Great Dividing Ranges and up and down the coast.

08:00 So I'm interested to know more of the kind of work you did with your father.

It was general painting. That's about it. Mainly court houses and banks and

08:30 those sorts of things. A lot of work, but being the young one I was the one who had to go up the ladder.

What was it like working with your dad all day?

I got along all right with him, but of course he wasn't forthcoming with a bit of pocket money either.

Oh really.

09:00 That must have annoyed you a little bit?

Well, I took it and I was helping out. But as soon as I was able to get into the militia and get a few payments together...a type of...what do you call it...weekend

09:30 parades and that sort of thing, so I was able to get a few pound that way.

Did you know of anyone or did anyone around you talk of their experience of World War I?

Of course we had a few of the old World War I Diggers in the town but...

10:00 no, I can't recall speaking to any of them. It's just that when the war commenced there were very few jobs in the country. The country towns had just closed up and there was no work. So that's when I decided that it was time for me to join up.

10:30 I had to wait until I was 18 of course, and get my Mum's permission, and before I knew where I was I was called up and down here at Richmond.

It tends to happen very quickly doesn't it, this big life changing experience?

Yes, it did in those days. I joined up in Grafton as a matter of fact. They had a mobile recruiting centre

11:00 in a railway carriage that was on one of the sidings. I had applied in Sydney and they wanted me to report for an examination at Grafton. They gave me the directions and so forth. Having been in the militia I was able to, I think, persuade the fellow

11:30 who was interviewing me that I was a good source for an armament section. So before I knew where I was, I was called up and did my rookies at Richmond and then down to Melbourne to start this armament course, which took about a month, and then I was posted to 23 Squadron at Archerfield.

12:00 Ok, just before we go on to enlistment and your training, if we could just back track a bit and if you could just tell me where you were when war broke out?

I was at Maxville of all places. We were working on...that was about 30 miles north of Kempsey. Dad and I were working on

12:30 a general shop and I remember that was where I was. I was up the damn ladder when the news came through that...in '39, that the war had started. Dad was a bit concerned about my older brother who was in the permanent army, and he was already in uniform down at....

13:00 So that's where I was on the 3rd December 1939, Maxville.

And what kind of impact did that news of war have on you at the time?

Well I thought, "Here's an opportunity." I'm 18, life was ahead of me and I

13:30 thought I'll do something. And there it was.

So you were in the militia before war broke out weren't you....sorry, when did you join the militia? Was that before war broke out?

Yes, when I was about 16.

So tell me about the militia?

14:00 **What did you do in the militia?**

Well as I say, I joined when I was 16 and we used to have weekly parades in the local show ground. We were issued with a uniform. In those days they had big putties which used to roll up your leg.

14:30 We'd go out on reconnaissance ...short of, no night manoeuvres or that sort of thing. And then once a year, perhaps twice a year we'd go down to Greta or Rutherford for our camp. We'd be away for about a fortnight. We'd come back

15:00 and resume our normal day to day work.

Was the militia something you enjoyed?

I enjoyed it very much. Yes, it was a meeting of a lot of young fellas my own age, and a different outlook on life.

Did you get up to any mischief with your mates...?

No, I was a good Catholic boy.

15:30 No, I was really on the quiet side. I never drank...while I was under 21. I behaved myself. And even while in the air force, I got an exemplary conduct report.

So did you feel like your experience

16:00 **in the militia helped to prepare you for your enlistment in the future air force?**

Oh yes. I was attached to a machine gun section in the militia and that gave me an insight into guns and armaments and that sort of thing. And that's what I did when I wanted to enlist. I wanted to become an armourer, because I didn't know anything about mechanics

16:30 and I had to give Mum my promise that I wouldn't fly.

Why was that?

I think she had a fear of anybody flying. But in later years she wouldn't travel anywhere unless she went by plane. But unfortunately, well it wasn't unfortunate, but I did manage to do a number of trips,

17:00 flights. The first one was with a young fellow who had just got out of his training, a fellow by the name of Bobby Gibbs. He became one of the Aces out in Africa. He was in 23 Squadron at Archerfield, and we used to go down to Evans Head to do the bombing and gunnery exercises and they needed the armourers down there to fill those

17:30 practice bombs and load the machine guns and that sort of thing. And of course being in the Wirraways, there's always a vacant seat in the back behind the pilot. So we all put in who wanted to go with whom, and eventually my turn came up and I picked Bobby Gibbs. He's only a little short bloke you know. He is only about five foot four, five foot five.

18:00 The exercise I remember quite well was, we were doing shallow dive bombing. In other words he'd come down like this very shallow, but Bobby would put the plane on its wing and, being a little short bloke...the target, I could see it coming up like this, wondering when he was going to pull out. Fortunately

18:30 it was necessary for us to wear parachutes, but if I had worn one I think I would have fallen out of the damn thing because it's never adjusted to one's physique. So that was my first flight.

And where was that? Where did that take place?

This was at Evans Head, at No. 1 BAGS, the bombing and gunnery school.

19:00 Later on at Kingaroy I was in a near forced landing. I was in an Avro Anson, just going on a flip as we used to say. One of the engines cut out. He was a young sprog pilot, a green pilot, and he decided

19:30 that he didn't have time to put the wheels down, so he just sort of crash landed. As he was coming in, we were in a paddock of sheep and of course, these damn sheep kept running ahead of us and he was trying to find a spot to put the plane down.

Did he run over any sheep?

No, no fortunately they all scattered at the right time. And of course my big one was flying from Townsville

20:00 through to Merauke, down to the southern coast of New Guinea, and then from Biak over to Morotai. That took a day and a half with an overnight stay at Biak.

Gosh that's a long one, a long flight. Was being in the aeroplanes...I know you promised your mother you wouldn't fly, but

20:30 **was it a secret desire to actually fly?**

Oh yes. Well everyone else was flying and I thought, "I'm not going to be left out of it." And after all it wasn't at the front line at all. We were miles away from any problems. I thought, "Just once will be enough." And once became twice and then the big one.

So did you have any desire to actually be a pilot at any time?

Not a pilot. I was more

21:00 inclined to be an air gunner because with my background in armaments and so forth. But after the course I did for an instructor, I thought a bomb aimer wouldn't be too bad either because I had the elementary knowledge of bomb aiming. But I never had the opportunity.

21:30 Well the opportunity was there but by this time I was over 21 and my own boss, and of course by that time the war was getting close to an end so they didn't need any more air crew.

So I'm also wondering...in the militia you mentioned you had your first experience of guns and machine guns, what kind of guns were you trained on in the militia?

22:00 There was this 1914-1918 thing. The bullets were in an enclosure and as one bullet was shot the thing would spin around to another one. But that's all they had.

That was a great description of what you said just then because I've never actually seen

22:30 **one. Can you give me a visual description of what it looked like, how heavy it was, how you fired it, how you loaded it. Can you tell me about that gun?**

The ammunition was loaded into the container and that was put on the top and it was clipped in. The gun itself was about three foot six long. He had a sight

23:00 on the top of it. It was on a bipod which meant it was light enough to fire from the hip if you wanted to but usually they were fired from a concealed position. They only fired at a rate of about, from memory I would say about six hundred rounds a minute.

23:30 There would be two men. One would have the other supply of ammunition beside you and then there was the gunner himself. He would be prone behind the gun with it stuck into his shoulder. When one container was emptied he would just take it off and the

24:00 other fella would pick up another one and give it to him and he would put it on. It was mainly used for... or it was designed for trench warfare. We were using it in the militia but that was replaced by the Vickers gun and subsequently by the Bren gun. Then of course, later on we had submachine guns,

24:30 which I carried up in Tarakan.

Was the Vickers gun also a gun you trained on in the militia?

No not at that time. They didn't have any available in Kempsey, but I have fired them later on.

We might talk about the Vickers and the Bren and the other machine guns a bit later on because you've obviously got a real expertise

25:00 **in that area. So that would be great to hear more about that. You mentioned that you enlisted in Sydney but you had to go to Grafton when you were called up.**

I applied to Sydney then I was directed up to Grafton to this mobile centre, and then they examined me and put me through...I had a medical examination

25:30 and I was passed down the line to this cove who was doing the trade test. He said to me, "I don't know anything about guns, what can you tell me?" So I was able to describe the Lewis gun to him and how it

operated. So he said, "As far as I'm concerned you seem to know enough about it to be accepted as an armourer."

26:00 Then when I was called up I went straight down to Richmond and from there I did my rookies, basic training on rifles and that sort of thing. I passed out there...passed the inspection. I was sent then down to Point Cook to do the armourers course which

26:30 took about a month. And as I said earlier, from Point Cook I was posted up to 23 Squadron at Archerfield.

Ok, let's go back to Point Cook. Tell us more about the training that you did there?

It was mainly classes and more theory than anything,

27:00 contents of what made the bomb. What sort of equipment a modern plane would carry. We had no Bren guns as such because that was really for the army, but later on towards the end we were having

27:30 Bren guns with our equipment. Usually it was mainly theoretical stuff like bomb sighting and that...you know. So after about a month we were given...

28:00 After about a month we were passed as successful and ...so long ago, it's a bit hard to...

You're doing so well....and you could describe the Lewis gun to a tee. You're doing really well. If I could get you at this point to describe exactly what an armourer's role was.

Well,

28:30 in my day, back in the '40s, an armourer was expected to maintain the guns in a plane, and if he was attached to a bomber squadron, not only would he have the guns, he would have the turret and also the bombs that he had to load.

29:00 So if it was a bomber squadron you would have to know the

29:30 type of bombs and what they contained. We had armour piercing; we had semi armour piercing; we had general purpose bombs. That was in the big 250, 500 pounders. And of course, we had the little 16 pounders. We didn't see a great deal of those but we had the practice bombs, the eleven and a half pounders. And they were mainly used in the

30:00 service flying training schools...or 1BAGS, or bombing gunnery schools. To load, or to fill the practice bomb, the bomb itself could be separated by unscrewing the nose from the tail, and there was a screw in it at the top which we filled with

30:30 carbon tetrachloride. This chemical would evaporate into smoke once it was exposed to the air, so that when the bomb was released from the aircraft, naturally being nose heavy, it would fall. And in fact a bomb doesn't fall straight down, it

31:00 follows the plane down. When it hit the ground the firing pin would be pushed up into a detonator which would blow the tail off, and you would have a cloud of smoke which you were able to pin point, and know just how far away it was from the target, which was usually a white triangle.

31:30 Usually they carried about eight practice bombs. Now depending upon the type of target we might have to use the bigger bombs, an armour piercing would be used against a heavy, say battleship or a cruiser, or something like

32:00 that which had a reinforced deck, steel deck, and the idea was that the bomb would pierce the deck and explode down in the engine room or the boilers or something like that. The semi armour piercing was much the same, but it would go into builders. And of course, the general purpose was used against aerodromes or

32:30 business places or anything like that which could be blown apart.

So your armourer was to load and organise the armaments for each plane, is that correct?

Yes, that's the bombs. But with the machine guns, once again depending on what type of squadron you were in, if it was a bomber squadron

33:00 the likes of the Lockheed Hudson, which is the one I was more familiar with, they had two guns pointing over...from the side near the pilot and the idea was if he was meeting something coming towards him, an enemy aircraft, he could fire his guns from the cockpit with the hope of deterring him.

33:30 Now, if it was a larger plane it would also have a turret which would be operated by a gunner in the back. He would have his back to where the rest of the crew were and he'd be flying towards the ... around the tail area. It was constructed in such a way that the guns would cut out

34:00 when it came to the fin of the aircraft, rather than cut it off. But the gunner and armourer would work

in conjunction with the maintenance of the turret. Now with a fighter aircraft and the one I was more accustomed to, the Brewster Buffalo,

- 34:30 we had four guns on the Brewster Buffalos. They were four point fives, four guns each with point five or half an inch armament, bullet. And
- 35:00 the thing was with the four guns, two were firing between the propellers up on the...mounted on the top, and two in the wings. With the Brewster Buffalo...just before getting to that, the guns had to be harmonised at a distance of about two hundred yards, which meant
- 35:30 that we would have to go over to the stop butts and fix the aircraft into flying position. The engine would be started and we'd fire one gun at a time to test the gun and to also test the timing, because this timing device in the aircraft was from the 1914-18 war and it was operated on an oil system with a cam in the engine,
- 36:00 which would thump, or hit a piston in the engine which would force the oil through a pipe to fire the gun. And if any timing was out, we'd have to adjust the timing before we left. We'd do the four guns all together.
- 36:30 Then if everything was all right we'd lower the plane and the pilot would take off back to Sembawang, and we'd pack up and go back by lorry truck.

So the armourer was always part of the ground crew, was he? He was never in the plane flying around with the crew?

No,

- 37:00 except on long distance reconnaissance where they would carry an armourer. We had No. 10 Squadron which was a RAAF squadron over in England. That was on submarine patrol. They always carried an armourer. It was a big flying boat, and later on they got the Catalinas and they also carried an armourer on those
- 37:30 because they were out for eleven and twelves at a time.

But you as an armourer never...?

No, I was never posted to a Catalina squadron or Sunderland.

So getting back to that ...you mentioned that feature of the guns firing between the propellers, was there ever a time in your experience where that actually did fail

- 38:00 **and the engine would be blown?**

The propeller you mean? The propeller would be pierced and of course we would have to get back and change the propeller. See it was not only the timing of this apparatus, but it was also the ammunition. If the ammunition was a bit wonky, or a bit slow

- 38:30 it could catch the edge of the propeller.

Did that happen often?

Not a great deal, when we got things organised and knew more about this interrupter gear. We had one or two, but we did pretty well, I think. There were a couple.

Did that ever happen to a plane that you knew of

- 39:00 **in action?**

No. No. We lost so many planes of course we wouldn't know if the propeller was pierced or not.

Because it's an amazing invention really when you think about it?

Well, when you look at your fan belt and the way it goes in your car, and to think they can fire bullets between them.

- 39:30 And this was a four bladed propeller too.

And you said that was a World War I invention too?

I just forget the correct name for it, but it was known as the interrupter gear, interrupting between the propellers.

Tape 3

- 00:34 **Now with your Point Cook training, I believe in April 1940 you were posted to 23 Squadron at**

Archerfield in Brisbane. Can you describe what happened when you got there?

At the time I got there the squadron consisted of a flight of Avro Ansons and a flight of Wirraways.

- 01:00 Shortly after that the aircrew belonging to the Anson aircraft were sent down to Richmond to do a conversion course on the Lockheed Hudsons, and eventually after a period of time, I just can't say how long it was, they returned with brand new Hudsons. The smell inside was overpowering.
- 01:30 It was like a new car. You know, the smell of leather and that sort of stuff. They were coming up in ones and twos until we got a flight of about six.

What was the main benefit of the Hudson?

With the old Avro Anson or "Aggie" as they were called,

- 02:00 they were very slow. They had a very light engine, two engines in them, and I think they were built about 1936 or 1937. They were ideal for training, multi engine jobs. But with the Hudsons, they were a more powerful aircraft. Originally it was converted from a passenger plane
- 02:30 and it was designed to carry a long range petrol tank so...during the Japanese war, they were able to go out for anything up to eight hours. Now the Hudson aircraft had a
- 03:00 Perspex plate in the bottom...in the nose where the bomb aimer would go down to line up his bomb sight, and the original ones when they arrived at Archerfield, they didn't have the turret. They had a...it was described as a
- 03:30 pan, an upturned pan with a gun installed there, just a temporary measure until the turrets became available. In addition to that they had a couple of guns pointing out over the nose of the aircraft. Underneath they had a door that opened up underneath the aircraft and we were able to load the four
- 04:00 250s and a couple of 500 pounders. They would fly around. On one occasion there was an aircraft which went out on a test with about 10 people. Unfortunately something happened out over Moreton Bay
- 04:30 and they sent out search parties. They could never find it except for an oil slick on the water. So we presumed they must have been flying rather low, and got tangled up with the water...just like Bluey Truscott did. So we never found any remains of the aircraft or anything.

05:00 Can you just clarify that? You said it got tangled up with the water...

Sometimes when you're flying over the water you can't tell exactly where you are above the water, and some of them used to fly so close...later on...that their wing tips would stir up the water as they were flying over. That's what happened to Bluey Truscott later on.

- 05:30 They surmised that he came too close to the water and went straight in.

Did he survive that crash?

No.

That actually happened during the war, did it?

Yes. He was up around Broome somewhere.

I hadn't heard that actually. I thought Bluey Truscott had survived the war.

No.

My goodness. Now what sort of training did you embark upon in Brisbane?

- 06:00 Well, it was mainly the bombing and gunnery. The gunnery exercises were done over Moreton Bay, so we didn't see any of that.

Just you yourself, what sort of training did you do?

It was mainly with the trips down to Evans Head,

- 06:30 with the Wirraways. We would go down by air force truck and we would take up residence in the bombing camp, No. 1 BAGS. We would just take over the bombing field. The rest of the personnel at
- 07:00 Evans Head were mainly with the flying of the Fairey Battles, which is another training plane. But we went down for the sole purpose of tuning up our bombing exercises and gunnery...if it called for the gunnery exercises as well. We just filled the bombs,
- 07:30 as I explained earlier, with carbon tetrachloride, lay them under the Wirraways and sent them away. Anything up to eight bombs would be carried, four on each wing of the aircraft.

You refer to 'we'. When you say we, you mean 23 Squadron?

Yes, 23 Squadron.

Now how long did the training take altogether

08:00 **while you were based at Archerfield?**

Well, after about 10 months I realised I could stay there for the duration of the war, but then this article 15 agreement came into being and that was an agreement between the Australian and British governments along with New Zealand and Canada to supply a certain number of complete squadrons

08:30 to serve with the RAF. Now we were able to retain uniforms, our identity, and the difference in the pay was made up by the Australian government. So I thought this was a chance of getting away from Brisbane and getting a bit of experience overseas. So I applied, like most of the squadron did,

09:00 and before I knew what was happening I was called up to report to 2ED [Embarkation Depot] at Bankstown where they were forming some of these Article 15 Squadrons.

Can you explain a little more about what article 15 was?

I've got it over there in the notes.

But if you could describe it in your own words?

It was a method by which Australian personnel

09:30 could find overseas service but still retaining our identity as Australian, and as I said the pay, the difference in the pay was made up by the Australian government.

And in the case of being transferred to the RAF they were being paid less than you were?

Oh yes, much less.

What was the wage comparison?

I've got no idea

10:00 what it would be now. Oh incidentally, there was a matter of promotion and this sort of thing which still hadn't been ironed out even after we got back

10:30 from Singapore.

The matter of promotion? Could you explain what happened there?

Well, the...this is sort of cutting in half way. The CO of our squadron was an RAF bloke, and he was one of these...he considered that every pilot

11:00 was a gentleman, and he didn't like the look of some of our sergeant pilots. So while our station commander, an Australian, J.P.J. McCauley, Crasher McCauley, was away, he apparently got permission from Far East headquarters to fly down to Canberra to have a word with the chief of air staff

11:30 to see if he could hand pick, mind you...he wanted to hand pick his pilots. The chief of air staff, a fellow by the name of Burnett who was also a RAF bloke told him that the trip down was ill conceived and that he wouldn't get anywhere, and he would have to accept the pilots as they were.

12:00 Some of them were too old for fighter pilots. This happened just before the war started and it took him 12 days to get back in which time these so called 'over the hill' pilots had been bearing the brunt of the Japanese Zeros.

At what location? In Malaya?

Yes, in Malaya and in Singapore as well.

So how long did it take to

12:30 **resolve that situation overall?**

What the pilots?

Yes, the promotion. You said a matter of...

While I was at the squadron and afterwards, it was never resolved. It was just one of those things that they hadn't thought out far enough.

13:00 **That sounds a very messy situation. Incredible. So it wasn't resolved before the end of the war?**

Not to my knowledge.

Would that have meant a promotion for you as well?

It could have been. I could have been.

What was your rank at this stage?

I was a corporal.

You were a corporal.

Yes.

13:30 **So...that just sounds incredibly complex, actually.**

It was just one of those small things, and it was just never considered that it would come up.

Now through this whole process had you made any mates among the people you were working with?

There was about four of us who used to knock around together. One was a boundary rider from Broken Hill,

14:00 a fellow by the name of Lane. There was another fellow, a fellow by the name of Bob Kitchen, he was a mechanic here in Sydney. The third fellow was...he was inclined to be...I think he was English by birth, but been out here for some time. He had owned a pearling lugger off Broome, or so he told us.

14:30 We used to knock around together.

Were they all armourers in the RAAF?

Yes, they were.

They were. So you obviously had something in common.

Yes. And when the war started of course things didn't look too brilliant, so I kept pretty close to Fowler because he was the one who owned the pearling lugger. I thought if we had a chance to get out, if we had to get out, he'd be the man to know.

15:00 **This is even after you joined up or is this while you were still with the militia?**

No, no. This was while we were in Malaya.

In Malaya, ok. So did he have the pearling lugger in Malaya, did he?

No, he had the pearling lugger in Broome.

So how could he possibly have helped you with the pearling lugger if it was back in Broome?

Well, we were all over there in Malaya and we thought we...well at one stage we were told we weren't going to be evacuated,

15:30 that we would have to defend the aerodrome. So with that in mind I thought well, if the worst comes to the worst and we left there, he would be the one to know, if he had experience with the pearling lugger we would be able to use his knowledge of sailing.

Oh I see, to commandeer or otherwise, a boat to get back to Australia?

Yes, I'm sorry I didn't make that clear.

It's ok. I was just trying to imagine the pearling lugger and how it was

16:00 **geographically located.**

I'm all over the place.

We'll stick to a tangent. Now tell me, how much were you hearing about the bigger events in the war at this stage? I mean, when you got to Archerfield, what sort of impact were things like Pearl Harbour having on you?

16:30 Well, with Pearl Harbour, we were already in Malaya.

Of course Malaya, that was December '41. Ok. What about events in Europe? I mean how abreast were you keeping with the events in Europe and the Middle East?

While we were in Malaya?

No, while you were still in Brisbane.

We used to get the

17:00 news out of the paper. That was about all. The Courier Mail and things like that. We knew things weren't going too well for the Brits. Especially after Dunkirk we had our rifles taken from us and they were all loaded up and sent over to Britain. We were more or less stark naked out here. We didn't have

a rifle between us.

You didn't have any armaments

17:30 **at all?**

No, no rifles. We had guns in the aircraft of course, but no hand guns.

That's extraordinary. Was that situation rectified later on and were you provided with...

By that time I had moved down to Bankstown for embarkation after joining the 453.

So

18:00 **when did you first hear that you'd be going abroad?**

Well, I applied roundabout March 1941, and I was down at Bankstown I'd say April, May. We just cooled our heels there while they were deciding just what sort of squadron

18:30 we would be. Originally we were going over to England, or that's what we thought, when we were issued with two uniforms, two blue uniforms which is the winter uniform. But then when they took that from us we thought, "It looks like we'll be going to Africa now."

19:00 But we were soon rudely awoken to the fact that, when we left Fremantle we were heading north and not north-west.

Had you wanted to go to England or the Middle East?

Oh yes, everybody wanted to go to England.

Why was that?

I suppose the mother land.

So at that time did you feel...?

We just wanted to get on our way and get into active service.

What notion did you have

19:30 **of the British Empire at that time? Did you feel you were a citizen of the British Empire?**

I felt that, even though I was a long way from England, I still had ties with Britain. But as far as serving King and country,

20:00 it wasn't that I suppose, it was just an idea of getting overseas and getting experience.

I've asked you about being a citizen of the British Empire, how much in comparison did you feel that you were a citizen of Australia?

Ever so much Australia. It gave us a lot of encouragement when we

20:30 were given the shoulder blazers to put on. You know, Australia...like they have these days, and we thought we were representing Australia here.

The shoulder blazers...can you describe what that was?

It was just little things...the word 'Australia', just on the shoulder.

Like tabs?

Yes, tabs.

At what point were you issued with those?

When we came back...after Malaya.

21:00 **That's interesting. It's interesting that you weren't issued with that kind of thing before you went away.**

It was just one of those things. I suppose they were still in the process of manufacturing them.

So to deal with your departure of Australia and what sort of farewell you might have had from memory and so forth. Could you talk about your farewell and departure from Australia?

When the time

21:30 came for our embarkation I had already been farewelled in Kempsey, and I thought "Well, if we're going to have a second embarkation leave, I can't really go back to Kempsey." So I had a married sister living in Hobart, and I thought well, here's an opportunity. I hadn't seen her since she was married, and I thought here's an opportunity of getting over to Tassie. So

22:00 we had a Tasmanian with us and I found out from him that he was arranging for his wife to come over from Tassie, and he was going down to Melbourne and they were going to have a few days in Melbourne together. I said to him, "Look, I've got a sister I haven't seen for a number of years in Hobart, what about we changed identities...yeah!"

22:30 That was a mortal sin...and he said, "Righto." And we arranged that I would go over on the old [SS] Taroona to Hobart and I was met there by her husband, only to find out that she was in the maternity ward in the hospital. And I thought well, a young bloke of 19, a maternity ward in a hospital was no place

23:00 to be seen. So I spent a couple of days in Hobart. I didn't even make an attempt to go up to the hospital, so I made a return trip back to Devonport, picked up the Taroona and went back to Melbourne and then on to Sydney.

So was she delivered of a baby or was she expecting?

She was in the process of delivering, and I wasn't going to be a party to all the screaming and moaning that was going to be going on.

23:30 **Did she ever discover that you didn't go to visit her?**

I think Sim her husband would have told her that I was there. We've never discussed it, so I've never discovered whether I was on the outer or not.

You never found out what her opinion was, if she did know?

Yes.

Can you explain more about the swapping of identities? You mentioned that quite quickly.

Well, we just....he got his pass and his name on it,

24:00 and I got mine, so we just sort of switched them over. There was nothing to it.

And it wasn't discovered and there were no consequences?

No, and I don't think they would have done anything anyway. He was just walking around Melbourne with my name and particulars, and I was having a dull run over to Hobart.

That's amazing.

It wasn't very long after that that I

24:30 left Sydney on the Katoomba to go round to Fremantle. But the difference in the seas was remarkable, because going over to Tassie and back again was just like sailing on a mill pond. But when we got into the Great Australian Bight, the huge seas started rolling in, and

25:00 the waves and the seas were so heavy that when you go down in a dip...I don't know the nautical term for it, we couldn't see over the top of the waves. We would come up and then the nose would dig into the water and then up she'd come. A couple of us, we even got up on the top deck and lay on our backs to watch the masts go like this.

25:30 Just to see who could stay the longest.

Did anyone get seasick?

Oh yes, quite a number.

What about yourself?

No. I always turned up for a meal, and it stayed down too.

You probably had a few spare meals to pick from as well.

Yes. We went over on the Katoomba, which at that time was still a boat, or a ship plying the coast.

26:00 We had stewards to wait on the tables. We had bunks. We arrived in Fremantle and we discovered we were going to be tossed off the Katoomba and trans-shipped onto the Sibajak, a Dutch ship. So we found out soon that instead of

26:30 having bunks we had the old navy ...

Do you mean a sling hammock?

Yes, a hammock. It was strange to see the blokes trying to get into the damn things.

How did you go?

I had a few spills until I realised that they had a couple of handrails above. What you do, you jerk yourself up and then swing over onto the hammock.

Did the rough seas continue after that?

27:00 From Fremantle no, it was just in the Bight. They had about three days of really rough weather.

I'm just trying to imagine people staying aboard in hammocks in rough seas.

Just between ourselves, you'd better put it off, one fellow always wanted to know how it would be to make passionate love in one of these things.

In a hammock?

In a hammock.

That would be very interesting to say the least. So

27:30 **conditions on board the Sibajak were a lot more basic, is what you're saying.**

Yes.

Can you describe that ship?

Well, I suppose it was 12,000 ton. It was crewed by Dutch and Indonesians. I've got some menus over there too, which might be useful.

28:00 We were in company with two other Dutch ships. If I may, I'll give you the names of them.

There's no need to get up for them, but we'll make a note of that for later. So you were in convoy with two other ships...

Yes, and we were escorted by the HMAS Hobart and we sailed north, north by

28:30 north-west until we got to the Sunda Straits. We passed through the Sunda Straits which later on became the site of the Battle of the Java Sea where the [HMAS] Perth and the [HMAS] Yarra were sunk. Sailing through when we did, we could see Krakatoa, the active volcano, was still belching smoke.

29:00 Now I don't know if you know the history of Krakatoa, but it had blown up in 1909, and the explosion was so great that it made a tidal wave of about 30 feet and swamped the neighbouring islands, and it was estimated that about 30,000 natives were drowned. The dust from the explosion circled the earth for about three years. So we got through there all right

29:30 and eventually landed in Singapore, with brass bands and the big shots were there with their brass on their caps.

So at what point did you ascertain that you weren't going to the Middle East, that in fact you were going to Singapore?

When we found that the 2/15th Field Regiment was on board and

30:00 they maintained that they were part of the 8th Division. When we arrived in Fremantle, the other two Dutch troop ships were there making up the balance of the 8th Division. So we thought, well this is where we're heading.

Now you've described the beginnings of your arrival in Singapore, what details spring to mind? What were your first impressions?

30:30 Of Singapore? We arrived at the docks and we could see all these fellows. All the big brass was there. We were taken off first because we were only a small contingent of about 35 or 40. We made our way down to where the trucks were waiting for us. We threw our kit bags in there and got in after them and

31:00 we were driven through the city and out into the country. I suppose Singapore would only be about 12 miles long and 16 miles wide. We didn't see a great deal of the city

31:30 on the way out but when we arrived at the air force station, it was a huge complex, and we found we were going to be housed in a three story building with showers and a repository for our kit bags and excess clothing. We had a native boy to make our beds and polish our boots. We had French windows, or French doors leading out

32:00 on to balconies on both sides. We found that the station had its own swimming pool, its own theatre, its own chapel. The mess was served cafeteria style

32:30 but if we weren't satisfied with the meal we could always go up to the NAAFI which was the [Navy], Army and Air Force Institute, which was equivalent to our canteen.

That was run by the British, wasn't it?

Yes. We would order something that was more to our taste. It was also somewhere where we could relax apart from our

33:00 dormitory building.

Now you mentioned driving out of Singapore and going to this base. Where was it?

It's right behind the naval base, up near the causeway on Singapore. It's more or less in the middle of the northern most part of the island. We had an air force station called Seletar on the eastern side, and we had Tengah on the western side.

33:30 The civil airport was down at the bottom of the island near the city itself.

Did they all have their own airfields?

Yes. You would hardly think that an island that small would house four airfields.

I thought you were going to say that at least one or two of them would share the same airfield. Was this the main air base for the

34:00 **RAAF and the RAF?**

For the RAAF, yes. Originally it was an RAF station but with the influx of the RAAF it was renamed the RAAF Sembawang base.

So how long had it been an RAAF base?

I think from the early '30s, because it was well and truly completed by the time we got

34:30 there....

35:00 **When was it that you actually arrived in Singapore?**

On the 15th August 1941.

And once you arrived there what were your main duties there?

We had to wait until the rest of the squadron turned up because they were coming through on the Manoora. As I say they took the tourist trip up and they were having time off in

35:30 Brisbane, Townsville, Darwin and Surabaya. They arrived about 15 days later than we did. While we were waiting for them we just had the run of the place and had a good look at Singapore and what it offered. When we came back...when the other crowd turned up, we were settling down then to real

36:00 activities.

So just before we get onto those activities, during the time that you explored Singapore can you give us some idea of your visual impression of the place?

Well, it was smelly. They had a creek running through the centre of it and you'd find there were kiddies swimming in one end and women

36:30 washing in the canal and you had water buffaloes wallowing around, so you can imagine the stench coming off it. And, of course, we had Orchard Road and Change Alley was another favourite spot for us. We'd go along and start bartering with the Chinese

37:00 or whoever was there.

What sort of things were you bartering for?

We'd get these silk dressing gowns and sandals and this sort of thing. We would do it just out of sheer, well...just trying to...we were doing it more or less to have a bit of fun. The idea was to barter with them.

37:30 You'd ask them their price then we'd cut it in half, then he'd come down and we'd go up. Then we'd walk off after spending about ten minutes bartering with him, we ended up not taking away anything at all. Things like furniture and that sort of thing. Walking sticks you could get.

Were you buying these things to keep them with you?

38:00 **Were you buying the things like the silk dressing gowns, the sandals, the walking sticks to have as keep sakes or to send back to Australia?**

Oh, to send back to Australia.

And you duly did send them back to Australia, did you?

Yes. And of course they had their open air restaurants or eating places. You would walk around and you'd see shark fins hanging above. They would be black and covered in flies.

38:30 We'd see the ducks, the way they hung them up by their necks covered in flies. I swore then that I'd

never eat Chinese food. Fortunately in the last year or two I've changed my mind.

You don't think it's too bad now?

Well, you don't see the flies on the shark fins or the ducks.

At that time, despite your being put off by it, did you eat any Chinese

39:00 **food?**

No. Always went for the steak.

And the steak was available in the shops in Singapore?

Oh yes.

Was it...I mean Singapore at that time, correct me if I'm wrong seems to have been a mixture of the Asiatic and the British Raj, did you get that impression?

Yes.

How strong was the British presence there?

Very strong. When the war started the wives of the planters

39:30 opened up what they called the Anzac Club for the servicemen. They were very strong.

Tape 4

00:36 **We were starting at the end of the last tape to talk about the Anzac Club. Can you tell us that story again?**

Well, after the war started in Malaya, the planters' wives from that country decided they'd have a

01:00 club for the relaxation of the troops when they were on leave or just had a few days to spare. They used to supply a certain amount of entertainment such as newspapers, books. We were able to have a meal. They used to provide the meals for us;

01:30 the usual glass or two of beer, and that sort of thing. It was a central point for the Australian servicemen, irrespective of what branch of the service they belonged to. They would all congregate there and it was possible to meet up with some friends from your own home town and that sort of thing.

02:00 I visited it on several occasions. I remember on one occasion a group of us were in town, in the city and we decided we would go to the Anzac Club for a bit of a rest, and lo and behold the sirens sounded, and we

02:30 made our way, quickened our step to get to the Anzac Club, so we could at least have a beer while we were waiting for the Japanese to come over. I remember on one occasion we got our beer and went out to the trenches, got into the trenches and waited for the Japanese to bomb buggery out of the city. Then later on of course, after the raid,

03:00 we could see the fires burning and corpses on the road and this sort of thing. The natives over there we found were not instructed to take cover. They thought that if the Japanese couldn't see them they'd be all right. And I remember on the first raid we had on our aerodrome, there were hundreds...I beg your pardon, there were quite a number of

03:30 natives that were just mown down by shrapnel. They used to hide behind the rubber trees so that the blast...they weren't aware of the bomb blast that could knock them about, and the shrapnel. That's getting away from the Anzac Club of course.

It's all

04:00 **related and we don't mind the process of association leading to other stories. That's perfectly all right. I love the touch of the beer into the trenches. I bet not a drop was spilt. So how were relations between the squadron and the Singapore locals?**

We got on very well. Of course, we had the high class planters' wives, but they used

04:30 to look after us quite well. The difference between the planters and the troops disappeared when the war started because they just seemed to understand that we were thousands of miles away from home,

05:00 and we wanted to do our best for the people who were living in Malaya.

So prior to the Japanese entering the war, there had been a bit of a class distinction?

I didn't notice any then.

But you said that relations actually improved. So what were they like beforehand?

Well, it seemed to me that the...

05:30 It's a bit difficult to...

Was it a case of mixing more freely?

I think the planters and their wives were a little group on their own and then they realised that all these troops were there and they would have to

06:00 look after them in some way.

And that became especially noticeable after the Japanese entered the war?

Yes, before the war started there was nothing in the way of clubs for the troops. Of course they had the Raffles Hotel but that was out of bounds to the ORs [Other Ranks].

So when you say before the war started, you mean before the Japanese entered the war?

Yes, I beg your pardon, yes.

So we're only talking about a few months then before the Japanese entered the war and the

06:30 **actual event of capitulation or surrender. So places like the Anzac Club had only been in existence for a few months?**

Yes, that's right.

And what about relations between members of the squadron and the local women, such as the Eurasian and the Chinese women?

Well, the first thing that we were warned was that we were to keep away from them because of the infectious diseases that they carried, but

07:00 unfortunately some of the fellows didn't heed the warning and they finished up in hospital. I understand that their pay was stopped while they were under medical attention.

Were these conditions described or regarded as self inflicted injuries?

Yes, that's right,

07:30 because after all, they were warned.

Were you aware that there were local brothels that the men could avail themselves of?

Oh yes. It was well known that there was a certain street in Singapore where you could go down there for relaxation. But I hasten to add that I kept well away from them.

What was the name of that street?

Lavender Street.

Lavender Street!

08:00 **So the men were told to keep away from the Chinese and Eurasian women, but men being men... Were there brothels where they could legitimately and safely go to?**

I wouldn't know. I just kept well away myself. And as I say, there were fellows who found brothels in

08:30 Lavender Street that they utilised.

Now, were there members of the US Air Force there at the time?

No.

Not at all?

No, we later came across them in Java when they had got out of the Philippines.

Now were you, at this time in Singapore, under RAF or RAAF command?

We were totally under

09:00 RAF, that is the Australian squadrons. We didn't operate independently.

And that was from the moment you arrived? You were under Royal Air Force command?

That's right. And being what they called the Article 15 Squadrons, we were totally under their commander, from the time we left Australia.

Now how were relations

09:30 between the Australians and the RAF personnel?

Not too brilliant. The main thing was their working hours were from half past seven am to twelve o'clock, whereas our squadrons were from half past seven to four o'clock. If we wanted any equipment from their

10:00 main store area, if we went over there a minute past twelve o'clock we were told to come back the next day. They just wouldn't...

What was their reason?

Well, they thought that working such long hours in the tropics was detrimental to their health.

10:30 It was one of those things, they'd go back and have their siestas, and our pilots being the way they were, they'd buzz their sleeping quarters and that caused a bit of concern amongst the higher ups, and they were told that if they continued to do it

11:00 they'd be on charges. But they still did it from time to time. We had the Red Caps, the military police, and they seemed to take delight in picking on groups of Australians that were playing up a bit.

This was playing up on the base?

11:30 No, no, in town after a few beers at the Anzac Club.

So the Red Caps were the British military police, were they?

Yes.

Was it a case of them lurking and waiting for the first minor infringement?

No, no. They'd ...

12:00 How will I go about this? They wouldn't just pick on individuals. They'd wait until there were a number of them, and if things got out of hand then they'd come in and put them in the paddy wagons.

And were the men arrested put on any kind of

12:30 charge?

I would imagine so. Who would hear the charges, I just can't recall. I imagine it would have been the station commander or where they belonged.

There was a certain British squadron leader wasn't there, who didn't like Australians?

13:00 That was our commanding officer. A fellow by the name of Harper, who was supposed to have had a pretty good reputation as a fighter pilot.

13:30 Well this bloke was supposed to have been a top notch fighter pilot. He came to us with this reputation, notwithstanding the fact that we had RAAF officers of equal calibre...a fellow by the name of Les Jackson and a second by the name of Peter Wright.

14:00 Unfortunately, the RAF insisted that they appoint an RAF officer, but they did allow us to have two flight commanders, Australians, who did fly and did see service in Britain, prior to and during the Battle of Britain. Their names were Doug Vanderfield and Mick Grace. Now Mick Grace

14:30 of course, belonged to the Grace Brothers company. They arrived as pilot officers. They got their... what's the...I've got a bit of a blank here...

Ok, suffice to say they arrived.

15:00 Ok, so they arrived and they were soon commissioned to flying officer rank. The new squadron commander arrived in October and he spent about a week in hospital. He had some sort of nervous complaint

15:30 and when he was discharged from the hospital he decided he didn't like the look of some of the Australian pilots. They were too old for fighter pilots and he decided he must do something about getting them replaced. So he got...

16:00 I'm just trying to think...he got permission from the Far East Command to come down to Australia and have a word with the chief of air staff who told him quite bluntly that his trip down was not required. That he wouldn't be able to select

16:30 the pilots himself. He thought that some of them were too old, and he went back empty handed, and arrived back in Singapore on 12th December and these pilots that he had tried to brand as no good,

17:00 they were carrying the war to the Japanese in aircraft which were unsuitable anyway. They had been declared near obsolete when we got them, and they were being matched against the Zeros. That was a difference of 100 miles an hour between their times.

So they were holding their own against the Zeros?

Yes.

17:30 **So obviously at that point the squadron leader did not try and replace them?**

No, he was told to get back to his squadron by the chief of air staff in Canberra.

Was this the same man who had some swastikas on the side of his plane?

Yes, he came with this reputation of being a top notch fighter pilot, and he no sooner arrived when he requested

18:00 six swastikas to be painted on the side of his aircraft. He told anyone who wanted to listen that he was, "expecting a decoration in the mail." But as time wore on and later on after the war, when Malaya was over it was found it was a figment of his imagination. And it was reported also that,

18:30 during the court of inquiry that was held into our squadron's behaviour that ...lost my train of thought here...

Can you tell us about the court of inquiry? I haven't heard about this before.

I've got a stack of stuff about this high with the

19:00 full and complete transcript given and it was found...and it was stated by some of the pilots that they, "can only recall having seen him fly twice only in the whole of the campaign." He was taking over the duties of what the squadron adjutant would do. Anything at all to keep him occupied on the

19:30 ground rather than have to go up in the air.

We're talking about the squadron leader? What was the purpose of the court of inquiry?

Well, he made a complaint that ...do you mind if I...?

Let's look at it later and we can come back to it later if you need further details.

Well, the purpose of it was he had made a complaint to Air Vice Marshal Maltby that, "The Australians didn't have the

20:00 guts to fight, and they were always complaining about the inadequacy of the aircraft they were flying." Notwithstanding the fact that he wouldn't fly himself. Another thing was, he seemed to consider that the officers and the sergeant pilots

20:30 were on speaking terms...first name terms, which was something he couldn't stand. After all, they joined up about the same time, they did their course together, and of course they were only trainees, and of course they were all Toms, Dicks and Harry's sort of thing. Because some of them got a promotion to pilot officer

21:00 but the majority of the them were sergeant pilots, he seemed to think that the officers should be treated by the sergeant pilots as ...

With due respect?

That's right, yes. So this court of inquiry was held in Melbourne after our return, and to cap it all off,

21:30 it was found that the Squadron Commander, Squadron Leader Harper, was unfit to command an EATS - that's Empire [Air] Training Scheme squadron. And the court also found that the squadron itself was quite blameless

22:00 in the accusations that he brought.

So it was while you were there you were still an EATS squadron? You were still training at that time?

Well, right up to the war they were still doing bombing and gunnery exercises sort of thing.

You've mentioned the name Maltby, what was his attitude to the Australians?

Well, he sided with Harper in this respect that...

22:30 On one occasion a couple of our fellows decided that...this was getting towards the end of the war, they decided they would go into Singapore for a reasonably good meal. They had walked in and they had their tin hats of course, and they were spotted by a provo [Provosts - Military Police] marshal of the RAF, and he asked them for their leave passes.

- 23:00 Of course they couldn't supply anything because it was just open slather. If we were off duty and we wanted to go into town we'd just let someone know where they could be found. And because they couldn't supply any leave passes to this provo marshal, they were deemed to have been...
- 23:30 **Absent without leave?**
- Oh, worse than that.
- Dereliction of duty?**
- Not so much that...oh it's all in there.
- I'm sure. Are we talking about the fact that these blokes were put on a charge?**
- Yes. Well they were told to get back to their unit, and
- 24:00 I don't know if there were any charges because things happened so rapidly then. I think it was just pushed under the mat.
- You said this was towards the end of the war, do you mean towards the end of the Japanese onslaught?**
- Yes, before they invaded the island itself from Johor.
- Now, what was Maltby's attitude to the Australians?**
- Much the same as
- 24:30 Harper's. He came out and gave us a good talking...
- Harper had complained to Maltby hadn't he, about the Australians' attitude? So what happened as a result of that complaint?**
- Well, Maltby came out to the camp and gave us a dressing down and told us to, "Forget any ideas of being evacuated,
- 25:00 because we were the only squadron left on the island that was still on service." He told us that we were to take the guns out of the crashed aircraft, those which couldn't be repaired, and set them up, so we would become part of an aerodrome defence squadron.
- 25:30 Before ...some of the guns were taken out and prepared in this manner, but then Brigadier Taylor I'm pretty sure it was, came out to inspect...because it came under his jurisdiction that area....it came under his jurisdiction. So when he was told we were there as an aerodrome
- 26:00 defence squadron rather than a fighter squadron, he said we would be more of a hindrance than a help. So that was about the 5th February. On the 6th February our adjutant came back from visiting headquarters and he was told
- 26:30 that preparations were to be made for our evacuation over to Java. So we were told to pack what we could just in our kit bags, take what tools we could lay our hands on, because we were going to be evacuated to Java where they expected more aircraft to be made available.
- Didn't Maltby use the words "moral fibre"? Could you comment about that?**
- 27:00 Yes, in his speech to us on the aerodrome he castrated us and told us that we were "lacking in moral fibre...that we had a yellow streak," and you name it, he laid it on the line to us.
- Why did he accuse the Australians of this?**
- Because he was being given this information by Harper.
- What was Harper's reason for claiming this**
- 27:30 **of the Australians? What was the issue? Had the Australians been asked to do something?**
- No, not as far as I recall. In fact Group Captain McCauley, the RAAF station commander at Sembawang, on one occasion went
- 28:00 out, as a flight of our boys was taking off on some...sounded like a suicide mission, and he stopped the operation going ahead and explained to Far Eastern Command that "the 453 pilots were on the verge of exhaustion and that in his opinion
- 28:30 the flight was just a suicidal command." So he took it upon himself to cancel it.
- So that was linked to Maltby's claim of lack of moral fibre?**
- It could have been. Yes.
- Was the squadron at this time...since they were the last squadron on the island, were they**

pressing to be evacuated?

Well, we thought that if the other squadrons were evacuated

29:00 over to Sumatra, Palembang, that we were serving no useful purpose there towards the end, because what aircraft were still flyable, they were not combat aircraft. They were only good for a quick army cooperation flight.

Could the lack of moral fibre accusation be linked

29:30 **to any pressure that the RAAF was trying to exert for evacuation?**

No, I couldn't say.

Just to back track a bit. Can we go back to even prior to the Japanese invasion, can we go back to even prior to Japan even entering the war and look at the routine of your life and work in Singapore? Between your arrival and

30:00 **Japan entering the war, what was your routine?**

Well, we'd start work at say half past seven and the pilots were still training, getting their hours up in the air, getting the feel of their aircraft. We'd knock off for lunch. Then we'd go back and work from one o'clock to four o'clock in the afternoon.

30:30 We had a few accidents. The pilots were still unaccustomed, to some extent, with the aircraft.

What aircraft were these?

These were the Brewster Buffaloes. They were relegated as near obsolete by the American navy for which purpose these were built, for carrier planes...carrier aircraft.

31:00 Then when they found that they were too bulky...they could only fly to about 17,500 feet and if they wanted to get any higher they had to hand pump the petrol. So you can imagine being in a dogfight flying one hand with your other hand on the petrol pump, it wasn't a good

31:30 feeling for our boys.

So were there a series of crashes involving the Brewster Buffaloes?

Yes, because they were built for the navy, some of the earlier models had the hook arrangement for landing on aircraft carriers. So that the break system was pretty frail

32:00 and they used to wear out pretty quickly. As a result they would tip on their nose and all this sort of thing.

This was obviously on landing.

Yes, this was on landing.

Were there fatalities as a result?

Not from landing but we did have one fellow

32:30 who was doing something with his compass, and for some unknown reason they lost contact with him and his aircraft crashed on one of the islands south of Singapore. His name was Brown.

33:00 They would take the aircraft out and they'd do formation flying and this type of thing. Then they'd come back and we'd have to...you see, they were training on these aircraft which were going to be used later as front line fighters. So they were worn out and we found out

33:30 subsequently, that the engines in these planes were reconditioned engines from commercial aircraft. They ranged...they were supposed to be about 1250 horse power but they were only 930. And yet these boys were supposed...were expected to fly in aircraft which

34:00 were really for training.

So what was the impact of this kind of superannuated equipment and the fairly corrosive relations with the RAF? What was the impact of that in terms of the RAAF's morale?

It was good as I recall. We used to keep an eye out for the Red Caps, as they were referred to,

34:30 but morale was quite good.

Why do you think that despite all these fairly adverse situation, why did morale remain good?

Well, we were Australians and we didn't give much care to how the RAF fellows thought of us.

So there was obviously a good camaraderie amongst the Australians?

- 35:00 Oh yes, yes, no matter what squadrons were there on Sembawang. Towards the end of November the squadrons were allocated certain aerodromes which they were to operate on, and as a result we didn't see...453 didn't see a great deal
- 35:30 of the other squadrons because they were up country. 1 Squadron was at Kota Bharu, 8 Squadron was at Kuantan, and 21 Squadron was at Sungai Petani. Apart from an occasional Hudson coming down for an engine refit or something like that, we had Sembawang to ourselves.
- 36:00 **Nevertheless, this sense of difference between the Australians and the Brits continued?**
- Oh yes.
- What about among ordinary ranks? I mean you've talked about the problems with the squadron leader and the air commodore, but what about between the ordinary ranks of the RAF and RAAF?**
- The RAF couldn't get over the fact that the ordinary ranks, even if he was say a flight sergeant
- 36:30 and a corporal...they'd still call each other by their first name. I mean it didn't mean a thing.
- So even the British ordinary ranks couldn't get over this?**
- No.
- Was there much mixing on a social basis between the Australians and the Brits?**
- Not as I remember.
- So there was this sense of division and distinction right the way through?**
- 37:00 Yes.
- Now I was asking you before about routine, your own day to day routine between July 1941 to March 1942. You were describing the hours you worked and you spoke about the activities of the base generally, but what were the day to day activities of an armourer?**
- As an armourer I would have to inspect the guns, clean them and have them ready at all times. I would make sure the ammunition was in
- 37:30 good supply for the guns. This is part and parcel of the day to day operations.
- That was a fairly constant thing for you to...**
- Oh yes.
- And how many aircraft were you looking after on this basis?**
- Well, each armourer had one aircraft for himself to look after. There was 16 and sometimes 18 aircraft depending on the availability.
- 38:00 **You make it sound quite quick and easy. Can you be a bit more specific about your routine? I mean if you're working a seven hour day...you use those words to make it sound like a 10 minute job but it clearly wasn't.**
- Well, we'd also have the daily inspections that went with the aircraft.
- 38:30 No, we weren't over worked and being in the tropics we just had to make sure we weren't over taxed in any way.
- So what was your role in preparing for and being present at the time of an inspection?**
- 39:00 Well, as I was saying earlier, we were just...see we're going back 60 odd years here. Can we pass that one up?

Tape 5

- 00:32 **Jim, the document you've got in front of you from the inquiry report, and there's two quite crucial paragraphs which relate to the morale of the RAAF men, and the causes for that drop in morale. Would you like to read those two paragraphs?**
- "The commanding officer's lack of understanding of his squadron which was accentuated by the fact that he did not fly with them in action except on two occasions,
- 01:00 and also he stated the opinion that he did not have much time for his unit or for Australians in general. Ineffective command exercised by Group Captain Winstondale while commanding officer of the station,

evidence shows that this officer was most eccentric and allowed discipline to slacken. The accusation made by him against the members of the squadron

01:30 that they were yellow was without foundation and totally undeserved. The court further finds that Squadron Leader Harper was temperamentally unsuited and insufficiently experienced to command an EATS squadron and that his lack of understanding and qualities of leadership were definite features in the lack of morale in the squadron."

Well thanks for that.

02:00 **Now a couple of pages earlier in the report refers to the drop in morale of the RAAF once they moved to Kuala Lumpur. Could you talk about why their morale had dropped?**

The squadron's pilots, this is the first really

02:30 big action that they were involved in and they soon found that the Brewster Buffalo was no match at all for the Zero fighter. In fact the Zero fighter could run rings around them and they had an estimated 100 mile

03:00 an hour leverage over the Brewster Buffalo. I think it's because of the fact that although they estimated that they had shot down twelve aircraft during the battle, that they believed they could have done better had they

03:30 had better aircraft to fly.

So that had an impact on the morale of the men?

Well yes, we were outclassed in the air and it looked as if we had to stay with the Buffalo for the entire duration of the war with Japan.

We were talking at the end of the last roll about inspections.

04:00 **Who was actually involved in doing the inspections on the aircraft on a daily basis?**

Each of the crew...we had fitter engineers. We had airframe engineers. We had electricians, armourers. We all had our own little duty to perform. Life wasn't push, push, push all the time.

04:30 There was time for relaxation between the flights going off and their return.

So the inspections were on each aircraft before and after they came back?

Yes, each time and they would have to be refuelled of course when they came back.

So the inspections were by the members of the personnel that you've just listed?

Yes.

05:00 And then on top of them again were the flight sergeants who had the responsibility of checking with the maintenance people.

Checking that all the procedures had been done?

Yes.

Now in terms of how various armaments were cleaned, could you talk us through a process of how the

05:30 **cleaning was done?**

The armaments were removed from the aircraft. Usually in the Buffalo they were removed from under the wing. As I've mentioned, the Buffalo carried six...four guns, two were firing between the propeller blades and two in the wing. The two wing guns of course were removed from under the wing.

06:00 And the two which were mounted on top of the engine were removed straight from their position. We'd pull the guns to pieces and clean them in a cleaning fluid, put them together again and reinstall them back into the aircraft. One of these guns,

06:30 I couldn't say with accuracy the weight of the guns, but usually it took two men to remove them from the aircraft.

Were the guns cleaned after every mission?

No, only if they had been fired.

So it would be up to whoever was on board the aircraft to report that that gun had been fired?

Yes.

Was it your personal responsibility to clean the gun?

Oh yes.

07:00 **That was part of the armourer's duties?**

Yes.

Now were you surprised about war with Japan breaking out?

Not really, because we had been warned early in the piece that the talks between the United States and Japan had been going on for quite some considerable time. It had actually broken down in October 1941.

07:30 We started to have air raid precaution drills. I'm just trying to think....

I'll just put in another question here. Was there an air of tension

08:00 **or was there any sense of on edge expectancy? In other words, what was the mood like?**

We went on our normal duties and it was always in the back of our mind, wondering when the ball was going to drop. About this time

08:30 it was decided that they would bring in an emergency second class warning type of thing, and that prevailed until...and the Lockheed Hudsons were ordered to extend their reconnaissance especially in the Gulf of Siam. This continued on through November, when about the middle of November

09:00 it was reported that unidentified reconnaissance planes were flying over Northern Malaya and Siam. It was then that we thought that "things don't look too brilliant now." So when No. 1 Squadron, flying out of Kota Bharu, discovered a convoy

09:30 of unidentified ships which we later found to be Japanese, the first class emergency was proclaimed right through Malaya and we just stood by and waited to see what was going to happen. Naturally the reporting of

10:00 the convoy was notified to headquarters in the Far East, and they in turn no doubt advised Washington and White Hall. It came back, "That under no circumstances were they to intercept." Now the theory is that Churchill was trying to get Roosevelt to come in on the side of Britain

10:30 but if it was found that we fired the first shot, it wouldn't go down too well with the American public. So we had to wait, or headquarters had to wait until we were able to see what the Japanese were up to. There was a move, and they thought the convoy might have been heading for Siam,

11:00 because at that time there was an agreement whereby if Siam was threatened, they would bring in Operation Matador. It so happened that Matador was cancelled the day the Japanese invaded Kota Bharu. So they lost the advantage of

11:30 having a toehold in Siam.

Now the convoy that you're describing was headed for Kota Bharu, was it?

Yes, later it was made known that it was one of the two convoys which was heading for Kota Bharu.

You've used the two terms, first class emergency and second class emergency, can you define what those two terms meant?

12:00 Well the second degree emergency was "be prepared" type of thing...that something was looming. The first degree was it was on for young and old.

Which it certainly turned out to be.

Yes.

Now, what was the first that you heard that Japan

12:30 **had entered the war?**

We were woken about three o'clock in the morning. We had a PA [Public Address] system right through our dormitories. I was woken by the crackling noise that came from the amplifiers, along with the rest of the fellows. We were told to get down to the hangars immediately.

13:00 That this was no drill. So not knowing just how urgent it was, some of the fellows went out and started having a shower. We made our way down to the hangars and overhead we could hear the hum of aircraft and we thought the Poms were putting on a full dress rehearsal.

13:30 Then the search lights opened up and then the guns started. They were hopelessly out of reach. We went down to the hangars, and by this time the acting commanding officer, a fellow by the name of Vigers, an RAF fellow, and our two wing commanders,

14:00 Doug Vanderfield and Mick Grace, were there warming the aircraft up, and waiting for instructions. They thought we would be...or they would be told to take off and intercept. But nothing came through and they made a request that they take off and they were told "No,

14:30 if they took off they would be put on a charge." So we all had to wait and watch these Japanese aircraft fly over head. We heard the whistle of bombs coming down and not knowing of course what this was all about, until one old fellow from the '14-'18 war who was with us, said, "Hit the deck, they're bombs." Of course the Japanese were after the Prince of Wales and

15:00 the Repulse that had only come in to the naval base a day or two earlier. So the first indication we had was the search lights, the guns opening up, the gunners overhead and that happened at three o'clock in the morning.

Why were the RAAF aircraft not allowed to take off?

15:30 Don't know. Don't know.

Because at that time, by that time, Japan was definitely at war.

Yes, I don't know whether it was because the power to be knew at that time that the Buffalos could never have reached the heights of the bombers and by that time of course the bombers were well out of range from the fighters.

16:00 **At one point the squadron was told to hold the aerodrome, at what point was that?**

It was towards the end before we were evacuated.

I see. Can you take us through the main points? Can you take us through the milestones if you like and what happened in a sequence of events between the first raid and your evacuation? I know you spoke about it yesterday but a few more details would be good?

16:30 Well, the first thing that comes to mind is we were still on Sembawang, being the squadron allocated for the defence of Singapore. The first date that comes to mind is the 10th December when the squadron was

17:00 advised to stand to, pilots were told, "To get in the aircraft and start the motors." It was found out later that the Prince of Wales and the Repulse were being attacked by Japanese torpedo planes, and 453 squadron may be required to go to Kuantan,

17:30 which was the nearest base where the Prince of Wales and the Repulse were stationed...and be prepared to take part in the...to see what they could do to

18:00 attack the torpedo planes. Eventually the word came through around about midday, to take off, but before they got there of course they had both sunk. They were both in the process of sinking.

So in other words it was known in advance that the Japanese torpedo planes were on route to the Prince of Wales and the other vessel and there was a delay which basically cost those two ships.

18:30 **Once again, did you ever hear reasons for that delay?**

No, they just couldn't make up their minds. See the Buffalo didn't have any auxiliary tanks, so they had a limited range. If they were told to go off, they would only have sufficient petrol to get to Kuantan and perhaps get

19:00 involved in an air battle, but they wouldn't...depending on how long that would last, they wouldn't have enough petrol to fly direct back to Sembawang. It would have been a case of holding the aircraft, preserving the aircraft. Another thing was, Admiral Phillips was warned not to expect any air cover,

19:30 but he went ahead and did what he did, but found he was a long way from home.

Admiral Philips was on which ship?

He was on the Prince of Wales, I think.

Now this was the 10th of December, what was the next important date as far as you were concerned?

Well on the 16th of December...on the first day of

20:00 hostilities, 21 Squadron was stationed at Sungai Petani and squadron commander of 21 Squadron approached the station commander who was an RAF person and asked permission to...prior to the Japanese coming in, asked the

20:30 station commander for permission to move the aircraft to areas away from the drome, because they were lined up wing tip to wing tip. This was refused by the station commander,

21:00 so the squadron leader then had no option but to obey the order. And of course, the Japanese came over

on the 8th December, dropped a few bombs and practically decimated the 21 Squadron. I think they finished up that day with about four serviceable aircraft. They were all damaged and burnt.

That's extraordinary. No wonder there were morale problems. So that's the 8th and 10th of December?

21:30 Yes.

What was the next milestone?

That was about the 10th, no the 12th when a flight of our aircraft, that was about nine aircraft, were sent to relieve 21 Squadron at Sungai Petani, who by that time had decided to withdraw from Sungai Petani down to Ipoh, and then from Ipoh back to

22:00 Butterworth, because of the Japanese advance. So our fellows were there then until about the middle of December when we were ordered up to Kuala Lumpur. That was the ...our aircraft at Butterworth were being maintained by the

22:30 personnel of 21 Squadron. 21 Squadron was then going to be returned to Singapore for re-equipment and our pilots were then ordered over to Kuala Lumpur, and we the maintenance people were sent from Singapore by train up to Kuala Lumpur. Now the air force at that time

23:00 was looked upon as garrison forces. We had no individual cooks. We had no individual medical services. We had no vehicles. So when we got to Kuala Lumpur we had to go out and commandeer vehicles which we found suitable for the operation at this little place called Sungai Besi.

23:30 It wasn't an air force drome. It was just a flying club, so we just had a very short runway. So there we were, we were at Kuala Lumpur and endeavouring to get our supply of motor vehicles suitable for the job. We were...

24:00 We were accommodated in homes of the wealthy Chinese who had decided to get going. They just left their premises, so we occupied them for a period of time until 22nd of December when a big air raid came about.

24:30 **The big air raid being on...**

Kuala Lumpur.

On Kuala Lumpur? Right. And you were there. Were they raiding the city or the airfield?

Well they were endeavouring to get to the airfield. That was the purpose of the Japanese, to blow the airfields out.

So this was at Sungai Besi which is...where in relation to Kuala Lumpur. Was it part of the city or...

Just on the outskirts, like...how would I put it? Like Camden is to

25:00 Sydney.

So you were at Sungai Besi on the 22nd of December when the Japanese raided. What are your memories of that raid?

Well, we had a grandstand view of the whole thing. We were so close and we could see the vapour trails quite easily. We couldn't hear the gun fire but we could see the aerobatics that the planes were adopting. Occasionally, we'd see a plane turn on its

25:30 back and one of our fellows would parachute out. In fact the pilot I was attending, he was shot down. The Japanese bullets hit his petrol tank and he burst into flames. He rolled his plane on its back and got out.

26:00 You could see the Japanese coming down and firing at the parachute. They would endeavour to get to the pilot. And when he landed he counted 29 bullet holes. But he was severely burnt and we never saw him after that. He was taken to hospital and he was so severely burnt that they just kept him there.

What was the name of that pilot?

George Scrimiger. He's still alive. He went right through the

26:30 war. He finished up on Spitfires up in Labuan.

How long had you been attending him as a pilot?

Right from the time he got his aircraft allocated to him.

In Singapore?

In Singapore, yes.

Did you know him well?

Oh yes, I knew him quite well. It was always George and Jim.

Could you describe him as a person?

He was a very quiet spoken fellow.

27:00 I suppose that's about the sum total. He was very approachable. He finished up a flight lieutenant too, from a sergeant pilot. So he did pretty well.

So what impact on you did seeing your pilot being shot have?

27:30 It put sort of an empty feeling in my stomach because I thought, "Did the guns work? Would I be held responsible for his parachuting out?" That's the feeling I had. I was wondering...I saw his parachute and I thought, "Have they really shot him

28:00 while he was coming down?"

It must have been fairly upsetting?

It was. And it turned out afterwards...he was taken to a military hospital and his burns were bandaged, but things were happening so fast that we were evacuated

28:30 then from Sungai Besi, because they knew we were operating there, and ...

I'll just stick with George for a moment, did you see him after he had parachuted in?

No.

Did you visit him in hospital?

No, we weren't aware where he was.

You were saying you were concerned you would be held responsible. I mean, was there any way of checking what had happened, or did he give an account of

29:00 **what had happened?**

Not to my knowledge. The intelligence officer would probably have spoken to him after he was well enough to talk about it.

But you said you were quite concerned about the guns and so forth. Was your mind set to rest later that everything had functioned as it should?

Yes, yes. I just felt...at the time, "Am I responsible for his death?"

29:30 **Well even the fact that he had been injured, were you concerned about what might have gone wrong that might have been your responsibility?**

I was.

What was it that reassured you that everything was ok?

With others being shot down too, I thought well they've been outnumbered. I think there was

30:00 advice that they were outnumbered seven to one. They just didn't have a chance.

So was it at this point that the tide turned in the morale of the RAAF squadron?

Yes, this was the time when we thought we were well and truly beaten. We were flying obsolete or near obsolete aircraft and we didn't stand a chance.

So from Sungai Besi what happened?

30:30 We were once again evacuated from Sungai Besi by train back to Singapore, and by this time the Dutch had two squadrons of aircraft on the drome itself. But they were sent back to the Indies because they didn't have any night flying experience and

31:00 the drome was just one big mass of aircraft. So we were relieved in a certain manner that they were gone because it would lessen the possibility of further raids on Sembawang.

So when you got to Singapore, to Sembawang, were there new kinds of aircraft there or were you stuck with the same?

We were stuck there with the Brewster Buffalos.

31:30 **Brewster Buffalos. There were no other aircraft being brought in?**

No. So we all operated...the four squadrons were all operating on Sembawang for I suppose a period of

about a fortnight when the Lockheed Hudsons were withdrawn to Palembang in Sumatra because they were still operating successfully. They amalgamated the two squadrons on one occasion because

32:00 of the losses. And they were operating from Palembang. They would fly into Sembawang in the afternoon. They'd refuel and the Buffalos then would be readied up during the night as well and the Buffalos would then act as an escort for the Lockheed Hudsons to fly further

32:30 north for bombing exercises.

Now you mentioned that the Empire Air Training Scheme activities went on until Japan entered the war. In terms of how the squadron then went into action, how did that then influence your day to day activities?

Well the EATS, that was mostly out here in Australia, it was the Empire Air Training Scheme teaching

33:00 the air crews the rudiments of flying and bombing, gunnery and that sort of thing. It was an EATS Squadron...

It was an EATS squadron that was based in Palembang and Singapore....

It was just the term used for the scheme to train the pilots.

33:30 Once they were graduated from the course they would be in a normal squadron.

So I suppose what the point I'm trying to ascertain here...was training continuing until the time that Japan entered the war?

Yes.

What happened to the squadron then? Once Japan entered the war, I presume all training went by the board.

There was no further flying as

34:00 a training exercise, they were in the fair dinkum show.

Which meant attack and defence?

Yes.

How often were they attacking as opposed to defending?

Well, it was not uncommon for us to be bombed two or three times a day, and then again at night. Well nuisance stuff at night. They were just flying around and preventing us from having

34:30 a good night's sleep.

Were the raids frightening?

Well, the first one...I can only speak for myself...but the first one nobody knew what to expect. But after that...the big raid we had in January....the strange thing about it was the Japanese would leave us alone on Sembawang. They'd bomb the hell out of Seletar and Tengah and those

35:00 places, those other RAF stations, but as they said on their propaganda...Tokyo Rose would say on her nightly shows, they wanted to be friends with the Australians and that we were being led by the nose by the British. They even, at one stage suggested they might drop some geisha girls, but we never saw them. So ...

Were you listening to Tokyo Rose every night?

35:30 Yes.

You were listening to the radio every night?

Yes, getting an idea of what they reckon we had lost in aircraft. Then she'd go on with this prattle about different things. When the AIF went into action on Gemas, we were told by Tokyo Rose to expect the Japanese air force to bomb Sembawang.

36:00 They knew where we were. The next morning at ten o'clock...we all woke up and did our duties until ten o'clock and then we started to get a bit apprehensive about whether she was fair dinkum or not. But sure enough she was. Precisely at ten o'clock the sirens went, we looked up and we could see 27 there, 27 there and 27 there.

36:30 I think there was something in the vicinity of 75 aircraft all converging from different angles on Sembawang and we got the lot. From that point on we knew what it was to be in a bombing raid.

What was it like to be in a bombing raid?

Well, the bombs they were using were general purpose bombs

- 37:00 and they had the time delayed bombs which meant the bombs would hit the ground, and because of their make and detonation, they'd go down into the earth and form a cavern and then explode. Others were sort of like daisy-cutters. If there
- 37:30 were any aircraft on the verge of the aerodrome, for some unknown reason they always seem to get hit with shrapnel, even though it could have been a couple of hundred yards off. But then getting back to what it was like. We were in trenches and the whole place would shake and where the bombs
- 38:00 would explode the earth would come over and shower us. We would be hit on the back or on the head or anything like that with great clumps of earth. I found that after that raid I would always have a knotted handkerchief to put in my mouth to keep my teeth apart, and put my fingers in my ears to save me from
- 38:30 ear blasts. When we could hear the planes moving off we'd sort of quite...we would just wait for awhile until we thought the time delayed bombs had gone off. We would get up then and survey the damage. In our case
- 39:00 we had a couple of aircraft in the hangars being inspected. They were hit by shrapnel. We had the ammunition in the corner of the hangar, and that started exploding so we had stuff all around us. The fires
- 39:30 had started in the accommodation, the water supply was cut, so we had no water to fight the fires. Headquarters was hit by bombs. The aerodrome itself was like a ploughed field with all the
- 40:00 earth that was blown up by the bombs. As soon as the raid was over we'd have a muster parade. All the names would be called out. If some were missing we'd find out from people there where they could be found.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **Jim, I presume this is your diary written immediately after these events?**

This was done at the time. "Precisely at 10:00 hours the sirens sounded. We got the Buffalos off except for a few which were unserviceable and made our way to the trenches. We could see three different formations coming towards Sembawang from different quarters flying at a great height.

- 01:00 The guns opened up but the range was not good for a time, but as they drew closer so did the range. Then came the now familiar whistle of the bombs falling and at the same time a direct hit was made on a bomber when it collided with another, and they both came down. The pattern bombing was complete. Station headquarters, barrack, hospital, mess and airfield
- 01:30 all received hits. The power lines were brought down and the water supply for the fire fighting was non-existent. After the raid we emerged from the trenches to observe the damage. The unserviceable Buffalos were no longer unserviceable; they were a total right off. They had been hit by shrapnel and set on fire by the bombs which had hit the hangars and demolished them...and set fire to a store of ammunition in the corner.
- 02:00 A couple of parked Hudsons under repair on the other side of the drome were damaged. The landing area looked like a ploughed field. So much loose earth lying around. Underground caverns made by time delay bombs could be seen.
- 02:30 As soon as the fires were brought under control a muster parade was held and the names were called to ensure nobody was missing. As the parade was breaking up word came through to the squadron adjutant that several from station headquarters had not reported in and a search party was to be formed to investigate. I must have looked to the adjutant that I wasn't gainfully
- 03:00 employed, so he grabbed me and five others and we became the search party. As the NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] he told me that before the raid they had been heading in the direction of the hospital to a gun pit and to look there. The L shaped trench had received a direct hit where the Lewis gun was installed and three fellows were lying around suffering from
- 03:30 shock and not able to say much except the fact that there was five in the trench before the raid, and that the three were in the other end away from the gun. We searched the trench and found nothing, not even the gun and moved away to search the area around the rubber trees. When someone called out that they had come across a boot, a shirt that had been shredded and other clothing, we collected parts of the torsos from the branches
- 04:00 of the trees and reported back after taking the survivors to the hospital."

Jim, what I'd like to do now, that's quite electrifying reading. What I'd like to do now is put the diary aside...that's a very valuable account....and just continue in your own words now, having been fed some memories by that...and talk about events from the muster parade onwards,

04:30 **as if we were picking up from the end of the last roll. Could you begin with the muster parade and then just continue the narrative from there?**

Well the...after each raid it was necessary to see who was still available, and they used to call these muster parades. The full...

05:00 **Could we keep it on the 18th of January? What happened with the muster parade then...even if it means...I mean we do want to recover in your own words for the purpose of this interview, what actually happened on the muster parade then and the events that followed?**

Well the roll call would be made and anyone...each one had to answer to their name

05:30 and if anyone was missing a search party would be established to find out where they were last seen and in what direction they were following, and a party of half a dozen or so would go out searching where they were. In my case I was detailed to take a party to an area around the hospital because

06:00 five from headquarters who hadn't reported in, we were told they were last seen heading towards the hospital area and the gun pit. So we were directed in that direction. We moved off and found three that were lying around shocked,

06:30 and got from them the fact that there were five in the trench at the time of the bombing raid and they were at one end and the other two fellows were up the other end where they got a direct hit. It proved to me that the L shaped trenches, even though they looked pretty frail, had a good purpose. Three were able to

07:00 get themselves out of the trench, but the other end of course received a direct hit. We searched the area adjacent to the gun pit and we came across a boot, a shirt and other belongings. We looked up in the tree and found other bits of clothing.

07:30 The blast just took everything off the bodies. So we collected the torsos and what we could find and took the other three up to the hospital and went back to our unit.

The torsos and whatever else you could find, these were body parts?

Yes, body parts.

What impact did that have on you?

Well being a 19 year old and not having seen a dead person before it was quite a shock.

08:00 I often think about it from time to time. So we got accustomed to these bombing raids and we always made sure that if we went to a distant trench, we'd always have somebody around with us.

That was one of the lessons you learnt

08:30 **from the first one. You say you often think about it from time to time, do you think it's had a long term effect on you?**

No, not really. With the passage of time it doesn't feel as gruesome as it did at the time. I just took it.

I mean at the time were you in a state of shock having seen these very confronting things?

09:00 Well, it came as a shock to see these body parts lying around, knowing that by the grace of God it could have been me there. That's how things were.

So there were subsequent raids of course on Sembawang?

Yes.

Approximately how many raids were you present for?

09:30 We would have an air raid alert at least twice a day, sometimes three times, and as they came closer... the Japanese came closer to Johor of course, the airstrips were more available to them as well, so they used to pay us quite a number of visits.

This was the 18th of January. What was the next

10:00 **important event for you?**

I think it was the 30th of January when the high command decided they'd evacuate the Peninsula completely and all the troops then marched across the causeway, or came across the causeway. So the Japanese had the whole of the Peninsula.

10:30 Where we were situated at Sembawang, we were the most forward of all these airfields. In fact we were only about a mile or a mile and a half from the Straits of Johor. Very early in the piece, after the last of the troops came across and the causeway

11:00 was blown up, the Japanese artillery was lined up on the shores of Johor and gradually they started to bombard the airfield and we were by this time evacuated from our

11:30 normal dormitories...accommodation, down into the rubber plantations. Where we were...

So this is what the 20th or 30th of January?

This is about the 30th of January.

Ok, we'll come back to the sequence of events in a moment. You mentioned the detail

12:00 **during that first raid of a knotted handkerchief. What was the purpose of the knotted handkerchief?**

Just to keep our teeth apart. Because of the concussion we tended to bite into our teeth and possibly have damage to our teeth and mouth. We'd also put our fingers to our ears to keep out the effect of the bomb blasts.

12:30 **I asked you before and we didn't go there at the time, but during these raids, were you afraid?**

Oh yes, every time. We didn't know whether our name was on the next bomb coming down. In fact the nearest bomb...it was only about ten feet from me. So it was a nasty experience to go through time

13:00 and time again.

Were any of your friends or mates killed during these raids?

Fortunately not. What did happen though, a couple of them were hit by the blast. In fact we had a big storm water drain that ran around the circumference of the strip or aerodrome, and to get the trenches on the other side

13:30 of the storm water drain, we had a small plank...I suppose the storm water drain would be about five foot deep and about eight feet wide. And you had to be in pretty good nick to take that jump across the drain. So we became pretty good Olympians by the time a few raids...and we had

14:00 experience. Two of them unfortunately fell when they were using this plank over the storm water drain, which was a concrete drain, and on one occasion a couple of bombs dropped into the far end of this drain and the blast swept right up and got these two fellows. The blast rolled them around and they suffered

14:30 concussion. They became hospital cases as well. But that was the only serious...oh one fellow had the back of his helmet taken off by a bit of shrapnel. But that was about the extent of damage to personnel.

Do you ever reflect on upon why you survived? Apart from quick reflexes and the athleticism which got you out of uncomfortable

15:00 **situations. Can you relate it to a sense of fate or faith in any kind of religious beliefs?**

I was saying a few 'Hail Marys' at times. I felt I had led a good life, a clean life and if it was to be, it was to be. But the Hail Marys helped I'm sure.

Were you saying them frequently during the raids?

15:30 Yes. I had the rosary beads around my wrist, or around my neck.

So the fact you did survive, did you relate it to this...?

Well, I felt certain that it did help me through the anxiety of bombing raids, the fact that I survived them all and came home without a scratch.

16:00 Which is a lot to be said for the power of prayer.

So did the power of prayer and your religious beliefs do you think help you to cope with whatever trauma you may have sustained?

I'm sure it did. Our padres were always on the spot to help anybody out, but fortunately I felt I was coping pretty well.

Did you talk to the padre at all?

16:30 No. But he was there.

And other people were talking to him from time to time?

Oh yes.

So we're up to the 30th of January and you mentioned the people moving across the causeway and Singapore becoming a bit more fortified as a result of the approaching Japanese. What was the next milestone for you after that?

Well, the fortifications around Johor were non-existent.

- 17:00 They had orders from Churchill to fortify, but the Governor Shenton Thomas, the governor of Singapore refused to do anything about it. He maintained that there were enough troops to defend the island. He was sadly mistaken.

Were the British clinging to this

- 17:30 **notion of the impregnable fortress right to the very end?**

Yes.

Was that part of the day to day conversation?

Well, they were still having their high tea dances and things, in the late afternoons.

What, even during the bombings?

Yes.

Even when things looked really desperate?

Yes.

How did you regard that?

Well, I can't say what the English thought they were doing

- 18:00 but it was quite common...it was common knowledge that they were still having their high tea and dancing.

Talk about the ultimate defence mechanism! Talk about deflecting reality!

So by the time the causeway was blown up, all the troops were back on the island.

- 18:30 And we found that we were the most advanced unit on the island.

When you say most advanced, what do you mean by that?

We were the most forward of the units. We were only about 2,000 yards from the Japanese on Johor.

- 19:00 They brought down their artillery pieces and lined them up around the area where we were on Sembawang and over at Tengah. We were copping it left, right and centre, day and night until about the 6th February.

Can you describe what you were actually doing there? Were you in a defensive position? Did you have

- 19:30 **guns in your hands? Could you paint a picture for me? You say you were in the most advanced position, but what did that actually imply in terms of what you were doing and where you were?**

Well, I was issued with a 38 Smith and Wesson with six rounds of ammunition and I was supposed to hold back the Japanese. The senior NCOs had a Tommy gun and I think there was about one rifle between three men.

- 20:00 Plus the machine guns that we had salvaged from the aircraft. With that arsenal we were supposed to hold the Japanese at bay.

Were you in trenches?

Yes, there were trenches. We were using the trenches that were used for the bombing raids. The Zeros were still flying overhead. They knew every move that was made.

Were they strafing you?

- 20:30 They didn't strafe us at that time, although I think they left it to the artillery. They were dropping their artillery onto the area where we...where our new quarters were. They sent over some daisy-cutters that inflicted a lot of damage to the aircraft that we had stored away there.

- 21:00 Some were flyable but the others were complete wrecks.

So in this defensive position was this at an airfield?

This was at the airfield.

Sembawang airfield. The Japanese were 2,000 yards away, could you actually see them?

No. What we could do, we could hear their guns firing. We could count to 17 and we could hear the

- 21:30 thud on the strip, on the aerodrome. This would be going day and night towards the end, as I say, until

the 8th of February when we were ordered out.

So how many were you there involved in the defence of the aerodrome and indeed in the defence of Singapore?

Well, by this time the pilots themselves were evacuated to Singapore, so it just left the ground staff

22:00 of about 130.

So there was 130 of you there in the trenches waiting for the Japanese?

More or less, yes.

And how many injuries were sustained in that 130?

Fortunately it was negligible. The only people we had on the sick parade were a couple of fellows who unfortunately disregarded the advice given to them

22:30 early in the piece to stay away from the women. They caught a particular disease and were hospitalised. When the time came for us to evacuate the island we had to leave them behind because they were too ill to move.

And what ultimately happened to those men?

They became POWs [Prisoners of War]. I know one survived because I was on Tarakan when they came through

23:00 after the surrender. Although I wasn't able to speak to him I knew he was on that particular plane. The other fellow, we haven't been able to find out just what happened.

So just to place you back there in the slit trenches, there must have been an incredible feeling of apprehension?

That was for about two days. They

23:30 instigated a roving patrol which covered our particular area. They'd go right to the naval base. This was the army of course, the AIF. They'd come around a couple of times a day for the first couple of days, and then

24:00 we got this order to evacuate the area. This was all due to the activity of the adjutant because we didn't know where our commanding officer was. He had moved into the city himself. He belonged to the Singapore cricket club

24:30 I think. He was away from any phones, so we had no idea where he could be contacted and he left the running of the squadron to the adjutant and the flying...whenever that was possible, to his two flight commanders.

That officer being...

Harper. Squadron Leader Harper, RAF.

That must have done wonders for morale?

Yes, he wasn't a very popular man.

25:00 During the court of inquiry which happened after we came back, it was noted by some of the pilots that he only flew twice during the whole campaign, and that was on what they called the milk runs, rather than the meat runs. They were the ones that mixed it with the Japanese. The milk runs were the ones doing escort duty for the

25:30 ships coming into the harbour.

You referred a couple of minutes ago, to the two men who had to be left behind. How did it feel to leave those two men behind?

Well we...I thought they might have got out on a later ship. We were the last big ship of any size to leave Singapore. There were a lot of smaller ones of course. But

26:00 we thought...I did anyway, that they would possibly get out later on one of the other ships.

So the fact that you had those hopes, made you not worry too much about what was going to happen to them?

Yes. Do you mind if I have a drink?

Sure it's right beside you. It's going well Jim. It's going very well.

26:30 **Now...**

The editor's going to have a ...

No. This is all good material. Good material. Definitely very good. Now you mentioned the couple of days in the trenches. What happened after that in terms of important events for you?

Well this was round about the second or third day of February,

- 27:00 and as I mentioned, on the 6th of February the adjutant came back from headquarters, and he drove around where he knew the bulk of the troops were and said to them, "Drop what you're doing, pick up your tools, pack as much as you can in your kit bags and report back at six o'clock. We're getting out. There's a ship waiting
- 27:30 and we have to be on board by eight o'clock at night." So it didn't take us much time...we thought if we take our tools there would certainly be aircraft which we could work on wherever we were going to. So we got assembled. He had the vehicles organised somehow. I suppose he commandeered them too
- 28:00 like we had in KL [Kuala Lumpur]. He got us all on board the City of Canterbury which was a ship which came in with the [SS] Empress of Asia. The Empress of Asia, when we got down to the docks, was alongside the City of Canterbury. It had been beached because it had been hit during a raid coming in, and
- 28:30 there was nothing that could be done. I think it had been bringing in some Indian reinforcements. So they beached the Empress of Asia. As we climbed aboard, or we were told that the City of Canterbury had sustained some damage on the way in, but we weren't told that the lifeboats had all been shattered by
- 29:00 the strafing raids. So we got out to sea and found that if we also had to abandon ship we had nothing to get in to...except for a few floats that were around. We were told to stay on deck because the holds were full of civilian evacuees
- 29:30 and in any case they expected submarine alerts. So we left on the night of the 7th of February. It was three nights and two days. We arrived at Batavia, no Jakarta.

- 30:00 **Before we do that, before you left Singapore, did you have a chance to look around the city to see how damaged the place was?**

I've heard of cities burning, and that was my indication of what it must be like. We were down on the wharf and we looked back over our shoulders and we could see the whole city was just a mass of flames. It shook

- 30:30 the lot of us to know that the whole city would probably be reduced to ashes.

Had you had a chance to look around Singapore between the first Japanese raids and now to see the progressive damage and such things as bodies...?

Yes, we were able to get into Singapore from time to time, but I was sticking pretty close

- 31:00 to headquarters because I knew if anything happened I didn't want to miss out.

You didn't want to miss out on...?

Evacuation.

So it must have been quite a considerable relief to finally get away from there?

It was, but we didn't know what was ahead of us.

Were you aware on the boat...you mentioned in retrospect that you discovered the lifeboats were all gone. But were you aware during the trip that there were no lifeboats?

- 31:30 Yes. We were dive bombed on two afternoons, and on one occasion they came down and strafed the deck again and we had Bofors guns, or the Royal Navy had Bofors guns on the deck. A couple of the gunners were hit

- 32:00 during the attack. So we knew it wasn't a bed of roses.

Did you see that happen...that strafing?

Yes. We were down...we didn't actually, we were on deck and we went down below. We were ordered down below. But we could hear the roar of the planes

- 32:30 as they came down. We could feel the swell of the water against the ship as it manoeuvred to get away. We were told that the captain would wait until he saw the bomb leave the aircraft and then he would take the appropriate evasive action. Apparently he had been through Narvik as well so he had pretty good experience in trying to escape from

- 33:00 bombs. So we eventually reached Batavia. We were strafed again as we were getting off the boat.

Any casualties that time?

There was one cove...an Englishmen. He was running ahead of me. He stumbled and I thought he had fallen, but he had been hit by a ricocheted bullet.

33:30 By this time the plane had gone away from us. We looked at him and bandaged his leg. We helped him off the wharf and into a slit trench. Then the raid was over and we finished up joining the main contingent and we were marched down to a railway station.

34:00 We were taken inland to a place called Buitenzorg, which in better times had been the place where the Dutch governor general had his summer residence. So we were in pretty good company.

Can you describe that place?

Well, we didn't see a great deal of the palace that was there, but he had deer feeding in the grounds.

34:30 We just walked through there, walked through the botanical gardens and back to our rest camp.

In what condition was Batavia at this time?

We didn't see a great deal of it because we went straight from the docks, onto the train and then out into the hills.

Now it was around this time that you had your 20th birthday, wasn't it? And I believe that was a fairly significant day in more ways than one?

35:00 Yes, it was the 15th February, and for a time I wasn't sure if I would be around to celebrate my 21st birthday. Things were happening, it was so fast. We were being bombed, we were being shelled, and on a ship that was a great target for a submarine had there been one in the vicinity. And then to get off the ship and be hit with

35:30 another strafing attack. So on that particular night we all heard that Winston Churchill was going to make a speech, and we all assumed what he was going to say. I thought for my sake I'll go along and listen to what he had to say, but at the same time

36:00 thinking what a thing to happen on a fella's birthday? After the speech was over we thought, well that was it.

Could you tell us about the speech and what he actually said?

Not from memory, no.

What was the essence of Churchill's speech?

Well, it was a case of admitting that the Japanese had been underestimated.

36:30 That he felt the troops could have done a bit more. Later on, not in this speech, but he and General Wavell came to the conclusion "that the Fall of Singapore was due mainly to the uncharacteristic behaviour of the AIF." He blamed the drunken

37:00 AIF. As he put it..."What can you expect of convicts?"

He said that subsequently, obviously not during the broadcast.

No.

What do you consider was the role of the British in the fall of Singapore?

I think they were...

37:30 only being a mere corporal, I felt that General Bennett had the right idea, whereas we couldn't rely actually on the Indians. They'd panic and a lot of them were only conscripts anyway. They were more or less

38:00 screened to warfare and they didn't have the proper training. So when the Japanese found out where the Indians were they would attack in force and the Indians would withdraw. So to keep the line intact, the rest of the troops would have to withdraw too.

Just to get back to...I mean Churchill's statement was a...

38:30 **...and Wavell's statement was a fairly provocative statement. What was your reaction to that, and from that can you give a summarising statement on your own view of the role of the British and the fall of Singapore?**

It's a difficult one, but all I can say is that the British were still enjoying their high teas...

39:00 **Do you think the British should have surrendered?**

From all accounts, no. It looked as if it was a big bluff by Yamashita, I think was the general in charge. He only had a very small supply of ammunition for his artillery, and had Percival known about it

- 39:30 at the time, I think he might have changed his mind about surrendering. I think...the Allies outnumbered the Japanese by 20... or 30,000 I think. In fact the AIF put on some counter attacks towards the latter stages of the war
- 40:00 and forced the Japanese back, but unfortunately they had to keep the lines intact and they were then forced to fall back.

Tape 7

00:35 **Can you tell me about events at Penang?**

With Penang, it's an island off the west coast of Malaysia...of Malaya, and when it was decided to evacuate the island, people had thought that there

01:00 would be something done about the yachts and boats that the well to do people had moored there. And they all imagined that someone would go around and sabotage them to prevent the Japanese from using them. But as it so happened nothing was done, so the Japanese

01:30 had ready made assault vessels that they were able to use to great extent along the west coast. So what they would do, they'd come down behind the lines and infiltrate and force the Allies to withdraw. They kept doing this all the way down to

02:00 the likes of Malacca and those places. They were forever getting in behind the lines.

They obviously had a ready made camouflage being yachts and cruisers and the like.

That's right. 453 Squadron was forever going out onto operations just for the sake of

02:30 firing...what's the word...

Was 453 Squadron going out to intercept and attack these yachts?

Yes, that was the whole purpose of it. They were going out to do as much damage and at the same time, if they were able to, sink the things with the Japanese on board.

How would they be able to tell if they were Japanese or friendly people on board?

03:00 Well they just had to...they just assumed that anything coming down the west coast would be the Japanese.

To move back now to Batavia and events as you went into this mansion with its park full of deer and so forth, what was the next important step for you after that?

03:30 Well, we were still there on February the 15th. I imagine it would have been something like the 27th of February when we were told to pack our things, that we were going back into Batavia. There was a ship there with sufficient space to

04:00 take us to where we were destined to go. It so happened that this was the ship that brought Weary Dunlop plus the, I think it was the 2/2nd Pioneers and the 2/6th Machine Gunners which was contrary to the agreement between the Australian and the British government for the return of the AIF from the Middle East.

04:30 But somehow Wavell, General Wavell thought it didn't apply to him, so he ordered the troops off the Orcades and as it was about to return to Colombo we were told to pack our things and get into Batavia

05:00 and onto the Orcades. We got through the Sunda Straits where a few days later was the scene of the Battle of the Java Sea. Then we headed south as I recall, and then all of a sudden the ship changed course and we learned that we were heading for Burma.

05:30 It seemed that the Australian prime minister at the time, John Curtin and Winston Churchill were having an argument about where we should be heading. John Curtin wanted us to be returned to Australia and Churchill wanted to send us up into

06:00 Burma. We had no aircraft, no nothing. So as it so happened, Curtin won the day and at this same time the ship's captain decided he was running short of fuel, so we had to go up to Colombo after all, where he refuelled and

06:30 we were there for a couple of days and then we set sail. We found we were sailing on our own. They reckoned at the time that the Orcades could outrun any submarine that might be lurking in the area. Fortunately for us, we got back to Port Adelaide where we disembarked and a troop train was there for us and we were taken over to Melbourne where we were refitted

07:00 with new uniforms and given a fortnight's leave and told to report to our personnel depots.

Just before I move you on from that, what were the conditions like on board the Orcades?

Well, after what we'd been through, it was like a damn palace.

Was it? Can you describe a bit of what you saw on board the ship?

Well,

07:30 the food was there for us three times a day. The morale was excellent because of the fact we were on our way home. Unfortunately we left some of the pilots behind. They were killed in action.

Where were they left behind?

They were buried up at Taiping on the west coast. They had been

08:00 involved in the second dogfight and they'd been killed.

Were they disembarked at a certain point? Where were they disembarked? In other words, you said you had left them behind. Where had you as a squadron left them behind?

The...

The two pilots you've just referred to?

Oh, they had been killed on the 22nd

08:30 of December and this is February.

Oh right. I had the impression they had been dropped off somewhere. Just one further question about your time in the idyllic European style park out from Batavia, what was the purpose of you waiting there?

We were resting. There were no aircraft.

Were you waiting for planes to arrive?

We were anticipating

09:00 planes arriving. But whether they were on their way or not I don't know. They could have been on their way and they could have been torpedoed.

What sort of planes were you waiting for?

We were expecting some Hurricanes. There had been some Hurricanes arrive...flown off the [HMS] Indomitable out at sea, south of Sumatra, and their first dogfight

09:30 on Singapore was quite an event, but that night apparently the Japanese had done their homework and when they came over again the Hurricanes went up and they really got done over...that's the Hurricanes. That was the time that John Gorton...he was in one of those Hurricanes.

10:00 He was being evacuated...he had been injured in a crash landing...and was being evacuated on another ship which had been torpedoed. He was rescued and finally arrived back in Australia.

Yes, that's a remarkable story actually.

Yes. One of our...not one of our squadron fellows, but one of the RAAF blokes got the MBE [Member of the British Empire]

10:30 for his effort in getting John Gorton on board the ship...I think it was the [MV] Derrimore.

That's right, because Gorton's face had been extensively injured and unrecognisable and it was all quite dramatic. Now you mentioned you had been evacuated with your full kit of tools, did you carry that with you all the way through?

We left them behind in

11:00 Batavia, or in Buitenzorg.

So when you were evacuated from Singapore where you able to bring all the things with you that were important to you personally?

Personal items, yes, except for clothing. We knew we couldn't pack everything.

Just before we completely leave Singapore, you've mentioned the British distress at the climate. Could you describe the climate of Singapore?

Well, it was just like an ordinary

11:30 summer weather that we would experience out here. It didn't affect the Australian contingent. We would strip to our waist. Dress regulation wasn't enforced on Sembawang. In all probability it was probably a different story over at Seletar and Tengah and those places.

12:00 But we all had felt hats and in some cases we had those pith helmets which were a bit awkward to wear while we were servicing the aircraft.

I bet they were. They were probably getting in the way all the time. Get a spot of oil on them and you'd really know about it. This rather casual dress code can't have impressed the British either?

No, it didn't. We were just a bunch of ruffians.

12:30 **The British considered you to be that?**

Yes, I'm sure that's how they would look upon us, especially our CO...a real 'pukka sahib' Englishman.

So what impact was the climate having on the British?

I think it was just an excuse. They were having their...they liked their siestas in the afternoons. Apparently they

13:00 weren't training as hard as we were. They had been suffering from the troppo diseases we used to call it.

Tropo diseases, what were they?

Oh, they just wanted to rest you know. They liked their stingers...

Gins on the terrace.

Yes, that sort of thing.

Were they complaining about the weather?

Complaining about?

13:30 **Complaining and doing a bit of whinging about the weather?**

No, no. See on Sembawang it was an Australian show with only a sprinkling of English personnel, but the majority were over at Seletar or Tengah or the other one down at the southern end of the island.

14:00 **Right just leaping back to Adelaide. You had two weeks leave, what did you do with that leave?**

Well, we arrived in Adelaide and then we went over to Melbourne to be re-equipped. By this time the people had moved Kempsey down to Sydney and the family were living at Kingsford.

14:30 I arrived home and I decided I...of course Mum and the family hadn't even heard of me since the beginning of the war because there was no way of getting mail out, and then getting over to Java where we were on the move all the time.

So there had been no letters backwards and forwards from Australia to Singapore?

No.

That's remarkable because even the guys under sustained fire

15:00 **in the Middle East had some occasional letters.**

Well you see, they were better organised, because this happened so abruptly and things were somehow disorganised.

So before you went away did you have a regular girlfriend that you had left behind?

I was a kid of 18. No, not on your life.

So there was no one special in your life at that time?

No, no.

I was wondering if there was someone pining for a letter which she didn't receive?

No. I was a wake up to these women.

15:30 Being in the country at the time, there was no one there I was attached to or anything like that.

Did you go out with girls at all before you left?

Well not in Kempsey.

16:00 I don't think I was long enough in the likes of Richmond. I was doing courses as well at Point Cook, and so my head was down in the books most of the time.

And was even after you came back to Australia and during that period of leave?

No, not really. I thought there would be time enough for romance afterwards.

16:30 **So the two weeks leave? The family must have been delighted to see you?**

The first indication they had I was still around was when I sent them a telegram I think it was from Melbourne to say I was back in Australia and I expected to catch the train to Sydney at such and such a time, arriving at such a such a time in Sydney, and of course the whole family were there.

17:00 **The whole family was there to greet you?**

Yes, even Dad came down from the Central Coast.

So your sisters were there? Was your brother there as well?

No, he was at Puckapunyal. The two unmarried sisters were there and they were both in uniform too, which was a surprise to me because when we left we had no inkling

17:30 that there would WAAAF [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] and WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Navy Service] and AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service].

What branch of service were they in?

They were in the army up...when I got back they were stationed up at Bathurst of all places.

So you went back and stayed at the family home at Kingsford, I presume?

Yes, that's right. And of course...I'm going a bit further ahead...by the time the two sisters were discharged, and my brother was discharged

18:00 and myself, it meant there was no room in the inn, so Dad had to start looking around for a bigger place, which he subsequently found, but it was in the same general area.

Now how had Sydney changed in the time you had been away?

Well, I didn't see a great deal of it because I was on the move.

18:30 After we had our leave...I did go up to Kempsey just to have a look at the place but you could put a Bren gun in the main street and fire a shot and you wouldn't have hit anybody. All the young blokes had joined up. They were all in uniform.

So what did you actually do during that fortnight's leave apart from going up to Kempsey? What did you do with your family in Sydney?

19:00 I just...I can't really recall. I had a couple of days in Kempsey because I felt there must be somebody around still that I went to school with. But after a couple of days I thought, "No, there's nothing here for me," so I went back and I decided then that if the family were living in Sydney

19:30 at the end of the war, I wouldn't go back.

So what happened after your leave period?

I went back to the personnel depot at Bradfield Park and I was posted up to Evans Head which was the bombing and gunnery school. I was only up there for about

20:00 a fortnight and I got another posting down to Melbourne and they decided I would make a good instructor...as an armament instructor to the trainee pilots and navigators and so forth. So after I did this course at Mildura, and also at Hamilton in Victoria, I got posted up to Bundaberg

20:30 and ...

Before we go to the Bundaberg posting, what sort of things had you been studying on these courses?

The theory of bombing, bomb sighting and bombing, gun sighting and looking after the guns, and that sort of thing; and the types of explosives that they used in the bombs.

21:00 It was all theoretical stuff which we tried to impart onto the trainee pilots.

Were there any notable advances in technology that you were boning up on as part of the course?

Not really. We were still using the same old armament and ammunition that we were using over in Malaya that we were taught early in the piece back in 1940 when I first joined up.

21:30 The only advance was really the gun turrets in the aircraft. Whereas before the only turret was a manual operated one, but now we had this bolt and pull turret and the Frazer-Nash turrets which were electrically operated and did what was necessary.

22:00 **So when you arrived in Bundaberg was this your posting as an instructor?**

Yes. I was there for perhaps 18 months, 2 years. Amongst the pupils I had a fellow by the name of Bill Brown...I don't know if that name rings a bell with you, but he was the opening batsman in Don...what's his name?

Don Bradman?

Don Bradman's team. He was the opening batsman.

In the Invincibles' Team?

Yes.

22:30 **After the war.**

He's still around. He had his birthday last year some time. Yes, so after 18 months...

Can you tell me more specifically what you were teaching?

We had a lot

23:00 of information too about the mass bombing raids which were on the secrets list at the time, and we were...just as a matter of interest we would read these things out to the class.

What mass bombing raids? Where had these mass bombing raids taken place?

These were over Europe, Germany and those places.

And that was on the secrets list, was it?

Well, it was at the time, but...

23:30 it was when it was printed but then it was released for general information amongst the air force.

Oh, I see so you didn't have to swear an oath of secrecy or anything like that?

No, none of this.

So that was all part of the lecturing that you were giving?

Yes.

You might have mentioned this before but can you just mention the subjects that you were teaching?

It was the bomb sighting and the type of bombs we were using.

24:00 They had another device they had if they were out at sea where they could tell what the wind velocity was. It was an aluminium container which was dropped like a bomb and when it hit the surface of the sea it would explode and have this aluminium spread over the sea and they were able to line up their

24:30 bombing instrument to find out the wind speed and the direction.

How were they reading the aluminium?

It was floating on the sea and they'd fly from different directions to see whether it was drifting one way or the other.

So they could see the fragments of the aluminium on the sea surface?

Yes. Then there was the bomb sighting itself plus the gunnery

25:00 for the navigators.

And were you taking the students on any flights at all?

No, I went along as a passenger at times. We also had a bombing teacher which was an instrument on which they could practice and hone up on their bombing skills. I could set the wind speed and the direction and ask them to find

25:30 by their own method, using these machines, what they would get as far as the wind speed and direction were concerned. And if it was a bombing class I would pick out a target...for somebody who's not accustomed to this, the bomb sight they were using had two bars coming out

26:00 and the idea was you'd lean out over the top and you'd see the target coming towards and when it hit, or when it came to a certain point on this bar, you'd release the bombs. It was a good exercise for them.

Now the RAAF had an air base at

26:30 **Bundaberg, did they?**

Yes.

So you were teaching at the air base? How much of the time were you in a classroom as opposed to going into the workshops and the hangars?

Depending. It was a half hour to an hour, and then I'd hone up...go back to my office and then hone up on my ...or refresh myself on what was going to happen the next day or the next

27:00 session.

So you were teaching for half an hour to an hour each day? Was that entirely theory or was there some practical?

A bit of practice as well.

So you'd take them into the workshops or the hangars for that?

Yes, or up in the bombing teacher.

Up in the bombing teacher? What was the bombing teacher?

It was a structure about four storeys high and they had this

27:30 machine that you could set wind speeds, you could set the height that you were supposed to be flying at. You'd have a group of four or five blokes and they'd each have a turn...depending on what I wanted them to do...finding the wind speed, finding the direction or doing a dummy bombing run.

28:00 So the day was taken up pretty well.

So that was about 18 months you say in Bundaberg. Did you have much of a chance to spend time in the town?

A bit yes, weekends.

Was there a very big RAAF presence in the town?

It was quite big. It was a service flying trainee school so they had a lot of Anson aircraft there and

28:30 I think they might have had a couple of Fairey Battles as well.

So were you able to go in and mix with the civilian population?

Oh yes. It was quite open handed.

What sort of recreational activities did you do in and around Bundaberg?

I thought this was coming up. Well at Bundaberg they had what they called the 'Home Wreckers', which was the dance hall. All the young fellas would

29:00 hop down there. And of course by this time we had the WAAAFs on the station as well. But being the good country boy I was, I used to go to the dances but leave on my own.

What were the Home Wreckers?

It was a dance hall with a band and all the unattached females would

29:30 crowd down there, hoping for a good night's entertainment.

Why was it called the Home Wreckers?

It was just a nickname they gave it. I won't go further into that.

I mean you mentioned you always left on your own, so clearly not all of the other guys were leaving on their own?

No. Well I assume that most of them would.

Wouldn't?

No. Would

30:00 have left on their own.

But a percentage of them...

Look, I don't know what the other parties were doing.

I'm just wondering why you're being so reticent about it. It was obviously a dance hall where guys went to meet girls and have a dance. Why are you being reluctant to go into any further details?

30:30 Well, I don't know for sure what was going on after I left or what happened.

Did you hear any rumours or reports?

Oh only that "I've been down to the Home Wreckers last night and had a good night."

Was there grog available there?

No, but there was plenty of pubs in Bundaberg, and what's more they always had to be sure that

31:00 they caught the last bus back to the station which was a few miles out of town, otherwise they walked.

So the women who attended Home Wreckers were all single?

I don't know.

What age group are we talking about?

All ages I think, yes.

What from teens through to whatever?

... umm.

Interesting.

Them were the war days.

So what other forms of recreation

31:30 **were there in Bundaberg?**

Well there was the beach. I just forget the name of the beach. That was pretty popular. There were tennis courts and picture shows of course. There was plenty to do, plenty of recreation. And of course we had neighbouring towns such as Maryborough. A bit further out was Kingaroy, a bit further inland.

And of course the Bundaberg rum

32:00 **as well.**

Yes, I was overlooking that.

Deliberately?

Deliberately, yes.

Why, is there a story attached to the Bundaberg rum?

No, no. People might get the idea that I was a bit of a drinker. But now...

Were you teetotal at this stage?

32:30 Oh yes I was.

And you went to church there in Bundaberg?

Yes.

You went to the local Catholic church?

Yes.

Bundaberg's a very attractive town. I was up there about a year ago and it still has the feeling of history about it.

Do they still park in the middle of the road?

Yes, very limited traffic flow down that main street. But it still feels like a 1920s, 30s, 40s town.

The old Commercial Hotel I suppose is

33:00 still standing?

Yes, the place is full of big pubs left, right and centre. So after Bundaberg I think you had the Morotai posting, didn't you?

Yes, after about 18 months I could see that the tropical allowance...we used to get two shillings a day extra for being in the tropics, and here I was, I had lost 18 months of two shillings a day

33:30 and I thought I'll try and cash in on this. So I applied for posting away from Bundaberg and I was posted to an OBU, which stands for an operational base unit, which was being formed up in Townsville. Now in theory the operational base unit

34:00 on paper was that we would wait until a beach head was established, the aerodrome construction

crowd, the RAAF construction crowd, and the OBU would then come into the beach head, the army would move out and depending upon

34:30 where the airstrip was, we would wait until the airstrip was secured by the army and then we'd both move up to the strip, and the aerodrome crowd would start renovating the strip. But on Tarakan we found that the strip was

35:00 spongy. It was built right on the edge of the water, so with every rise and fall of the tide so would the airstrip. There was no ballast really to fill the holes because the water could still seep up through.

When you say spongy, was this a compressed undergrowth of some kind?

I don't know what it was, but we were told that

35:30 they were having difficulty because of the rise and fall of the tide. So obviously...I've got photos of the bomb craters.

Now what was the purpose of your going to Morotai?

That was to get ready for the big Australian push up into Borneo and further afield. Now to get to Morotai from Townsville

36:00 we had to go in an advance party. We had about two ton of equipment in the DC3, which belonged to the United States Army, and we flew from Townsville through to Merauke in Dutch New Guinea, along the south coast of New Guinea

36:30 until we got to the Sarong I think it was, which was the narrowest part of Dutch New Guinea. They had violent storms in that area and they had been losing quite a few aircraft flying directly over the top, so we did the shortest possible route. Then we landed at Biak and we spent the night there. The next morning with fighter

37:00 escort we flew from Biak over to Morotai. All in all, that trip took us a day and a half. So we arrived at Morotai and we waited then for the main body of the troops to come. They came by ship

37:30 whereas I had the easy part and flew. I suppose we were there...I left Townsville on the 18th February and we boarded the ship for Tarakan about the 28th,

38:00 the last day of April because the invasion of Tarakan was set down for the 1st of May.

Now wasn't it on Morotai that you met up with your brother?

Yes. Brother John had been in the permanent army, and from day one he had been endeavouring to get out into active service.

38:30 So being in the instructional corps they were loath to let him go because at that particular time they still had recruits coming in. I had anticipated that he might show up, so when I found that some of the 9th Division fellows

39:00 were on the island, I thought well here's an opportunity that might come his way.

Tape 8

00:33 **Jim, could you just resume your story of meeting up with your brother? So you anticipated, you suspected he might be about to arrive...?**

By letters from home I'd learned that he had secured a discharge from the instructional corps and he had been transferred to the 9th Division. What part of the

01:00 9th Division I wasn't aware, but it turned out to be 2/24th Battalion. I'd been on Morotai for a couple of months when I noticed there was some slouch hats around the place and I found out that they were belonging to the 9th Division, and I had hopes that he could have been amongst them. We used to get a ration of two bottles of beer

01:30 a week, so I kept storing them up in the hope that he would show up, and he did on one wet raining night. He poked his head in the fly of the tent and asked if there was a Porteous hanging around? I said, "Yeah, who is it?" Of course he walked in then. It turned out when he left we went in the wrong direction.

02:00 He had no idea where he was. He was disorientated in the dark night. It finished up we were going through the Japanese wire and...I'd been through it myself several times. We used to call it the perimeter. When I realised we had gone too far we turned the jeep around and came back, and it turned

- 02:30 out he was only half a mile away from me. He said he was up with the rest of the battalion and it looked as though he would be going into Borneo, he wasn't sure where. I said, "Well we've got orders too that we'll be packing up ourselves." They were short of drivers
- 03:00 to take all the vehicles down. I said, "Well I can drive. I'll take one down." They gave me a damn petrol wagon with two and a half thousand gallons of high octane petrol to drive down, and I hadn't driven one of these with two lots of gears on them. I don't know what you call them. However, I got in and started the damn thing up and away we went. I took it down to the wharf to be loaded onto the
- 03:30 ship that I was going to be carried on, and lo and behold, here he was. He was going to travel in the same convoy. There was the main ship...they had a proper name for it. I was on one side and he was on the [HMAS] Westralia, on the other. The amazing thing was, the ship I was travelling on was the [USS] Titania.
- 04:00 Yeah, the Titania, which didn't please me a great deal. Any rate when we arrived on Tarakan, the Westralia went in with these rubber dinghies, and the troops took off, landed and I followed that afternoon with this tanker. When we were approaching the jetty
- 04:30 we found the tide was out, so I had to wait until the king tide came about which was about ten o'clock at night. So here I was with a petrol wagon with two and a half thousand gallons of petrol driving along on a road, which I later found out had been mined by the Japanese and I had gone right away as far as I could from all the other vehicles and
- 05:00 personnel. Fortunately I had a MP [Military Police] with me to assist. He had a torch, going, "Back further, back further." All of a sudden there was a whine of bullets. He was on the ground, I was in the truck and I reckon I beat him to the ground. So I left the truck where it was, took the keys, went back and
- 05:30 from a safe distance from the petrol wagon spent the night there and waited for the rest of the drivers.
- Before we completely leave Morotai, what had your day to day duties been there?**
- We were sent along to various squadrons - just to keep our hands in with the maintenance on Kitty Hawks,
- 06:00 Mustangs, Beaufighters and that sort of thing. It was just more or less to keep us occupied.
- What about Liberators? Were you working on Liberators?**
- No. They were operating from north-west Australia, around Carnarvon and those places, Broome.
- So back to Tarakan. What were your first impressions...could we have**
- 06:30 **a bit of your first impressions of both Morotai and Tarakan as places?**
- Morotai, we came in by aircraft so I didn't see a great deal. It was all completely new to me. We didn't move out of the perimeter a great deal. It was just over to the strip and back again.
- What were**
- 07:00 **the conditions like? I mean was it a heavily vegetated island?**
- Very much so, it was quite wet of course. I think...no, we weren't in a monsoon, but we were getting a lot of rain.
- Were you surrounded by forest?**
- Jungle, yes.
- So you were surrounded by tropical jungle?**
- Yes. The Americans came in and they just took sufficient of the island to
- 07:30 prepare a couple of airstrips, and they left the Japanese on the outer. From time to time I understand, I don't know how correct is it, but they...the Japanese would make a raid on the cookhouse because they knew that was where the food was. They were starving.
- So they were a fairly inactive Japanese...**
- Yes, we didn't pay much attention to them.
- So they represented no threat?**
- No.
- 08:00 From time to time the Americans that were there were still heavily...we were still heavily outnumbered by the Americans. But from time to time they'd fire a volley from a fifty point five gun to let them know that they were still aware that the Japanese were around.

How were the Australians getting on with the Americans?

All right. Some of them made a fortune

08:30 cutting down the point five ammunition and making salt and pepper shakers. I've got a pair of them up there, salt and pepper shakers. The cost of them was nothing at all because they would just help themselves to the ammunition and they sold them to the Yanks. Put a couple of holes in them for salt and one for pepper, and they used to sell them to the Yanks for \$25. They made a fortune.

09:00 **Nice beginnings of a post war business empire. What were your first impressions of Tarakan as a place?**

Well, we could see that from the sea. Previous bombing raids had damaged and destroyed all the oil. That was the sole purpose as I understand it of going into Tarakan, to secure the oil fields.

09:30 As I say, the previous bombing raids had rendered all the port facilities that were there, which wasn't a great deal, just these oil tanks. They were all destroyed and the whole place was just a wreck. When we

10:00 were anchored and we could see the AIF going in, the B25s of the RAAF came across and sprayed the whole landing area, the whole island for that matter with insecticide rather than run the risk of dengue fever and malaria. So we could see that the RAAF were keeping an eye on things from above.

Insecticide?

10:30 **I mean insecticide...**

DDT.

Yes, DDT! I mean, during the Vietnam War that had a bit of a negative affect on things. Were there any kind of flow on effects of that?

Not that I was aware of.

Were they spraying it while the troops were moving about?

No, this was before the landing beach head was established. They came across, nine abreast.

I wonder what impact it had on the local population?

11:00 **Was it a populated island?**

Yes, there were natives there.

Did you have anything or much to do with them?

No, we would only see them from a distance.

What about Morotai, did you have any interaction with the locals there?

I didn't see one.

Now, once you had done this drive with the aviation fuel, I think we'd left you...you had made your way back through the mine field.

11:30 **At what point...?**

These were just on the road, the mines.

On the road? At what point did you discover it was a mine field?

The next morning.

How did you discover that?

You could see them. They were at ground level. They weren't buried or anything like that. They were just lying there all connected up, but it appears the firing mechanism had been damaged in a pre-dawn raid or something.

12:00 So although they were there they didn't prove to be much of a worry.

How many were there?

I wouldn't know, but it stretched from where I drove off to beyond where I parked.

But they can't all have been damaged?

No, the firing mechanism, to set them all off together.

Oh I see, which was in a centralised place. But nevertheless it must have been a shock to discover you had driven through them.

12:30 Yes, I nearly had to change my underwear.

I'm not surprised. So when...so you left the truck and then you went back to the camp.

To an area where it was safe enough for me to doss down for the night. The next morning I went to find where the others were located, which I found to be in a warehouse with a roof on it

13:00 and a little garden where we eventually had our vegetables.

What happened to the petrol truck?

I left that with the keys with the...not the...with a senior NCO who was in charge of the transport. It was in his hands then.

So you got to this area where

13:30 **you set up a bit of a camp, and you mentioned they. Who were your colleagues or associates?**

These were the other volunteer drivers plus the NCO in charge of the transport.

Were they all RAAF men?

All RAAF.

So did you continue to be a driver on Tarakan?

No.

What were your activities once you had left that truck?

We had to wait then for the

14:00 strip to be taken. Some of them were detailed to unload some of the landing craft. They had their shelters, their trenches because we were being troubled with snipers up in the trees. In fact while I was waiting for the king tide to turn, I did go ashore

14:30 to where some of our other fellas were and we were struck with a sniper. The whole damn place opened up on him and he must have been shredded by the fire. He fell. They always had rope around their bodies in case they were killed.

15:00 They just dropped down.

He was up a tree, was he?

Yes, up a palm tree.

You saw the body fall?

Yes.

Did he strike anyone before he was killed?

No, not that I'm aware of.

So from this point on, what was your job on Tarakan?

When they found they couldn't get the strip ready in time for

15:30 the Balikpapan show, and the still had the Labuan and Brunei invasion to concern themselves with, about 50 of us were selected to go up to the Philippines. We operated on an island called Tawi Tawi in the Jolo group, which is a group of islands between

16:00 British North Borneo and the Philippines. We went up there with the idea of staying a fortnight and we went up by LCTs, which were landing craft tanks, but because we had motor vehicles, bombs and gasoline, they had to use these things because they had to get up as close as they could to the shore.

16:30 **Just to clarify, the purpose of your trip to these islands was to do what?**

To service the aircraft that were using the strip for the invasion

17:00 of Brunei and Sarawak.

Ok, and the LCTs were travelling across the sea? Were they on any other sort of craft? Or were they just landing craft tanks...

I think the top speed was about 8 knots.

Could you just describe to me what a LCT is?

Well, I suppose the best way to describe it is an oversized punt. You know, where you drive in one side and ...

- 17:30 I don't know how many engines it had. We used to gain about 8 knots an hour. There were three of them. The stores were divided equally. When we got to Tawi Tawi, we came right up as far as we could
- 18:00 and then it just dropped the front of it and we drove the trucks off. We had the choice then of rolling out the 44 gallon drums of octane petrol. The strange thing about this airstrip, the Japanese had prepared it and I think it was in operation for two days
- 18:30 before the Americans arrived. So the Japanese built an airstrip and the Americans took it over straight away. I guess we were on Tawi Tawi for about...well we were destined to be there for about a fortnight, but instead of that we were there for about six weeks because they couldn't supply these LCT's
- 19:00 back to us, so we could get back to Tarakan.

What did you do during that six weeks?

We used to visit the local markets and do a bit of fishing and that sort of thing?

So you had a fair amount of interaction with the locals?

Yes. There wasn't a lot on the island. It was only a small island. It was just big enough for an airstrip, just a few huts and a market place.

These were Philippine people?

Yes.

What sort of people were they?

- 19:30 They were quite friendly with us. They were aware that the Americans had been there and they appreciated that they were being released from the Japanese overall command. We had no trouble with them at all. They were quite friendly.

And so what were

- 20:00 **your living conditions like during those six weeks?**

The old tent and the open air fireplace for cooking. One of our fellas selected himself to be the cook while the rest of us did the hard manual work, which was to go up to the strip and see the aircraft off and help with the bombing up that they had to do. Replenishing

- 20:30 the ammunition for their guns.

So was that your day to day activity as well?

Yes.

So you were doing a full range of things, which was taking you further than an armourer in the first place. There were more duties, weren't there?

Yes, we were doing it as a matter of course, a matter of everyday experience.

Was malaria an issue around this time?

I got a dose of dengue fever there.

- 21:00 I suppose I was a bit careless. Being so close to the sea I thought it would be free of any infestation of malarial mosquitoes. I went down with dengue fever which is akin to malaria.

And what were the symptoms?

Headaches, perspiration, tiredness.

How long did that last?

I was in the hospital which was another canvas

- 21:30 arrangement. I was in there for about four days, I think it was.

Were you taking Atebrin?

Oh yes, yes, yellow as anything. One thing I must mention too, we had a lot of trouble with the Huks, which were the Communist Filipinos. They'd come down at night and fill the petrol tanks of the aircraft with coral dust.

- 22:00 **What was their problem?**

They were trying to gain independence...or we presumed that was what they were after - the communist takeover of South East Asia. Invariably our...until we woke up to what was causing all these crashes, the aircraft would take off, gain a couple of hundred feet and the engines would cut out because of this coral dust.

22:30 They would go straight into the sea.

And there were fatalities as a result?

Oh yes, and quite a number. I've got the record there that shows the number of aircraft lost in one day and the number of pilots and crew.

In one day?

Yes.

On average how many were you losing a day?

Well, that was the worst of them. I think it was about three aircraft, one after the other.

23:00 **And obviously a check and inspection was done afterwards to find out what had caused it?**

Yes, and we found the coral dust, so we had to mount...or double the guard on the aircraft.

How did you know the Communist Philipinos had done it?

Well, who else was there you see.

So you were aware of them around the district?

Yes.

What was their attitude?

We didn't see them face to face. They would only come out at night. Incidentally, on Tawi Tawi was the scene

23:30 of some Australians who had escaped from Sarawak. They got into a leper colony and they knew... somebody had advised them that the Japanese were dead scared of lepers, so they knew that while they were in the leper colony the Japs wouldn't touch them. The idea was that they were preparing to get away from

24:00 the island and they made their way over to the Philippines. This was where they were doing guerrilla work, and when General MacArthur heard about their activities he arranged for a submarine to take a number of them off and take them back to interrogate them and see what...this is when they learned of the atrocities the Japanese were inflicting on

24:30 our troops.

At Sandakan, I think.

Yes.

I've heard of these men before. They were called the Bahala 8 and they had actually escaped from a camp near Sandakan. One of them, Rex Blow ended up in the Z Special Unit.

One in particular got back after all this and he was a timber getter by trade and ...he was a Queenslander, and he was out in the bush

25:00 cutting a tree and a branch came down, hit him and killed him outright.

A widow maker.

Yes.

After going through so much. So right, how long were you actually on Tawi Tawi? Six weeks I think you said?

Yes, six weeks.

And at the end of that six weeks?

These LCTs came along and took us back to Tarakan.

25:30 **For how long were you on Tarakan before you returned to Australia?**

Well, in between Tarakan and getting home we also covered the Balikpapan invasion, which was also an Australian invasion. We were kept busy there.

Now did you take part in the first wave of that invasion?

No, we were stationed on Tarakan.

26:00 The air force used Tarakan as a base. They used to go out on sorties on a daily basis.

What was your involvement in the Balikpapan invasion?

61 OBU was the operational base unit, and our job was to see that the aircraft were maintained, in addition to the squadron

- 26:30 armament crowd and other engineers. But my purpose there...I didn't ask for it, I was given the task of being on strip duty. I had to be there every day. In the case of an accident I was to get the
- 27:00 pins from the pilot to put into the bombs before I released them. The idea was to get the bombs off the aircraft in case of a fire and get the aircraft out of way. Then I'd proceed to disarm the bombs. In a lot of cases I would have to rip the tail off and take the detonator out of the tail and then do the same thing with the nose of the bomb
- 27:30 before they could be rendered safe. Then I would just kick the bomb onto the side of the runway and let somebody else worry about picking it up. I was left with the detonators. Even the heat of your hand was enough to set the detonators off, so I had to be pretty damn careful. The hot weather too is another major factor
- 28:00 with detonators, so I would carry them around until I was relieved.

How long did you do that?

Until the hostilities finished. By this time I was

You were fairly jittering, were you?

Yes, after doing a number of these...making the bombs safe.

So are we looking at weeks, months?

Weeks.

Weeks, yeah.

- 28:30 Then the activities started to slow down. By this time Balikpapan was more or less contained so there was very little flying done after that.

So this disarmament of the bombs was your sole activity during that period, was it?

Yes. I was on the strip duty.

So you used the motion of the shaking of the hands, and I used the word jittery, but what impact did it have on you?

- 29:00 I would think the next one might be my last. Besides I wanted relief anyway and I reckoned I had been doing enough. So after the trip to Tawi Tawi and back again, on the open sea, it started to tell on me.

In what ways?

I just felt I needed somebody to take over

- 29:30 and give me a bit of a break because I wasn't getting any relief whatsoever. I don't know whether the sergeant had it in for me or not, but it seemed to me to be that way.

That he kept you on the job?

Yes.

Were you doing it by yourself?

I was the sole armourer, and I had to be there when they took off and when they came back. So if a plane crashed on its return

- 30:00 I would have to make sure that the guns were cleared before anything happened.

So this must have been very stressful?

Yes it was. I didn't mind it for a while, but day after day and having the same thing happen. You see with the strip at Tarakan, as I said earlier, they didn't have the ballast

- 30:30 to fill the holes, the bomb craters, so they had to get these steel strips laid right across the runway. In wet weather with the mud and the grease and so forth, the plane was inclined to slip off a bit, and if the pilot wasn't ok,

- 31:00 it could...as one did happen, run off the strip and into the mud and get bogged. He was up on his nose like that.

So after this number of weeks you were...what happened to you then?

Some of the fellows were getting early release and going home and for some reason I seemed to be missing out.

- 31:30 It wasn't until November of 1945 that I heard about a little RAAF supply boat, which is only about half the size of a Manly ferry, it was in port and it was due to sail the next morning for Cairns. It had space for about
- 32:00 15 personnel. So I thought, "I've had enough of this place." So I made an appointment with whoever was in charge to see if I could get my name on the list, and luckily I managed to get it. There weren't any...we were deck passengers. All we had was a tarpaulin
- 32:30 over us and we ate and slept there. The crew of course had their own quarters. It was only about 175 ton. We sailed from Tarakan down through the Celebes down the Timor Sea and around...we stopped at Torres Strait because of the numerous islands that were there and there was supposed to be a mine field. The captain
- 33:00 decided to play it safe and he would anchor on the far side of the Strait until daylight and we'd pick up the anchor and go hell for leather to get through. We finished up landing at Cairns. This was after about 12 days mind you. So we...
- 33:30 all disembarked and made our way up to...we used to call it the transit camp. We made ourselves known and we asked if we could get down to Townsville. We changed our guilders into pounds, shillings and pence. From Townville we got onto a troop train
- 34:00 and went from Townsville straight through, stopping only for meals to Sydney. We arrived in Sydney on the 23rd of December, so I was able to have Christmas at home. I was the last of the family to get home to. My brother had been wounded on Tarakan and was evacuated. He'd been trying for years to get away on active service.
- 34:30 He saw 16 days on Tarakan and then got a bullet in the shoulder which shattered his shoulder, and then evacuated back to Sydney. After 16 days...he had been trying all those years to get away and...
- I believe that was the war for a lot of people though. Waiting and waiting to go into action...or maybe not going into action at all.**
- 35:00 **Where were you when the war ended?**
- I was on Tarakan. Yes, we heard the broadcast and we saw the celebrations...or we had our own celebrations of course. The swords were going up, anything at all. Guns were being fired.
- There was great jubilation.**
- Yes, there was.
- 35:30 It was all over and we had all got through safely. The only thing left was to try and get home as quick as possible.
- And when were you demobbed?**
- In January 1946, after five years and eleven months, about that time.
- You've given us a summary of your life after the war,**
- 36:00 **when were you actually married?**
1951. A big event.
- How did you meet your wife?**
- A dance. And it wasn't a home wreckers either.
- Fair enough.**
- We had four children. Three boys and a girl, and we settled down to a normal married life. The children started arriving and
- 36:30 that's when I had to work harder. But it was good while it lasted.
- How long did it last?**
- About 22 years. I don't want us to go any further.
- 37:00 Just between ourselves, we split up and that was that.
- And of course you've maintained contact with mates from the war?**
- Yes, most of us belong to what we call the RAAF Malay Squadron Association, and of course over the years it's dissipated. There's not a great number, in fact on Anzac Day
- 37:30 there were only four that were able to march. Six turned up, the other two decided their hips and the knees wouldn't take the march around the city.

Did you march on Anzac Day?

I still march, yes.

In what ways do you think the war changed your life?

Well, going in as a raw teenager and coming out and being what I had been through

- 38:00 made me realise that life is very precious, after seeing so many horrible sights, pieces of personnel, my own people just hanging in the trees and that sort of thing. Pilots whose planes are on fire and they're unable to get out,
- 38:30 just going into the ground. All in all, I think we lost about seven pilots. The squadron itself has been confirmed having 32 aircraft shot down, which isn't too bad for an obsolete aircraft and pilots who were supposed
- 39:00 to be too old for combat.

That was all in Singapore?

Yes, Singapore.

Well our interview's coming to an end now, I was wondering if there's anything else you'd like to say before we finish?

There is a poem I'd like to recite if you'd like to have a look at it.

Sure, let's just switch off quickly.

I'd like to recite a poem at this stage. It's called "War Graves on Tarakan".

- 39:30 It's written and composed by Flying Officer Latham, the RAAF on Tarakan. Dated 24 June 1945.
- \n[Verse follows]\n Will you walk with me in the heat of the day\n Till we come to the crossroads on the way\n Of a dusty road on Tarakan.\n To the scene of the scheme of the war's mad plan.\n There are soldiers there in a little square\n Who will breathe no more of the dust filled air.\n
- 40:00 On the trails they died, by the road they rest\n
- With the foreign soil on each manly breast.\n On the crosses which mark the arid mounds\n Are the tails of courage which knew no bounds.\n Killed in action, died of wounds\n But the wasted lives are the war's worst ruins.\n You will see their mates at the gravesite's stand quietly\n Slouch hats held in hand.\n
- 40:30 And you may grieve as they will too\n
- For the hopes and the dreams that will not come true.\n In death these men have simple needs\n No separate tracks, no different creeds.\n For the soldiers who were never cold in life\n Are together in death as they were in strife.\n You may gaze at the flag that hangs from the mast\n To some of the men who were staunch to the last\n
- 41:00 And fancy you hear a quiet voice say\n
- Australia, my country. Will you reply?\n Will you warm my heart with daily bread\n To give the hungry mouth that you once fed\n For the sweat and the toil\n Of a fallen man who sleeps by the road\n On Tarakan.\n So when you return by the dusty road\n You may bear your share of a sacred load\n With a pride whose flame ignited them\n Will burn to the sound of the last Amen.\n

Well thank you very much Jim. And on behalf of myself and the entire project, it was a most wonderful interview.

Well, I hope I've made it informative to you both and to the War Memorial. I hope they'll find some reason to keep it.

I'm sure they will. Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS