

Australians at War Film Archive

Rowley Waddell-Wood - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1707>

**Some parts of this interview
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are
noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

- 00:36 **So no details right here, but to begin with thanks for being involved Rowley, we couldn't do it without your support, both from the office and us, thanks for being here.**
- It sounds very professional.
- I am glad you think so. To begin with we need a summary of your life, so without**
- 01:00 **giving any detail can you take us through in point form, starting from your childhood?**
- Yes okay, I was actually born in Moree and I stayed in New South Wales for four years, I had my fourth birthday with my grandparents near Moree and then moved to Queensland. So anything I remember from life in New South Wales, I know I was three years old or younger.
- 01:30 Life was very good, I had a lovely life and Mum and Dad were very good. I had an elder brother and sister and then me. Funnily enough they were called Jack and Jill and Rowley. It was on a farm, they had a lot of sheep, some crops. Dad wasn't a very tall fellow, I think looking back on it he was normal body and short
- 02:00 below the knees. Then we went to Queensland to Dulacca which is between Brisbane and Roma, which is about a hundred ks [kilometres] east of Roma and there we stayed until the Japanese got into Papua New Guinea. I was about ten or eleven then. Once again a farm, we had ten thousand acres. Great life, it really was. Barefoot little buggers; my
- 02:30 sister was probably the worst. We had horses everywhere, Rowley got the old ones; I ended up with about half a dozen plodding horses. But we would ride cattle and sheep and fat lambs, quite daredevils. Then at about eleven or twelve we sold that farm, we did run out of money. And then we had an orchard near Esk which is in the
- 03:00 Brisbane Valley. Once again, I am now eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, I am going to Esk State School, I have been back recently in the motor home, and it is a very nice little town. Then I stayed on the farm; they were poor but they sent me to Toowoomba Grammar School for two years. And so at the age of fifteen I left school. I didn't like it much.
- 03:30 I was definitely a country boy, and this came through all of my career and Vietnam, I am not saying the city slickers can't think but the country boys get pretty clever with tracking and smart and deception. That's how I saw it anyway. So I worked on the farm through my sixteenth year. I wasn't paid but I was delightfully happy. Learnt how to work of course,
- 04:00 and working with my brother as well, brother and father. Once again Mum and Dad were as good as you could possibly get. Then around about seventeen, Dad, unbeknownst to me had thought, "Son needs something, he is very mechanically minded and all of these sorts of things." So he got me a job and then told me, "With Warren Josephson," and then told me, "In Brisbane." They were caterpillars, big caterpillar

- 04:30 men. And I was going to be their trainee exec type fellow to go up through the engineering system and be management type shall we say. I stared at two dollars and thirty-five cents, and if you think that's per day, per week. I did over a year there and they treated me well but my God I was certainly like an
- 05:00 apprentice, and I was doing the hard work all right. I worked with a Welshman, obviously called Taffy and he said, "Son you should join the Fleet Air Arm." And I had no idea what it was. So that was 1948 and a bit of '49. And strangely enough the Australian Fleet Air Arm started in 1948. I think he was referring to the Royal Navy, but here it was. I just took that on board and did
- 05:30 nothing. Then I ran away from Brisbane and made my way to Rocky where my father was at the time and my Mum, and pleaded that I could join the Fleet Air Arm. I always wanted to fly. And Dad finally relented and said, "Look son, they only have one intake a year. I will get you a job now harvesting wheat in Dalby with my old mates there." So I went to Dalby and I stayed there
- 06:00 over a year, the one paddock, wheat. Fantastic, and I did it all, the boss would send me out with...corned beef was two bob a pound. And he would send me with as much corned beef as I could carry and I would boil it up, perhaps I should come back to this later?

Yeah we will come back, but we have to rush through a bit now.

So I ended up somewhere in Western Queensland, jumped

- 06:30 a rattler and things like that. And I was poking around Thargomindah and an aeroplane flew over and it was about the only aeroplane I had seen for a few months and it was a Dakota DC3 and I was on the ground and a bit upset about that silly so and so flying there and I couldn't. And so I came into Thargomindah, had a haircut, saw an ad to join the
- 07:00 navy, calling for Fleet Arm Pilots, great stuff. So I went along and of course I was a month too late for that year. I mean I was now getting on to nineteen odd. So I put that aside, I came down to Brisbane, and I had the great fortune actually of meeting Elaine on her eighteenth birthday. Which, she has now just turned seventy.
- 07:30 Fell in love, moved to Brisbane, got a job, trainee exec, always seemed to be trainee exec for me—different from fencing through and chasing sheep—at G. J. Coles in Queen Street and they worked my butt off for eighteen months. Somewhere in there I had joined, and in those days you had physicals which I did, an eyesight test, for which you
- 08:00 go to Wickham Terrace, the navy doesn't have any medico's there or doctors, they send you out into the community. And he gave me a little brown envelope after my eyesight test, I raced home to my future mother-in-law, and once again smart enough to steam it open before I returned this thing unopened to the navy authorities at HMAS Moreton.
- 08:30 That started my spooking intelligence life as we call it and I had failed, my left eye was not good enough. And so I did give up and I spent the next two years boarding in a house next door to Elaine with bedrooms looking at each other, so we had a lovely courtship. And two years later I must have been twenty-one
- 09:00 the lieutenant commander from Moreton wrote to me and said, Hey son, he must have taken a shine to me, not that way of course, like navy. He wrote and said, "The eyesight standard has dropped and I felt that you would get through, son, to be a pilot." Mind you, you have got to get through even if you are accepted. So I went to Wickham Terrace and sure enough there was the same fellow there, the optometrist, and he said, "I have seen you before, son." And I said, "Yes, but better this time; they have
- 09:30 dropped the standards." He raced around the room for a few minutes looking for Australian Naval Orders because hardly ever saw any navy people anyway and he couldn't find them, and he said, "I don't think so son, I have never heard that they have lowered the standards." And of course I nearly cried, I was really upset. So he did all of the tests there, where is the red line, where is this and that? And once again he wrote it
- 10:00 all out and put it in a little brown OHMS [On Her Majesty's Service] envelope, and gave it to me to take to the navy. I once again raced home to see my, probably fiancée by them, future mother-in-law. Steamed the thing opened, I passed. Well I couldn't believe it. He must have taken pity on me. So it was a bit of luck, but of course straight after that I did join, March 26th
- 10:30 '54. Jumped on a train, God knows how long it took to get to Melbourne, there were four of us, and very quickly I will say I think there were several hundred applied that year, nineteen of us turned up at Melbourne. Then after a few months, nineteen of us were sent back to Archerfield, which of course is in Brisbane and in those days was
- 11:00 seven or eight miles from Elaine's place, and I had a car too. We were flying Tiger Moths, a few months there. To Uranquinty in Wagga, Tiger Moths and Wirraways and I wasn't doing that well, I was a plodder. And I had left school at fifteen and some of these things went onto logarithms and things and I didn't even know the word, let alone spell it.
- 11:30 So there was a lot of hard work in there and I can't pat myself there really because someone must have

put a lot of effort in. And then to Point Cook onto Wirraways and finally in August '55, passing out., By the time of course passing down to eleven and then to five. Five navy pilots got their RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] wings, the RAAF were quite happy then because they had got their wings, ours

12:00 then were provisional. We had to go to the Royal Naval Air Station at Albatross which is at Nowra, so if I talk of Albatross that's an airfield, a stony frigate at Nowra. We had to fly the heavy beasts, the big fighters and things like that which were Fireflies. And we lost two of us, down to three

12:30 and I was going to fly the fighter bombers Fireflies, V12 engine, very nice, Rolls Royce engine, very nice, Rolls Royce Griffin. Good old aircraft. And later we lost one more of us; he flew into the ground at night. He had been selected for the fighter side, Sea Furies and things like that so I was moved across to Sea Furies and then there were only two of us left.

13:00 So Jim and I, Junior we called him, he had joined at seventeen and a half, I was twenty-two so he was junior and I was the old fellow. So we both flew Furies which is the best fighter in the whole world. Delightful. The week before wings I had planned to marry. We had planned and booked the cathedral in Brisbane

13:30 about a year before wings, because wings parade was supposed to finish before, but we had run into some bad weather. And I remember flight lieutenant, now a flight lieutenant is nothing much these days but I was scared stiff of the flight lieutenant when I was a probationary naval airman. He called me in and said, "Listen son, we're behind in our schedule, we

14:00 are going to have to fly all weekend. We're strafing and bombing you see," and I must have thought, "Oh my God, my mother-in-law is going to kill me, let alone Elaine." And before I crumpled he said, "No, just joking son, you can have the weekend off." Funny fellow. Went up and down, and of course we turned up at Albatross, Nowra, married. It's a no, no. No one had told us, we had planned this and courted for years,

14:30 and so they didn't mind, but I was the first navy pilot through and I was twenty-two or twenty-three and I was married and living in town. And I remember the boss calling me in and saying, "Listen you're a sloppy slow sleepy son of a so and so and if you don't buck up I will make you live on board, in the officers' quarters, that will separate

15:00 you from Elaine." So it got to that, I was still working hard to get there. Somehow or other I bucked up and got through., and then we had to do deck landings, and that was why our wings were provisional, we had to do all of that. I was terribly lucky with deck landings on a straight deck on the HMAS Sydney because the

15:30 Melbourne had come with a sloped deck and they had just paid old Sydney off for deck landing with Sea Furies, I would have probably killed myself. But we did plenty of dummy deck landing on an airfield with a batsman, he brings you in and you sit on somewhere between eighty-eight and ninety-two knots and when the batman says, "Cut!" you cut

16:00 and the whole things fall out of the sky because you really are just hanging there above the stall. Really hanging there on nearly full power, cut the power and bag you're in. So although I didn't land on board, I did the theory. I am probably not going fast enough.

Yeah we will come back to all of these details, just to rush you through the summary I will get you to tell me in point form or a list, where your postings were after you did get your wings?

16:30 So got the naval wings and I flew around for about a year in '56. In '57 I was selected for a jet conversion which we did in twin Vampires and then you went solo in Venoms, which was the night fighter Venom (Sea Venom). And then of course front line service; 808 Squadron on board HMAS Melbourne, away from home for six months

17:00 up to Japan, out to Honolulu, over to New Zealand down to Hobart, probably Melbourne in '58. So the progression there had been all forward. And then '59 someone else went to sea on the Melbourne and I just sat at home on a training squadron, very boring. Got into aerobatics then, formation aerobatics and then '61, similar to that. A bit of luck in '61, I was twenty-eight

17:30 years of age, we ran out of COs [Commanding Officers] on squadron and I was posted as a full squadron commander which is pretty good. And we got really stuck into formation aerobatics, and around that time I was leader of the aerobatic team. Quickly I should say we were the only team in the world landing four aircraft at once at that time, not even the Blue Angels could do that.

18:00 Then I turned into thirty years of age, and I could see the writing on the wall, as a CO I was not as fast as my young pilots, and in those days we didn't have missiles, it was air to air gunnery, and air to air to ground rocketing and strafing, it was dog fighting stuff. I was losing that but I have

18:30 been given a permanent commission, the navy said, "Please stay for all of your life," because I was only there for the eight years. This is where Jim dropped out and he went civil aviation so I was the only one of my initial group left. Rotary Wing, I said I had better go into Rotary Wing, I told everybody I was going to do the next course and soon enough somebody heard. And I went into Rotary Wing, came out of that very keen,

- 19:00 I came out of that a real professional now, not just an old farm hand swanning around flying like I had always wanted to do. I realised there was a profession here so I got professional and got stuck into it. Loved Rotary Wing. Selected to go to the Royal Air Force, UK [United Kingdom] of course for an instructor's course, helicopter instructor. And then instead coming home, two and a half years with the
- 19:30 Royal Navy in Cornwall, kids and all. Wonderful. Moving from one service to the other was easy; we did do a lot of work with the Royal Navy. Three years and three weeks in UK. Came back very quickly in '66, went to things called Wessex, anti-submarine helicopters, big stuff. Senior pilot, that's 2IC [Second in Command],
- 20:00 luckily enough the CO was an observer, navigator we called him. So although I was senior pilot I was really CO; when we flew I was the leader. A year and a half at that and then my boss went to navy office and was promoted and I was then posted in '67 as flight deck officer, that's one hell of a job.
- 20:30 On the Melbourne, that's of course being at sea again. And then half of my friends were selected to go to Vietnam with the American army Assault Helicopter Company. That put my nose out of joint so at the end of '67 I was CO of this Wessex Squadron, the Wessex Squadron was being updated to better acoustics and better
- 21:00 submarine finding equipment and I was cut down to half a squadron. And half of the pilots and observers and that got a bit boring towards the end of '67, although we did embark on the Sydney, raced around to Adelaide and picked up 3 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment], virtually the whole battalion, and took them up Christmas '67 to Vung Tau,
- 21:30 come back. And by this time I had offered me services to the posting officer, and instead of saying, "Look send me to Vietnam." I said, "Look, send my whole squadron, the boys as well." I didn't tell them but that's when my old CO rang and said, "I have got you a job in Vietnam but I am sorry it is with 9 Squadron RAAF." So I haven't flown an Iroquois at this stage. So in
- 22:00 February '68 I had a quick conversion, virtually in two weeks. I had a ride in the morning and in the afternoon I went solo and then I did twenty or thirty hours. And then the worst thing happened on the 29th of February '68, my friend was killed in Vietnam. This was hard news; I will expand on this later. And because I was going
- 22:30 I came to Fairbairn here in Canberra, 5 Squadron, where I met all of the blokes who over the months were going to go into 9 Squadron RAAF in Iroquois. So at this time I was instructing on Iroquois and I could hardly instruct myself at that stage, but I did meet all of the fellows who were going to go and a lot of the fellows coming back from 9, coming back to 5. We did a lot of work, met the CO of 9
- 23:00 who was going to go up there a few weeks after me and got on very well and he is probably one of the best leaders I have ever seen to this day. I can name him later. Got to Vietnam in May and straight into it so and there is the whole year I will talk about later.

May '69?

No May '68, came back in April '69.

We will come back to all of that. Quickly when you came back from Vietnam what were your...?

- 23:30 It was threatened that I would be promoted, but to be promoted to commander which was the big jump, I had to do sea time and I had to become what we called a fish head and sail a destroyer or fighter destroyer. So I came back and went straight to sea. I spent a year at sea through to
- 24:00 June of '70. From March of '66 to June of '70, it was about four and a half years. It was straight, what the navy terms front line service, away from family. But sometimes was the year in Vietnam, several weekends at sea. Some weekends of course I would be home or leave; I could be home, but it was four and half years away from family.
- 24:30 '70 was a golden era because it had been promulgated that I would get a decoration, that was fine. I wasn't allowed to wear the ribbon until it was invested and pinned upon me. Well on the 1st of January I was selected for command
- 25:00 and if I kept my nose clean, six months later I would be a marvellous commander with scrambled eggs and all of that on your hat too. In May the 1st, actually the Queen was here in country for some reason and I was invited to come along to Government House Sydney and she pinned the medal on me.
- 25:30 I am quite pleased I am getting through this. This has always been a sticking point, because I am certainly not a monarchist really, I am Australian, but it was nice, an Imperial decoration and everyone seems to understand what those initials are. And we had a little chat, and I am not allowed to talk about that, what she said to me and what I said to her. But after that
- 26:00 there was certainly a lot of us there and a lot of my navy friends who had gone away with the American army they were there too, they deserved medals. So after that in the garden party it only took a few minutes, I will tell you about the champagne later and a few other things. I was promoted to commander on the 30th of June and went straight to Canberra to the

- 26:30 Joint Services Staff College. Seeing we lived in Nowra at the time, this gave me another few months away from my family. I lived in Brassy House here with overseas students and particularly the Kiwis. Made a lot of friendships and then sold in Nowra, sold the private home and bought in Canberra.
- 27:00 We had two years in that house, and then after the course started, of '71 now, I was a navy officer, director of personnel services. I had eighteen months there and of course I didn't like it at all, but I had been promoted out of a flying job. And then one day another director of
- 27:30 officers' postings came in and said, I am ahead of myself, "What are you doing here? Get yourself across to the library and Foreign Affairs, you're going to look after VIPs [Very Important Persons], be escort around Australia for a few weeks." And of course it was Haille Selassie's grandson.
- 28:00 I did that and I will get onto it. And then the Defence called me around after going around Australia, which I loved, it was a hell of a nice thing to do, called me in and I thought they were going to debrief on Haille Selassie the man, and they said, "No, do you know what you're here for Rowley?" "No idea, debrief?" And they said, "No. We're interviewing you for the job of Defence Attaché Manila."
- 28:30 I have just remembered not to stand up here on camera. I just stood up and I said, "Yes." And they said, "Sit down Rowley." Because they were very high officials in Defence, a few admirals and so on. And they said, "Sit down Rowley, we're only interviewing you." Anyway I waited ten days and I was selected at the end of '72 to go to Manila as defence attaché. I couldn't get out of Canberra and the navy office quick enough. So I had two years in Manila,
- 29:00 with Mr Marcos, martial law, all of that stuff we will go back to. Came back from Manila and there was a job in navy office and it was director of naval safety, that was right up my office, I enjoyed it very much, I worked only with navy, my office had a lieutenant commander, a sailor, a leading seaman and me, and I answered only to one chap, one admiral.
- 29:30 And that was very good for eighteen months, and I could have stayed on there forever but I was getting itchy feet and we decided, I had always had mud running through my veins, a farmer. Perhaps it comes from my mother's side, my father's side and obviously I had realised for about thirty years I had been very keen at looking for ground, mainly more agriculture than sheep. So end of '75 we
- 30:00 looked at a property and bought it on the spot and then realised of course that I would have to leave the navy and there you are. Then I had twenty-five years farming.

All right, well that brings us very comprehensively though your career. More detail than I expected but very good that we got there. Family life, did you have children? What happened there?

- 30:30 Eighteen months after we were married, November the 7th '56 we had our son Peter and I must tell everyone of course, you must have children, it is just the most delightful thing. It was wonderful, perhaps it is the way I have been brought up and Elaine and of course now we have our son. And I know where he is right now, he is almost on my shoulder, in fact he lives just three hundred
- 31:00 yards away, thank goodness. More later, he is in Foreign Affairs, so we haven't seen a lot of him. Then in '58 and remember I sailed all around the world in '58 but I was home in September for Sue, just plain Sue, no second name. A delight. I know where she is right now too. She is a paramedic and she is in
- 31:30 her forties, but a paramedic, delighted with her. These have helped me of course through other traumas I have had. This is why I am retired here, walking distance or riding a bike distance, but oh my God, not often. We'll say it the other way, third daughter Gay 1962, she walks the dogs around here occasionally, she is here a few times a week and of
- 32:00 course she has a marvellous fantastic sixteen year old daughter; granddaughter. We spend a lot of time together. So these have been a delight and are still a delight. Peter has two daughters, granddaughters nearly five and one and a bit. And as I say three hundred steps and we're there. Not that we're living on their doorstep. Once a week we will see them and phone calls.
- 32:30 These three, as I developed some twitchiness ex-Vietnam and nightmares and things, very much on side. We're a very close family with a lot of care. I have learnt not to
- 33:00 have a stiff upper lip, the old British thing, a more touchy feely person, so there is a fair bit of hugging and so on going on. They know how to help me and counsel me, very subtly of course, but it counts.

Well from your immediate family now I want to go right back you your childhood and I

- 33:30 **want you to start by telling me about your mother and father and where this mud came from, in your veins?**

Well we can start with Mother who kept us on the straight and narrow. Her chastisements were immediate. If you did something wrong she had the longest damn arm, I could never work out how she reached me sometimes, but I always got a slap on the bum for not doing the right

- 34:00 thing or quick enough or whatever. Her family were landed and they had eleven children in Mum's

family. There were hardships at times, eleven living children, Mum was born in '04, we will get onto Dad soon, the worst thing happened when Mum's two eldest brothers were twenty-eight and twenty-six,

34:30 they were at Gallipoli and I have done a lot of reading and I know where they are, and of course they went into the trenches in the Western Front in '16 and for all of those fellows it was dreadful. And at Broodseinde on the way to Passchendaele through the Menin Gate and Ypres, both on the same day, they both died.

35:00 **What did you hear about your uncles' stories when you were growing up?**

Those ones, nothing. The family just locked in so there were nine left in my mother's family and they didn't really talk. It was after Vietnam I suppose and I had to really dig it out myself, my mother having died in '66.

35:30 And Dad went on until 1990. But no, they didn't talk. All I know, [CW] Bean [war correspondent] wrote a fair bit about it, I have looked it up through the archives. One had the military cross and no one had found out how, but I have found out when and how

36:00 he did it. We have been to the Mennen Gate a few times and we have been to the battlefield. Bean wrote very explicitly, by yards almost and times. I must say of course the bodies were never found, and so they're on the Mennen Gate and some of the forty-five thousand with no known grave.

36:30 I have been to all of the cemeteries, but from what Bean was saying and how close the battalions were I am sure I walked on the ground that JST Rigby walked on. And then just a little later and just over the hill the ridge they called I, it Broodseinde and Ydsonibec, and those country towns did really have a crossroads and they're still there; of course they have been there for

37:00 hundreds of years. The old buildings are still there. This is the old ancient Europe. So you can get there.

Why do you think their story was never taken pride in or told in your mother's family?

I think there was so much trauma. And of course in those days they talked about the diggers having shell shock and of course we know it is other things. Different names. And I think that family too, I did know later that two

37:30 teachers came on the one day and that's for the boys, they called them the boys. Mum was fifteen when they died. So I know now looking back how it would happen to the family. Now I know JST Rigby was Jack Stanley Thomas. My brother is called Jack.

38:00 Mum's slightly elder brother Les Rigby, his son is called Frank. In my library here I have found books that I hadn't read until my parents died and these books are as old as time sort of thing, 1920s,

38:30 and after studying them closely and extracts of Bean's as well, low and behold of course, it is a history of that 21st battalion. So I have done a lot of study of that. And here it has been in my library all of my life, my father's library, my mother's library. And no one talked. I stumbled upon it only several years ago.

39:00 **What were your contacts with your mother's family growing up, obviously you have a large...?**

Yes it is very good because out of Moree the family had started way down, well the Corns had come to Burrow and Morgan and in Mount Gambier and Horsham and so it was wheat and gold and things like that in Ballarat, but

39:30 always land to the north, 1900 and before, it was always cheaper. And the old fellow we called him Fardy, L Tos Rigby, he was a good grandfather, Mum's father. What they did, he bought a property for every one of his sons. Not daughters as usual.

40:00 And I remember the two youngest sons, younger than my Mum, Art and Claude, were sent to Queensland on horseback to look out for land and they came back from near Roma, Taroom, Miles, Wandoan, and said, "It's good country up there Dad." And he said, "Right, go and buy it son." And that's why in '36 when I was four years old

40:30 my father then moved up too and bought a property. So everyone was coming north and getting bigger properties and able to finance them and things like that. So we were very close. We had an uncle Bob who lived in Brisbane with my grandfather and grandmother. Uncle Claude was at Wandoan. Uncle Art had a couple of cattle

41:00 properties beside him, with twelve men working the cattle. I mean this was big stuff. We were near Dulacca with ten thousand acres. Les Rigby also went to Dulacca, South Dulacca about twenty miles away. Had a property and his three sons, one, as I said, Frankie.

00:30 **Tell us about Dulacca what was the place like up there, obviously huge?**

Yes it was huge, thank goodness one of our boundaries was along the great western train line and the little town of Dulacca. Single street

01:00 and people just lived on one side and the train line was the other. We were about a mile away so we just walked to school when I finally got to the age of five. During the period though the great number of my mother's family were scattered up the east coast of Australia. Some of the girls had married and lived in Melbourne or Sydney. But there was contact all of the time. I remember

01:30 Mother getting a letter of something like thirty pages. Somehow or other they would have a letter from their sister add their letter and pass it on. There was a system untold to me how you could get the news from everybody, about every month or so. And then I couldn't understand how when Mother wrote, she was the last of the chain

02:00 and sent it on, how it all started again and who took the month old letter out and added new, and these went around and around. Also family visits. Now in those days in the country, people came and stayed for weeks. And this happened post World War II, we had a few prisoners of war in the family, to get them going again, everybody seemed to have a property, meat and milk and fresh air, had work and good company.

02:30 And these fellows were passed around for a year or two. Some of the worst cases. So Dulacca, yes, covered in prickly pear, barefoot boys hot, we didn't really complain. I loved the sports day at the war memorial where the ground was so hot and I grabbed my mate by the legs and I wheel barrowed him

03:00 along on his front legs, and at the other end, we were having a race of course and he picked me up and we were coming back and either I took longer strides with my hands, but I know they were hot. Here I was a boy of eight and I had the greatest biggest blisters one has ever seen on my hands just from doing a wheelbarrow race. That's how hot it was. Bindy eyes, what you could do was sort of hop on one leg and scratch the other, get the

03:30 rid of them. Cactus there, we were getting rid of it because on our property was the scientific research for the cactoblastis moths which gave the larvae grubs which ate that cactus. And in season of course I would be on the way home and I would eat. I know I didn't have a knife and I don't know how I did it but I would take the prickly pear fruit and somehow be able to skin it.

04:00 Clever I think now. I was terrified of snakes of course. I fished nearly every day, there was a creek running past us, it didn't rain that often. The old homestead was over a hundred of years of age. Dunny outside, long block we'll call it. A lot of Dad's belts went there. Dad was the one who took a week

04:30 to decide or he held it through to Saturday or whatever. And it was into his office bend down and he would take his belt off and give us a few smart whacks. That kept the discipline going. But boy, he lost a few belts down the dunny, oh yes.

What would he be inclined to discipline you for?

It would be something he didn't catch us at, something Mother reported; it was a bigger misdemeanour than a quick slap on the bum from

05:00 Mum. I can't remember what they were. They were always fair, so there was not really pain attached to that. But we used to get back at him by that. He was a character too; he was a funny man he had a lot of jokes to tell. When people visited for a week or so they would sit up at a roaring log fire of course and each joke reminded him of another one,

05:30 and he could laugh at them himself and others would tell jokes, and I laughed a couple of days; your belly was so sore from laughing. Quite a character. We could work together as I said we have done without talking and it was a nice thing. As I got older I would work beside him and I could see he needed a certain spanner or something, and he would reach around and start, and I had it in my hand waiting and I would take the other away.

06:00 Until one day when I was about nineteen, dear old Dad—we had some very big spanners, tools called stilson and wrenches and one wasn't working it was slipping and I could see him getting pretty wild which was pretty unusual for Dad. Anyway I had another one and he was getting worse and worse and of course he slipped and banged his knuckle and then he stood up and picked up this stilson which was a couple of feet long.

06:30 And I left, I had no idea, I had never seen him so furious. All he did was whirr it around his head and throw it in the creek. And then fine, that was done, he got rid of that. I have seen my brother do something similar, it was hilarious actually.

What did you have on the property?

We had pretty well all sheep. I don't remember too many cattle, I

07:00 don't remember many rabbits, I do remember dingoes and dingo drives. We had snakes of course. We had a stockman who rode around every day. We had more men of course at shearing time. But the stockman, Dad was with it as a farmer, he would give the stockman a small bag of seed and all day long

the

07:30 stockman would throw out, in the right season just a few little seeds. And that would have been a phalaris type and a Rhodes grass, improved pasture. We would see Harry on our way home from school and all three of us would hang on his stirrup and say, "How many snakes did you kill today Harry?" And Harry always killed about eight or nine you know, he probably didn't. But he held us spellbound when I was six, seven,

08:00 eight, and nine. So it was mainly sheep and wool.

Were there any Aborigines on your farm?

None at all. Dulacca didn't seem to have any Aborigines, there might have been a few further out and I didn't have any contact with them. It was interesting because this was a huge old homestead and there was a huge old bell outside and a couple of rings, to ring the bell, that was in the late 1800s,

08:30 anyone come home, the Aborigines are here. For us and Mum it was 'come home'. It was a bit like leaving the back porch light on, but we didn't have electricity so she couldn't leave the porch light on to 'come home now kids', but she would ring the bell.

Where would you be? What would you be doing as a kid?

Only a couple of hundred yards away I would fish or swim. Or with a few mates, we had bows and arrows, we

09:00 had shanghais, we would shoot each other with these things, especially the bow and arrow. No one ever seemed to get their eyes pushed out. So we did games like that, water pistols. But I remember swimming a lot and fishing a lot. For hours. And then one year, 1938, we had a flood and I have got photographs of this creek, a hundred yards across and moving. And I do remember Mum, the clucky hen, one side and...

09:30 that was our five acre house yard, and the river just came up into the house yard. And we were the other side a hundred yards away, so my brother jumped in and swam across and my sister jumped in and swam across, and I was six. I think I was under six and Dad called me and I could see Mum jumping up and down, and I of course I swam across, who cares?

10:00 Dad called me; he reckoned I could swim across. He would have jumped in, I suppose. But the photos are interesting. Then of course one day, I was terrified of my sister, she could belt her elder brother and me the younger brother together. She could hold us down and pummel both of us. And one day I was fishing and I had taken a bit of time getting the line in

10:30 and there was the cat swallowed the meat and swallowed the hook and it was her cat. Oh my God, things were okay. I was sort of cutting this off the cat and hoping it would go through and fifty yards down the road I found my sister coming through. Well panic wasn't it? I said nothing. I cut the string before she got there. And duly a couple of days later I found the cat with a fish hook on its bum.

11:00 What do you remember about the war coming to Queensland?

Yes there is a good story there, because we were on the western line, after '42 when the Americans came into the war the amount of goods that came through the east coast and through the centre. Some came through over our house to Charleville and then up to Darwin. A lot went Brisbane and then up towards Longreach, Townsville

11:30 and Darwin, all day every day. And trains as well. But the planes, they would come in tens and twenties. Fighters, thirty or forty. And because we had a name on our homestead the odd American fighter would give it a circle at fifty feet to see where they were. Or wonder what that stupid kid was doing down there jumping up and down.

12:00 So this is where air came in. I know my father was terribly interested and always wanted to be a pilot. His came from World War I and particularly in the '20s and early '30s and the barnstorming of when they came back. And he did save up money and have rides in those barnstorming, I will call them, days. Yes talk about aeroplanes everywhere. And I got to know them all as well.

12:30 But the nice story comes, we bought that property in '36 from a people called the Cullafords. Changed their name a bit, German name. Don't think too harshly about Germans, they were probably several generation Germans as my other friend who was in Vietnam with my, Oroshime, sixth generation Australia. But a German of course.

13:00 It get complicated, my sixteen year old granddaughter is trying to understand, Japanese Germans, and Australia Japanese that are really Australians, multiculturalism it is these days. Cullaford but the sad part is they had a boy called Rob who was ten years older than I, so when I was nine he was nineteen and he joined the RAAF and pre-embarkation for

13:30 Britain and Bomber Command, you can almost read ahead of me here, he wished to spend his pre-embarkation leave at this old homestead. So once again there he was and he had a uniform and he had wings. And he told me lots and we worked together before and after school and weekends. He had to

get physically strong as well. And he bought out a shot for shot putting and I would do the measuring for him and

14:00 of course every now and again a few aeroplanes would fly over. Of course the sad thing, he was shot down over Germany.

What do you know of the aeroplanes, do you remember what types you would see?

Oh yes. All American, but of course we knew Spitfires and Hurricanes. We knew the early bombers; I didn't know all of the bombers they had so many. Wimpys and Wellingtons and A Stings and made them so quickly.

14:30 But the American ones, Boomerangs were interesting; I remember a lot of those. Some of them had white cowlings and later I had seen them in Brisbane, funnily enough flying out of Archerfield, and Archerfield was just a field, all of these fields were just fields and certainly World War I, that's how they got their name; field. Parafield is in

15:00 South Australia, just a big field, pretty flat. Yes the B25s, B29s; saw a lot of American ones and then of course I got to know a bit more about Hellcats and the American ones, I have forgotten now. I can bring back to mind Bearcats and things like that. But that has also grown on me since those days; I am trying to tell you what I knew as a kid.

15:30 But I sure did want to fly, there was no doubt about it and I didn't know why. This came later when a psycho got me and he kept saying, "Why did you want to fly?" until I used to nearly get angry. "I don't know, I just wanted to." And he would see me every month and asked me those six questions every time. And I suppose if I had shown steadiness, well you were a good old

16:00 steady bomber pilot but finally if you got angry you were probably a fighter pilot, that's all I can think of.

Was there a chance sometime in your childhood when you got to go up in a plane before you joined the navy?

No. The first time I have ever got more than several feet off the ground was at Archerfield in a Tiger Moth on my first flight. And I am amazed at that.

We will talk about that first flight a bit later. During the war your family moved, why was that?

16:30 Well we had run out of money. There was a rift between my father and his mother who was a stake holder, family history. Family fights. Anyway she was through and the property was sold and we moved to Esk. But I am not sure when it was now, I think it was '43.

17:00 Which rather ruined my schooling because I got to Esk State School and I should have been in a certain year and there was none that year for that, so I went up a grade. And it was the year of decimals and fractions, I remember, and boy it took me a long time to find out how fractions and decimals worked and how you could multiply a quarter by a quarter. So I missed

17:30 it entirely. Before that I really was a hundred per cent in maths, quick enough to do it and then quick enough to do it backwards, I always double check if I have got the time. And that reminds me of the questions they asked me when I was being interviewed for the army, things I didn't know about.

And what was Esk like

18:00 **compared to Dulacca?**

Esk we were four miles out of town . And we either rode a horse, bike or ran. Each way each day. My brother didn't like it. He finally I think talked his parents out of, so he could stop school about the age of fourteen. He was a big boy, big strong man.

18:30 And he worked on the orchard with Dad. Now I know we had six hundred Washington naval trees, that was just one paddock. We must have had a couple of thousand ordinary trees, but these were huge trees. Then we had different kinds of mandarins, lemons. We ate a lot of fruit and we knew which were the best of course, and of course we ate fruit at night,

19:00 and we had passionfruit. Uncle had several acres, that's a hell of a lot of passion fruit, and also he had a market garden. He lived a few miles away but if ever he wanted help in packing tomatoes or picking carrots or whatever else he had, Dad would offer his two sons. And we would go off through neighbours' paddocks and work all day

19:30 and we had a good work ethic, my brother and I; worked hard and we liked it and knew we were building our bodies as well, at this time, perhaps nineteen or sixteen for me. And then at quitting time my brother would always yell out, "Fifteen more minutes for the boss!" He must have got it from me Dad. You then doubled your pace, worked a lot harder and better and that was for the boss.

20:00 Free. We couldn't say really free because the whole damn day was free, no one ever paid us. And that put me in good stead with understanding business and bosses and things like that.

What was your father like as a boss rather than a father?

He really

- 20:30 was and later on just grew to be an older brother of mine. A delightful friendly older brother and we will get onto that later when I got my farm, no one ever believed I would get a farm, not even I. Certainly not my uncles who came and had a look at it, fell over themselves it was so good, I was just a lucky pick, it wasn't my brain at all. So but I remember Dad as the old man, old, he was just forty-three or something.
- 21:00 But I must have been showing off a bit, barefoot, and all around our house at Esk four miles out of town, we had a few milk cows, milking cows and so on, no other real beasts, no sheep, thank God. Couple of dogs, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Cooch grass. And we got to the gate of the house
- 21:30 and for some reason or another at five o'clock in the afternoon he said, "I will race you to the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK house son." A hundred and twenty metres. We were one. He had boots on, and I remember they were all hob nailed, he had twenty or thirty hobs in the things. And he went past me, the old fellow, you know. And that was something interesting. He must have just thought I will show this fellow.
- 22:00 And then I know my brother and I had a very large rock on a tank stand outside the house and it doesn't matter what happened, we never walked past that rock or ran past without picking it up, ten in each hand. Talk about body building, so even if we were in a hurry we would have to pause, I would try and get there before him; was always a fitness thing going on. That was great. Did a lot of shooting as a young boy.
- 22:30 Mum coped and catered. Got on very well, the question was Dad, yeah no problem. By this time he had stopped the old strap, probably lost all of his belts or we were too big for it. But he was an old joker, but everything had to be in its place. If I took his pair of pliers from his tool shed, he knew,
- 23:00 and when I was finished it had to go back in the same spot. I have still got those pliers. He didn't get angry, he just told me. The other thing on money, we didn't have a lot of money. I did hear him say in about 1948 or '49, "Oh Ed we have made four hundred pounds this year." Doing his tax, went a fair way. I remember one Christmas
- 23:30 I desperately wanted a Caterpillar tractor that you could wind up, and it was five shillings fifty cents. And I must have started working on Mum telling her about this thing I had seen up there in the shop and low and behold we had no money at all, but in my Christmas bag I had one present,
- 24:00 the Caterpillar. I used it for years. I then started taking it apart, made in Japan, this is about 1938, twist a little bit of metal and fix it or oil it. Fix a broken spring or shorten a broken spring and put it back together again. I did that for years; most satisfying and I do remember that. Mind you I got nothing else; there was nothing else at all. Not a lolly or anything.
- 24:30 I don't know how they did the fifty cents. At Esk there was always a big glass bowl with silver in it—threepences, sixpences, one shilling and two shilling pieces and that was there open for whenever Jack and I wanted some money. It was never tallied, never counted and you never told anyone, if you wanted two shillings you took it.

25:00 What would you get two shillings for? What would you spend it on?

Well two shillings was an awfully lot of money, I really should have said six pence or five cents, five cents got us into the movies occasionally on a Thursday night and my brother would walk rather than do anything else. So we walked together, four miles into town. Probably bare feet. We would see the movie. And one night we were

- 25:30 coming home and we had the biggest rain storm you have ever seen, and of course it is pitch dark, and we couldn't afford a torch in those days. So my brother and I held hands. And now it was okay on the big roads but when we got into the paddocks, all there was was little tyre marks. So he assured me, yes we did have bare feet because he assured he was on this little track and we are the distance apart holding hands and I am assuring I have got a track as well.
- 26:00 Walking along in this pitch black thunderstorm and next thing we have got a tree between us, and we're off into the bush somewhere.

Was it a hard life? Were their hardships as well?

Seemingly not. I don't know how Mum and Dad did it but we were well brought up, certainly well fed. A lot of our own produce I suppose. Money,

- 26:30 there was enough, I know it wasn't much but there was ample. We didn't need anything, we needed a pair of shorts and a shirt to work in and go to school in. Occasionally shoes I suppose, but generally worked bare feet.

How would you describe your personality as a young lad? Adventurous or shy?

I was terribly shy.

- 27:00 Yes I certainly wouldn't go up to a teacher and that's why I enjoy the young people these days, and certainly my young bloodline, will chat up to a teacher or point out that they were wrong. For me now, if I had to recite a poem I would go behind the curtains. Not often I was asked to do that. I was shy; I would go red in the face, I would cross the street,
- 27:30 very good eyesight, mind you they said the left wasn't so good, and if I saw a teacher, mind you it was a one teacher school, quite easy to see him. Funnily enough he was Schultz, German extraction, as Australian as we are. I would cross the road. So I was shy, had some friends, always played, I didn't have any trouble with shyness with kids, adults.
- 28:00 It was 'be seen and not heard' a lot. We listened a lot and sort of didn't interfere. I did have one disaster where we had a huge fireplace, always hot, always burning. Had so many sliding doors, double ovens, it was a chef's delight of course and this night about eight or nine o'clock we decided to rekindle
- 28:30 it but it was only hot coals so my brother poured some kerosene on it through the top and put the top back on. So I opened the sliding doors and put my mouth right up to the sliding doors and blew on it. and the next thing one black face kid, burnt me right across the face. They were a bit alarmed, Mother and Dad were right over the other side of the house, a long way away. And so my brother took me into
- 29:00 the laundry with a kerosene lamp and he started scrubbing me with a scrubbing brush to get all of this black stuff off which was actually skin and so he rolled all of the black skin up and then it started to bleed and then he got frightened and he decided to call Mum. Well all hell broke loose because I was well and truly burnt. And he had a truck in those days but didn't have a car. We had a telephone. So we were able to call the bank manger to
- 29:30 borrow his Ford V8 and took me to hospital thirty miles away it took from the time of the fire to getting there was a couple of hours, and burns are bad news. And it was probably was a Monday or Tuesday night and I remember because Thursday night was movie night and Forty Thousand Horsemen was on and I kept saying, "Will I be back in time to see this movie?"
- 30:00 and they lied like hell Mum and Dad. Said, "Sure." It was a month I was in hospital with the face masks. Mum would come a few times a week. She would have to walk to the station, catch the one train a day somehow, took her all day I suppose and then after the hospital visit she would have to wait for the old western mail
- 30:30 going the other way, out to Cunnamulla. And she would read to me and things like that.

How did you spend your time in hospital?

I couldn't read or anything. I was puffed up and so Mum used to read to me, and I know I had not only Blinky Bill but the next sequence and the next one. Mum got it all in one

- 31:00 big book. So Blinky Bill and Blinky Bill Grows Up, and Blinky Bill and Nutsy; that was the girlfriend. And she would read me that, well that probably took a month to read. All I knew one of the nurses in Miles hospital, you would bathe this off each morning, took half an hour but you would bathe in warm water. Because it would seem to glue, the face mask would glue. And the other
- 31:30 nurse would slowly just pull it off. That hurt. So I used to look forward to the one who was gentle. But I wouldn't give in of course.

Just moving forward a bit, you left school at fifteen; was that your own choice or your parents choice?

I had done the Queensland Scholarship. Further one was,

- 32:00 there was no college, most of the state schools went to that age. I don't know what you did for a couple of years then. Right now I know for granddaughter there is two years more college, whereas I know I did a school certificate, then there is the higher school certificate, but I don't know where that was, that might have been in Ipswich. I hardly knew there was university.
- 32:30 I knew there had to be because doctors had degrees; I didn't know much about lawyers then. I didn't really know that much,

Were you really keen to become a farmer, were you keen on flying even then?

Well I was into flying and was always into mechanics. And I remember we bought a rotary hoe Dad did and

- 33:00 after a couple of years it needed some repairs and I was seventeen and Dad would say to me, "Okay son I have got some pistons and wings, you do it, " he would sort of look around and follow me. How the heck I became mechanical I don't know. There was a time later that the old Chevy Ute wanted rings and Dad had heard about these cord rings, so instead of having one ring
- 33:30 you got about four very thin rings. They were all the go. We were so far out in the bush that we pulled the top off the engine, the bottom off the engine, we didn't have any tools much you know, fixed the

rings and then we couldn't start it. It was pretty tight. God knows how I did it, and my brother was there to help and so was Dad but I was doing it, and then we

- 34:00 finally had to push it around towards dark, flattened the battery of course, and we still couldn't. And of course I have no idea how I got the timing right, the screw had come out, everything had come out. And it must have been well into the night when we had all pushed, flat country, black soil plains, but pushed, and I jumped in and dropped the clutch and dammit it started. Well we had it, we had
- 34:30 worked on it for two or three days and we needed it. And another time there the floods came and we ran out of food, black soil plains we don't go anywhere, so my brother and I, he took the little old pea rifle, twenty-two single shot bolt action and we went across to the flooded creek. And picked over and he gave the rifle to me; open sights and there was ducks on the creek,
- 35:00 it wasn't flowing steadily but it was flooded. And he whispered in my ear, "Get ready, I'll jump up and say 'shoo' and you shoot them." and I said, "No, no we're hungry." And he said, "That's not sportsman like." I said something like, "Bugger this we're hungry mate." And then he said,
- 35:30 "Okay I will hold the rifle, you go and get it." and I said, "No, I shot it you get it." It was winter time. And then we actually shot a wild pig a day or so later. He got that from a hell of a long way away too. And I remember Mum said to me, "Well work out a way skin this thing." Anyway I had to gut it. What do I know of these sorts of things?
- 36:00 I hung it on a tree and it got gutted and I know it got pretty dark. Poor Mum went out the next day and cut into the pig to get a bit of pig meat to eat and I had left his wee up there. So it was full of piss upside down. Mum of course cut straight in and got showered in piddle. But I wasn't a butcher.
- 36:30 Life was very pleasant; much loved, comradeship.

Tell us about your first job off the farm?

Well this was Warren Josephson, the big caterpillar staff. So I got there the first day, had a pair of overalls and got stuck into it. And they said, "Son see that big caterpillar there, it's filthy, just take it

- 37:00 everything off it." And in those days the bulldozer blade would weigh a tonne and it wasn't hydraulic, it had a cable that came up over the back, which wound the cable up and down or it fell under its own weight, and nuts and bolts two and three inches across. Being a modest farm kid I struggled and I did it.
- 37:30 One of the ones was a D8 which was about as big as they made in those days. And with Taffy, my Welsh friend mechanic was, and I remember dismantling the whole thing and we renewed this D8 it probably took six months. I wasn't into torque wrenches and things like that. I remember when I was doing up the radiator I must have broken studs,
- 38:00 little bolts and then I would have to drill them out, so you learnt. And I remember getting into the gear box, the gear box was so big. And in the bottom of the gear box someone had left rather large pieces of tools. I was surprised at that. We put it all together and we should have had sixteen forward gears and two reverses. And when it was finally done I steam cleaned it with an old boiler thing that used to blow up every now and again, but you learn.
- 38:30 Then I took it out to the paint factory, and I don't know how many days I painted it yellow. And I had to paint it from all angles because a tractor has got a hell of a lot of angles and bits and pieces in it. I don't think I had a face mask because I know I used to pick my nose at home and yellow paint would come out and I was yellow all over mostly. I tried to wear a cap but my eye
- 39:00 brows would be yellow. Anyway it was a bit of a rush then for this Brisbane exhibition was in August and to my delight I spent a couple of days at the Ekka sitting on this D8 that we had fixed. And what it was, it was tied to itself by a chain and its tracks were in a little tray filled with oil, so you would put it in low gear and people would come around the corner would see this
- 39:30 thing rattle slowly, but the funniest thing was Taffy said to me, "When it was painted you had only got two forward gears and one reverse." He had bugged up all of the gears, and there was lots of gear in the gear box. So after the exhibition we had to take it apart, take whole days just to get to the gear box. But there we are, with two forward gears and one reverse. And he was the one who said, "Hey son
- 40:00 I know what you should do, join the Flight Air Arm, fly with the navy."

Tape 3

- 00:30 **Rowley if we can start with the story beginning with Lieutenant Commander Plum asking you to reapply?**

He would love that name, it is funny, since 1953 I have never forgotten his name, Lieutenant Commander Blunt.

- 01:00 Having failed my, having missed my first opportunity, I think I missed my second opportunity for the yearly intake of pilots to the navy and first time I actually got somewhere I failed eyesight, and after two years, I am now twenty-one years of age, I am quite settled in Brisbane working with G J Coles
- 01:30 and really doing pretty quick and hard work. And this Lieutenant Commander Blunt wrote a letter saying, "You might be interested, you should be. The navy have lowered their eyesight standards for pilots and I feel that you should reapply." The first thing I did because I lived next door to my fiancé, was tell her. She told
- 02:00 her parents and so that evening when I went across after dinner and I washed up for my landlady and I crawled through the hole I had made in the back fence so I could get quicker to Elaine, I was met at the door by Elaine's father saying, "You're not welcome." And I could hear Elaine crying inside. And I said, "Why not?" and they
- 02:30 said, "We don't think you should become a sailor," sailors drunk and all of that, "You will go down the wrong path son." So I put my chest on his and I bunted him away and said, "Look well I must talk to Elaine, I insist." And so he was good enough to let me in, and she said, "Yes okay, I am okay." So we had a bit of a problem and I was a pretty good young fellow and I got around them,
- 03:00 I explained that I didn't know much about it either. But we had in fact all been to a family wedding, one of the nieces of my parents-in-law to be and there were sailors there. Now, of course there was a punch up, but the sailors were in uniform and it stood out. I mean you can have a punch up anywhere in the street, it is like drunken sailors, you get a hotel full of drunks
- 03:30 but the moment you have got a uniform on, "Oh he is a drunken sailor." Everyone forgets the other hundred drunks. So we seemed to get past that, so I did apply. I got down; again there is Lieutenant Commander Blunt, I have got to do my physical exercises, and here is some of the written exams and thank God, way back in '53 there were these...
- 04:00 what are the optional answers? The A, B, C? Those ones and although I had never heard of logarithm, couldn't spell it, had no idea. What's the cosine of something? What the hell is this? Wow, A B or C? So either Blunt got it and fixed it for me or I was very lucky with the A B C answers. I can't believe it.
- 04:30 So then blew up the mercury, no one tells you how far to blow it, this is obviously for the chest and lungs and God knows what and you blow this mercury up the tube and of course being a young kid you want to blow it right up to the top and then of course when you get it up there they say, "Now hold it." Well you have just put all of your energy into it, so I got my tongue on the end of it and I bit it and I sweated, I knew my forehead was
- 05:00 busting. No one tells you if you have passed or not or how far to go. It might be different today. It probably showed I was determined come hell or high-water I was going to go for it. I am still that way too. And then back to the eye doctor, and would you believe it back to the same fellow who had done me two years before, the optometrist. And he said, "I know you." And I said, "Yes you sure do I was here two years ago and I failed.
- 05:30 But they have lowered the standard." And he looked at me and he said, "What, I haven't been told." I thought, "Oh my God." Blunt had told me, well something going on here. He looked around for the naval orders and couldn't find any. And he said, "Well I will do you." And he did the eye test and sealed it in the brown paper envelope On Her Majesty's Service. "Take it to Commander Blunt." But I didn't, I took it to my mother-in-law to be,
- 06:00 steamed the thing open and I had passed. Now who changed all of that, I don't know. My eye hadn't got better anyway I know that. So they must have thought, well, he is persistent if anything.
- So when did you impress Blunt to in effect befriend him so that he let you know a couple of years later of the standards?**
- Well I had applied that two years before and I had done all of these tests and there was a bit of (UNLCEAR 'parra') command
- 06:30 and they just talked to young fellows and luckily enough, as I was seventeen and a half. I might have been a bit immature but I was mature, in those days in the bush you matured, you made it or that was it. So I was self assured there, not as shy as I was as a kid, very definite very steady.
- 07:00 Not pushy and I didn't really ask a lot of questions and that came out later in the navy and I was queried as to why I didn't. I said, "Well look there is a lot of brown nosing going on and a lot of stupid questions like 'Sir what's two and two?' but if they haven't asked these questions by the end of this period I will ask the ones I want to know."
- 07:30 The very delicate or difficult questions, the ones I needed to know, then I would ask. They seemed to accept that. Then I learnt to talk, I never talked much but I talk a hell of a lot now. So somewhere in that first meeting with Blunt and then failing the eye test, he must have been disappointed; he probably picked out that I was a good kid to do the job.
- 08:00 Now on the second one when I got through we were getting along very well with Elaine and the

parents, but to go to J G Coles and say, "I am sorry, I have to resign." And I remember Cas the manager, it is a big store in Queens Street, it went right through to Adelaide Street sort of thing, big store. In fact I virtually ran that store; in

- 08:30 eighteen months I was in charge of the whole thing. The next job would have been a small country stores as a manager. So they push you through quickly. I do remember I had ladies dresses as well in one section, bras, women's things. And I remember there was, well I was terribly young and she looked terribly old,
- 09:00 probably about thirty-three. And she said to me, "Okay you join the navy to fly, that's terrific. I wish you the best." And then she said something to me; I didn't take it and I have thought of it since and worked it out. She said, "One day you might get a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross]." And I thought nothing of it. Looking back on her age,
- 09:30 and she was single, it looks to me like she had lost her lover or husband and he had a DFC. I choke a bit when I hear of those things, or I see bravery or I talk about bravery and courage. It cuts me up a
- 10:00 fair bit, I have had to fight it all of the time, I have seen it there. Interesting if we could...on courage, most people think courage, just like that. I put them down as hot courage and cold courage and I mean nothing by it and nothing taken away from the good men who are awarded
- 10:30 the VCs [Victoria Cross] and things like that as I talked to Cutler later. A lot of VCs are rightly won and so many are not of course by that wonderful bravery and courage of hot blooded, definite, 'save your mates' for whatever reason and the ones who do live through it and
- 11:00 turn the tide of that battle that hour, are certainly deserving of a VC, and the ones who don't certainly posthumous as well. I am not taking anything away from hot blooded, but no one has ever mentioned cold blooded courage. Vietnam was such that you could hardly leap out of a chopper and do your hot blooded stuff, but the
- 11:30 courage was there to do things. That you wouldn't allow a patrol to die. And that's not so much cold courage, but cold courage is knowing all day and all night that you are going to do it again. And then you know the system and you're going to do it all year until you die and not once are you going to back down, you're just going to do it and do it and then actually it
- 12:00 came to pass that you do do it. I can't talk for other people, I don't know how they think. But I consider cold courage being deliberately knowing you're going to do it and do it again. We haven't got to Vietnam.

But thank you for sharing that. You were accepted and you began training at Cerberus?

- 12:30 Yes, so on the 26th of March '54, I go to the railway station. Elaine comes along, her parents come along, God knows, they must have all had the day off. I get on the train; there are three other fellows, four of us from Queensland. And we know it is going to take a few days so we introduce ourselves; we have got our seats reserved and we're going off to Melbourne.
- 13:00 Well it was great because in those days the train went through Wallangarra, Warwick and down to Sydney that way. My parents were at Warwick. They drove in and got to Warwick and several hours later of course it is only a hundred miles, and my Mum had turned up with food, I remember the apples quite well. Four apples because she knew there were four of us. And that apple comes back later
- 13:30 because one of the men was six foot six, and his name was Jerry from Brisbane. One was Brian from Redcliffe and Blue, I don't know where Blue came from. He had come out of New Guinea anyway. A teacher in New Guinea. And it was later that night, we were probably not far over the border
- 14:00 anyway and we were able to turn the lights off in the carriage. So sitting up, sleeping, what the four of us did I can't remember much about what we talked about but we were obviously going to be on the course together and join all of the other groups as we went along the states and I remember the last thing we did, we had the apple each and one of us turned the light off to go to sleep and there was a hell of a roar from Jerry who was six foot six or something.
- 14:30 "Light on, light on! There might be a grub or something in it!" so we started thinking well he is a bit of a wuss. And he wasn't of course. We got to Flinders naval depot which is called HMAS Cerberus, the three headed dog, and we were issued with a hammock and lots of strings, they don't make them up for you, that's up to us to do. And a
- 15:00 petty officer in charge of us. Now there were nineteen of us, all navy, all wanted to be so we were called a recruit naval airman for several months. We slung our hammocks and did all sorts of things. Jerry now couldn't get into his hammock; they are very hard to do. And so after falling out
- 15:30 two or three times, half in, he got up on sort of a mantelpiece, tops of the wardrobes and he sneaked up along the wire, along the ropes, and there he was six foot six, and he just about made it and phht. Next thing he has almost broken his arm flung on the floor again. And so there we were, nineteen of us. We were drilled, we exercised, we were lectured. We were

- 16:00 told about the navy, we did more exercise, we were led by our petty officer who frightened the living daylight out of us. And I still know his name, Fagan. And do you know I haven't seen him since but later he was promoted from the ranks and he made Lieutenant Commander Fagan. So he had a lot of nous as a petty officer to take charge of the nineteen of us;
- 16:30 we never walked anywhere, we had to double march all of the way. No one could fit Jerry into naval working uniform, he was far too big. But they found something like a boiler suit that was about a mile high and Jerry could fit in that and we couldn't march or double march or run together because if you were in front of him or behind him his strides were totally different and we could all fall over. But one of them, one of the lectures
- 17:00 and I know now, I knew soon after, but you don't know at the time when you are told to do something. There was an old naval gun on wheels that you could take the wheels off. Probably Nelson type gun and like a stern chaser or something. It was out on the parade ground which no one was allowed to walk on unless you were marched around. And there was a great big gum tree with a lot of branches .and the petty officer called me out first, "Waddell-Wood
- 17:30 front." I came forth. And he just said, "You are the leader, you get that gun up over that branch and down here." And no one had ever done this before, this was the first time any of us had struck this, it was not like we knew we were going to have to do leadership and organise things. It was like a bolt from the blue, especially the first one. So all of my mates were
- 18:00 lined up and I stood in front of them and all of their faces were, "What the hell?" But after just being together for a month they all came together; there was a couple of good guys out of the 19 from Sydney, Perth, Adelaide and one must have seen that I was pretty ashen and he must have bumped a couple of his mates. "Yes right oh" and wheels off.
- 18:30 And that's a good idea, "You get ropes." Who to pass it to, and one chap I seemed to know and everybody got together and got bits of gun pulled apart and pulled them up and put together on the other side. Those are the sorts of things, I suppose this is initiative and how you are going to handle things and things like that. Let alone the psyche who kept seeing me every month saying, "Why do you want to fly?"
- 19:00 If I could handle him I suppose they thought you might be able to fly an aeroplane.

Did anyone fail because of the psyche?

I don't know how they failed, but I would say eight didn't follow us on after three months, after three months we went back to Archerfield,

- 19:30 I think there was eleven of us there. We were failing through that. I know one his legs were burnt so badly he was thrown off course. Because he burnt his calf muscle and he wouldn't have made it. We weren't allowed off the base for six weeks. And then we were allowed 'up the line' as the sailors say.

20:00 How did the fellow burn his calf?

Well that must have been after the six weeks, I presume he had been to the pub and fell asleep with his leg on a water heater in the winter down there in Melbourne. I presume we were in uniform. Sailors uniform

- 20:30 in Melbourne the first time we were allowed up the line. We all spilt into groups. By this time we had selected like minded three or four people and we get up there and of course Jerry is with us, he is hanging onto us, he liked us, he had got to know us from Brisbane before that. And well, we weren't too happy and it is a bit sad actually, he didn't quite fit in

- 21:00 and we were going to have some beer, we thought that was a good idea, and so we would wait until the lights almost changed to red and then three or four of us would dash across Collins Street or whatever it was in Melbourne and he made it and so we said, "Oh well we will pop into a pub here." Well that stirred him up because he was definitely a non drinker. So we went in and had a few beers, God almighty, usual things.

21:30 Let's, if you would share with me Archerfield, you came to really that point of flying?

Yes.

Can you share with me the lead up to your actual first flight?

Yes first thoughts, I had a car and I had left it, but I picked it up again when I was in Queensland so I was the boy and everybody loved me because I had a vehicle. Mind you we weren't allowed off the base at Archerfield.

- 22:00 It was a grass paddock, a few hangers, Tiger Moths everywhere. We did a lot of engineering side. Well you have got to know your aircraft well, it is not like a 747 these days, there was almost nothing to it. You had to learn a lot about that; start and run it. We had instructors there, I remember my first instructor, I remember another instructor there and I remember the chief instructor, Flight Lieutenant Jim Fleming.

- 22:30 who turns out to be an Air Vice Marshal in the end, and Jim is still playing golf with another one of my mates on Mondays I think. Well, the first one, with the car, Elaine is only seven or eight miles away. So we 're down to about eleven people. We do a lot of study and that and I
- 23:00 remember the first flight, I remember my first solo. I go up with this fellow; he is in the back seat. Now hearing is a terrible thing. He has got gosport cubic [UNCLEAR] which runs from his cockpit to my cockpit and he has got two little, we'll call them copper tubes. And for me in my ear pieces I have just got to put my two bits of
- 23:30 rubber on there, well when he talks, he must have had a mask or something; do you think I could hear him? Of course I couldn't hear him, they were a terrible thing. So I didn't hear much and didn't learn much and he didn't teach me much because on take off, the aeroplane would do what it wanted to do, and all he would do would say, "Kick the right rudder" or "Kick the left rudder." Even airborne he would say that.
- 24:00 He would not say why. And there is a bat and a ball thing there. "Keep the ball in the centre." So the balls out here which means it is going sideways, he didn't say that. "Just keep the ball in the centre." Well what for? How the hell do I keep the ball in the centre and so things were pretty grim for the first few flights. I did enjoy it.
- 24:30 I did know downwind it takes an awful long time to get a Tiger Moth to climb to height turn and go downwind. Now downwind you have got to do your downwind checks. Now it was fuel mixture slots, now fuel was there just straight above the fuel tank with a little gauge on it, there, yeah can fly for hours. Mixture, engine richness mixture, they were a little knob probably here,
- 25:00 and they were wired in position, totally locked, nothing you could do with them. Fuel mixture slots and that was here, and you had, it was locked or unlocked and what that did, as you approached these slots came in front of the top wing, just to reduce the stalling speed a bit. Well of course it took all downwind to really think of those. I did this for some hours.
- 25:30 "Downwind checks son." "Right." Fuel and then you're watching everything else, speed and direction and airfield and what not. And you would get your fuel mixture slots out by the time you had crossed wind and land, yeah it wasn't great. And they must have told Jim Fleming, the flight lieutenant, and he gave me somebody else.
- 26:00 And this chap just roared out, "Keep the ball in centre, look at this, you push this pedal and the ball comes back and push this pedal and it goes out the other way, you do that and you get your wings level straight away and your feet and you have got it." So things started getting better. Came nine hours, first solo. Now Tiger Moths don't have brakes. They have got a tail...
- 26:30 not a tail wheel just a tail skid that drags on the ground and slows you down. No one told me, while we have got all of our instructors there we have got a naval lieutenant aviator, Lieutenant Bill Dunlop was there, he flew with some of us too but I don't think he flew much with me. We called him the senior naval officer at Archerfield. So the day came when the fellow climbed out of the backseat and said, "Well, away you go son, you're going
- 27:00 solo do one circuit, away you go." Okay, and did it and landed and taxied in, all by myself, I was obviously getting better and the next thing I know there is a fellow there in white shirt and white stockings and white shoes and it is the admiral, fourth naval member in charge of aviation, and he is coming to see his pupil doing his first solo.
- 27:30 And there is a photographer, and Lieutenant Bill Dunlop and there, is me being photographed, and this is okay, this went in the papers and they duly left in due course by my God I got a rocket after that because Bill Dunlop Lieutenant came up to me and said, "You didn't shave this morning son." And I had about six whiskers. So I would shave every three or four days.
- 28:00 And all I could say, "Nobody told me the admiral was coming." So obviously I had several whiskers sticking out that Bill didn't like. And that was flying Tigers [Tiger Moths] and we got on later to spins I enjoyed it. First time as I said I have ever been off the ground higher than I could jump, and I did enjoy it, it was great.

These Tigers, were they left around from World War II?

- 28:30 Probably before I think; some Tigers were about 1930, '35, yes' they were from the World War II training, there were Tigers everywhere, Tiger Moths.

So the Tiger Moths, they were very old as the aircraft, they weren't made for training you?

No they would have been World War II trainers as we had seen all around the countryside,

- 29:00 and there are still dozens you know, there are still dozens, wherever you go around Australia there are still Tiger Moths around for joy flights and I must take one one day.

Now for you and your ten friends that were there, what sort of accidents occurred since you were flying for the first time?

Very rare I would think. I am trying to remember how many passed out of Archerfield and went on.

29:30 Probably all of us, very hard to crash something as light as a Moth, there must have been some terrible bounces. But even a couple were take offs, a couple but that's all, fortunately that's all, everyone can fly I am sure about that but you have got to be able to fly in a certain time because

30:00 as you go on and get into the Sea Furies and things you can't go on forever, and I found that later when I was instructing, you really had to do things by a certain time because you were really going to run into problems later with the bigger aircraft.

After Archerfield you went to Wagga?

Outside of Wagga is Uranquinty, called RAAF Uranquinty. We had Tiger Moths there and continued. By this time we were doing

30:30 solos, forced landings, cutting the engine and restarting and restarting meant when the propeller stopped, so you dived and got speed up and the engine would turn over and you would start up again, spins, a lot more solo navigation. Yes navigation wow, thank Goodness there is a place there called the rock,

31:00 and if you were about, well you couldn't get more than fifty miles away; it took half of the day, well it took an hour or so, and you would look around and all find the rock and we all knew the rock and knew where home base was, but you could go up and "Now this week we're spinning." So if you were on the ground and there just a few miles away in that direction or that direction Tiger Moths not running into each other, they were too slow to catch each other, and you would find them all

31:30 spinning down and that would spin and they were all within only a mile or so from the airfield. And after that onto Wirraways. Now there was an old saying, "Wirraways don't worry me." And you keep saying it until you start shaking. They were frightening, they were supposed to stall and drop a wing, but that only happened once or twice. The accidents started then with

32:00 Wirraways. The odd wing drop hit the ground, spin the aircraft around, probably spin the aircraft around and probably wipe its wheels off. We had a few of those. It didn't mean you were scrubbed, certainly if you were good enough, it could be an accident. The Wirraways were all right, they frightened me but nothing happened.

32:30 I was starting to get a bit cunning I suppose, bush cunning, I don't know how I did it. Certainly no danger, no problem, no nothing. I still wasn't brilliant.

Was there a start up procedure for flying the Wirraways?

Yes it would be something like the switches and fuel and then you had to

33:00 prime the engine with a bit of raw fuel into the...it was a radial engine, about four hundred and fifty horse power and then you cranked, like a car as far as I know, I can't remember a key but anyway it cranked, it could also be cranked outside on the wing with a great big crank handle by somebody else. Not that he cranked the engine, he cranked a fly wheel that got up to a certain momentum and

33:30 then you cut it to cog it in to turn the engine a bit and hoped it fired. I really don't remember much about that.

And this time was quite hard you mentioned, in training?

We were certainly getting into accidents and things like that.

Could you share with me some of the accidents that occurred?

Only a couple, mainly wing tips hitting the ground, that would be it and the ground looping in that sense then

34:00 because it generally pulled you around. I have got a couple of photos of Wirraways with bent propellers on the back of trucks because they had no wheels. That's about it. We were getting a lot of spirit by now, we were flying with RAAF as well. Oh yes we weren't all navy, half were RAAF, we were getting used to that together.

34:30 We were all friends and the fewer we got in number the more we clung together. Well after a year or so cooped up and working hard, exercising hard and studying hard we were getting a nice group, we still remember each other.

Part of that study was the word you couldn't spell, logarithms, how on earth did you get on top of those?

35:00 Well we had ground instructors and chief instructors who didn't instruct in the air at all, but they would instruct on mechanics, in English, maths, graphs, because all of this was going to happen later on as well. Air to air firing, we had to know trajectories and speeds and relative movements between aircrafts, collisions and things like that. Got through the books and

- 35:30 we all had the books to learn from. And then it was easy to depend on which instructor was what, I took to the mechanic part like a duck to water. Always intrigued with what was put together and what went around and up and down and I still do it actually, I am, still Mr Fix It in my family. What man has put together you can generally take apart.
- 36:00 It's difficult these days, sometimes plastics are glued together and I can't get at it, but if there is nuts and bolts and a screw, yes, sure into it. And my granddaughter is similar too. She is doing auto stuff just to understand what's going on inside the machine.

So I take it during these studies there were exams?

I seemed to get along all right in those. It got a little harder back in the pure navy. But I was helped

- 36:30 by a great old friend who in those days was a very old chief ground instructor. His story is fantastic, where he came from and what he finished up as. I had lunch a couple of days ago with him.

In what way was he helping you?

Chief ground instructor he...I certainly was having some problems with the ground study and those ground exams,

- 37:00 but he was instructing five of us so he could give us time. We became friends then and close friends now, even though we were apart; a brand new stupid student and chief ground instructor.

And these ground studies involved the pulling apart and putting together of engines and these sorts of things?

No, some of them were just...the mechanics

- 37:30 did that and we had to know, we also had to know the hydraulic system, we had to know the oil system we had to know instruments and when instruments go wrong. So although we don't fix our instruments we know it is unserviceable because we would come back and report unserviceability. Whether it is the whole shebang or just the throttle or brakes,

- 38:00 you had to come back and say to the mechanics, "So and so." You had to know a bit about it. And what to do if something fails, what about electrics, all of the night, go out at night, that's hairy. And we then trained with half of the instruments failed, you can fly on the other half and you do a lot of training on that; you just cover up the instruments.

- 38:30 **You shared with the Tiger moths and some of the downwind procedures, what about the Wirraways, what was there to do there?**

There were more to that because they had hydraulic flaps. There was pitch, the propeller pitch had to change, revs, so you could get out of trouble if you wanted to. You didn't want to just be cruising along like driving a car in fifth or sixth gear, you would really go down to about second so you could land in second gear if I may use that term.

- 39:00 Then certainly the flaps and the flaps went down a little bit and then further. You had wheels now, put your wheels down and to check that you had your three greens and yes there would have been a control tower then, and yes we did have radio too. Tiger Moth there was no radio; solo, you talk to yourself.

- 39:30 So now you could talk, you're downwind and three greens and you were given clearance to land. Sometimes you just got a green light, so people could look out and see and get a green light okay, red light go around again. You would also have to know which runway because the wind could change from north to south while you were away doing a navigation or something.

- 40:00 Open the cockpit, fresh air probably so you could get out easy; you don't want it to jam.

Tape 4

- 00:30 **Just coming back to the time you were flying the Wirraways what were you wearing in terms of clothing, parachutes, those sorts of things?**

We had to carry our

- 01:00 parachutes out from the ready room, and you put it in and spread things around a bit. There was no dinghy as in the navy so you sat on this thing as part of your seat. Your helmet, which was a leather helmet then in those days, radio earpieces. And I don't know much about radio in those days but obviously plugged in somewhere.

- 01:30 You had a crewman at the aircraft would probably get up on the wing put your chute in for you. And then you walked around the aircraft and kicked the tyres, but you were sort of checking things out. And then you got in and did your checks before you started, checked that everything was in its correct place and right direction, wheels were down and locked and flaps were up and the control column moved all

of the right surfaces

02:00 that you wanted. And then started, once again I hardly remember how we started the things. I remember the navy ones.

Excellent from there you moved onto Point Cook did you?

Yes I am trying to get a timing here, it was '55, might have been around March, I can only remember that because I know August was the completion, wings

02:30 parade and that was it. By this time I had become a probationary naval airman (P) for pilot, so I was PNAP. So still a sailor and still a bit past recruit and then the gem in August on the wings parade, all of the navy made

03:00 acting sub-lieutenant which gave them officer rank.

And what were you doing at Point Cook?

Wirraways all of the time. A lot of ground study and a lot of flying. Now the flying got past just simply flying an aircraft. Navigation was much further away, low flying without killing one's self. Slow flying,

03:30 stalling, but that's all of the pure side of flying. Then we did strafing. This is air to ground, bullets obviously, not air to air. Practice bombs, that's air to ground, no rockets yet. So you had to learn then what they

04:00 were doing, learnt to fight with the machine, not just fight. There is one hell of a difference, as I said, especially when I became an instructor I said, "I can teach anyone to fly." But to fight it is a totally different thing. And finally you will see later how we got outside of the safe operating envelope, you had to

04:30 stay alive or to save other peoples lives. So you fight your machine and you fight a hell a lot of other people too doing it. There is no good dying on the first sortie. Taxpayers have put a fair bit into you and you have yourself, I have always had respect for taxpayers.

Well you have spoken about flying the machine, the strafing and stuff, but how were they educating you at the time on the process, that it is

05:00 **different to just flying a plane?**

We weren't told as much as I have just talked about, it's different. Then the next sequence came along and they said, "Now we are going into formation flying." That's different or tail chasers. Tail chasers are where you chase your buddy, first of all with an instructor in each and then solo,

05:30 you find out how not to run into your buddy and it is for dog fighting later. It is for getting comfortable with the aircraft and the extremes of the abilities. And then you fly again with an instructor and you do aerobatics, and then you go off solo for aerobatics, getting you used to being upside down

06:00 and stalling and spinning. And you shouldn't spin so if you spin well that's naughty, you fouled up. And if you do it enough you find out how to do these wonderful sequences of upside down and around about without spinning. So it is a progression of becoming a fighter pilot, or a fighter force.

06:30 **So if we could go through those one at a time, following your buddy, does he just choose a course? How does that work?**

Well I can tell you a bad one about that, that's when we lost our first death I suppose tail chaser is to be aggressive, so my friend was, yes like go anywhere do anything. Straight up, down, loops, roll

07:00 over backwards, flip, turn one way and do something else the other full ball, power off, wheels down, hoping the chap behind goes in front so in theory you can shoot him. So we were doing that over Corio Bay just off Point Cook and Pixie was one of our navy pilots and he had an instructor, I won't say his name, flight lieutenant or something like that, and I had a pilot officer sitting behind me.

07:30 And obviously were weren't good enough and both of these boys had come back from Korea. And all of a sudden the aircraft I was flying really started to rock around and my instructor said, "Hey his instructor has taken over." Old warries. So my instructor took over, all hell broke loose. We weren't normally allowed below a

08:00 certain height, I remember at the board of enquiry I was asked and my eyes were popping out. We just did dog fights until the instructor in front...we had got down very low to the water remember...and he pulled a very tight turn and he stalled and flipped and straight into the bay. Two dead straight away. Pretty shocking.

08:30 There you are, you can die easy enough, you can die by instructors. Oh they had had enough instructing. They had had enough of these pupils pussy footing around and they were trying to show us where it gets to, to the extremes of dog fighting, and we did go through the extreme. My instructor was about to be demobbed and he had a job with TAA [Trans Australian Airlines], no one took him.

09:00 Court marshalled, TAA wouldn't accept him and we buried one of our friends.

So just take me back there, the plane crashed and suddenly what happened in your plane with respect to the instructor?

My instructor didn't pull, he pulled a split aarsed turn or something like that, he didn't turn right over and pull hard back as much., it was a high speed stall, the

09:30 airframe stalls, now you know you can do it at slow speed and you just veer in or very high speed and you change your angle of attack very quickly, and the whole aircraft high speed stall and phut you're gone. People still do it, fighter pilots still do it.

So were you at that moment ordered to radio back that a plane had gone down?

Yes, it is all a bit of a haze because it was one

10:00 hell of a dog fight I remember I don't think I was too happy about it, and I certainly wasn't too happy about the height and I was asked a lot of questions about that. Yes we were very chastened.

He didn't ask you, the instructor, to lie about anything?

No, well it was his mate that went in as well as my mate. It was pretty

10:30 straight forward and I was gently lead through things, I was having a few troubles with some things still, probably death I suppose. It happened again later when my best mate died.

So just on this story, the board of enquiry, where was that held and what happened?

It seemed to be in a room at Point Cook and there was a few flight lieutenants around there, probably a wing commander and just very slowly and gently sat me down and went through it

11:00 and asked me what heights did I see? And what else I felt and things like that. All I could say is, "I am pretty sure I saw the altimeter going down through three hundred," and we were supposed to be over a thousand feet. And that probably put the kybosh on my instructor but he probably said the same because it was quite obvious where we were and it would have been seen from shore.

11:30 **Where any black marks put against your name because you had been a part of this?**

No. Learning experience. And you know we were trying to be safe and you never forget those things and you don't do too many foolish things. You end up doing foolish things because you have to, in rescues and things, but you just don't do them for fun. You do them when you have to.

How

12:00 **many weeks had passed between when the crash happened and the board of enquiry opened up?**

I would think a day. Very swift, not like enquiries now that take months. It was quite simple, I mean the aircraft didn't break up and the engine didn't stop. My pilot would have been able to tell the truth and I did the same,

12:30 nothing was able to tell them anything. I mean if it happened now they would be finding pieces and trying to find out if a tail plane came off or a wheel fell down, blade fell off. It was quite obvious.

Do you remember how they collected the bodies in the plane itself?

Only told, because they did have at Point Cook on the water, Port Phillip Bay and Corio Bay,

13:00 they did have search and rescue, SARs as they call them. Then I suppose I wasn't privy to how they raised it. It wouldn't have been too deep. Winch it up and divers. All I heard that they are a pretty failsafe sort of aircraft, strong and all sorted of bolted together

13:30 with aluminium pipes and things, but of course hitting like that. All I heard was that both people were pushed right up the front together and pretty pulped up. You really don't want to hear that about mates, being a pulp.

This particular accident, how did that affect the new recruits, you fellows who were in training?

In those days it seemed to be a

14:00 part of the job. I don't mind that and I think it is a good way. These days of course there would be a dozen different counsellors all getting their hands over you, but I rather agree with the way we did it. And I can tell you my old navy ground instructor who I had lunch with just a little while ago, he

14:30 is writing a book. He lost six mates in one morning, in one day, training—Empire Training School in Canada. They buried the six in the afternoon and next day they were all flying again. And Nobby and I agree that's just the way it was, and that's the way it is in war time. So if you're practicing in peace

time why get patted

15:00 and sugared about, you had to learn to carry on. It stands you in good stead later, that sort of training.

Just in respect to flying, you said there was a base level of about a thousand feet?

Just for that chase.

Was there a ceiling at all?

No I wouldn't think so.

I was also going to ask you, can

15:30 **you talk me through the things you did during that time at Point Cook?**

The aerobatics would be rolling in a barrel roll, rolling onto your back and upside down for a few seconds, that would be a straight roll. Loops. There weren't too many aerobatics. Oh yes half loops, roll off the top, figure of eight where you do a half loop and

16:00 go boring down again and do a half loop over to the left, and a half loop to the right so a horizontal figure of eight and things like that. You try to bunt over the top with negative G, get high speed and drop the nose, where you raise up from the seat, minus G, you get very aware of the G forces and knowing them and where you start to

16:30 grey out or black out, that really starts to come in the bigger aircraft actually. That's just where your blood goes to your belly or your legs, and it just goes from behind your eyes so you can hear and think and still work but you can't see.

And had any parachute training been given to you in respect to if something did go wrong and you had to bail out?

We discussed it a lot; we didn't jump off towers with parachutes as say the army

17:00 or the SAS do now. It was a little later in the navy where we used to get kitted up with a parachute on your bum and with a truck driving along at a set speed, maybe seven or eight miles an hour and you just jumped off the back and learnt how to roll as you hit the ground.

17:30 We discontinued that in the navy because no one had ever got hurt ejecting out or bailing out, but we had so many broken wrists and legs from jumping off the back of the truck. Backwards too, could have killed us. And also jumping, that's bring a net, probably outside the Wirraways too they would just yell out, "Bail out!" and you had to get,

18:00 there is a fair few things to do, you disconnect a lot of things but not the parachute you see, and jump out with the damn thing. And we did that at Nowra and of course we jumped out of a Firefly and the net wasn't tight enough and somebody hit a bulge in the wing, really hurt him. So we really discussed that we don't need these practices, the real thing happens okay.

18:30 **Could you discuss with me the procedure of getting ready to jump out without disconnecting your parachute, could you run me through that?**

Oh dear you're testing me back to forty-nine years shall we say. You certainly had a harness, okay the chute was harnessed to you, don't touch that one. But you are harnessed to the seat, it would have been a different colour and

19:00 it would have also had a different lever to unlock it, so you certainly had to do that but before you did that I think you pulled out your mic, your radio lead to your helmet. Because although they push in and pull out you get quite stunned if you try to leave an aeroplane, because that's the time it wouldn't want to go around the corner and pull out straight away, it would be sideways and nearly pull your head off.

19:30 And then the seat harness, you would get your feet well back from the rudder, get your feet back, open the cockpit, wind it open, later you could eject them of course. It was quite a struggle to get out because you would have to stand on the seat to get high enough to

20:00 jump out of the aircraft. We knew in the Spitfires, Hurricanes, you could roll on your back and fall out. You have got to be very careful because there is a tail behind you and you really would want to get away from the side of the aircraft because it would be hell to be hit by a tail and some were. And if you pulled the chute too quickly the chute could be caught on the plane so little things like that we

20:30 knew about but that's a dim and dark memory.

Thanks for the memories, from Point Cook you went to the 5 Fleet Air Arm is that right?

There were ten of us lined up for our wings at the end of Point Cook in August, August 26th '45, five air force and five navy, we were

21:00 down to five from our first nineteen and we got our wings. I was married a whole six days or something by that time and we had a weekend honeymoon in Melbourne, that's it. And then we were officially

called sub-lieutenants, given a uniform, single stripe on it.

- 21:30 Gold wings on the sleeve in those days. Got the rest of the uniform. The senior naval officer who was down there did all of our shopping and ordering for us. He got me a great coat, a beautiful great coat; I mean I could have done the Arctic convoys in it. And I think the first time I wore that great coat was about thirty years later, one rainy night as a
- 22:00 farmer on my planter and I insisted on getting this thing planted rather than get bogged the next day and I put the great coat on for the first time in my life, and it kept me sort of dry. Our next six weeks, I can't remember, it was six weeks in Sydney. We were talking about a knife and
- 22:30 fork course or an officers' training course; how to peel a banana with a knife and fork, oranges too, and best of all grapes, how to eat grapes at mess dinners. And that was six weeks in Sydney. We also did other work on radar and naval ships and a bit
- 23:00 more navy. See we had been out of the navy with the RAAF for eighteen months, they were now getting us back, like that first three months as a recruit. And so we were being tuned back into all things naval, as well as the knife or fork training. Six weeks there in Sydney at Watson and a few other shore
- 23:30 establishments and a few other ships. Our first look at big ships, the Sydney was in there. And drive to Melbourne and six weeks back at Cerberus. More naval training to get us back into the navy as young officers. Wardroom training too, also learning to look after sailors and what sailors did
- 24:00 and what all of the ranks did and what it all meant. Being in charge of sailors. Officer in charge of guards. I mean the royal salute is a hundred sailors and a guard and that, you're the gunnery officer sort of thing. Power of command, loud enough and getting
- 24:30 used to giving orders. And that was very nice in the navy because in battles you just can't decide and sailors understood that as well, now you can have a great friendship with sailors and we all have. But the moment that it is needed or in training, you say do something and it is done. It has to be that way.
- 25:00 And it comes forward later, when someone is dead you just tell the dead man's friends, yell at the sailors, "Forget him he is dead, move it!" He might have crashed on the flight deck or something. And the one time I did that, the sailor wasn't dead. He was a favourite of mine as well; he had been severely knocked down. I am sure a lot
- 25:30 of these people that have been knocked down can hear you as you know when you're in hospitals, if you go, "Oh God he is not looking so well." Well he can hear you. And I have always thought that nice sailor, that really nice young man probably heard me say, "Forget him, he is dead." Learnt from that and passed it on. You don't talk like that in hospitals or anything like that because they can still hear in lots of cases.
- 26:00 And that's just it and the sailors just left him and carried on with the accident. So that's power of command and command is like that and it just has to be like that.

So while we're at that accident, what happened to the fellow?

A wire broke on the Melbourne. The restraining wire and a rather large piece of wire and metal hit him

- 26:30 across the mouth and head, he looked pretty dead to me. We were running past of course, all things were happening.

So you made the call, "Forget him he is dead." So what happened to the guy, everyone has gone back to their duties but what happened to the guy when they found out he is alive?

He lays there and I presume he is dead.

- 27:00 We race ahead to the aircraft that was having a fair bit of trouble and had actually stopped on the deck and then you have got to choc it, start cleaning up the mess, get the crew out, stand by with the fire extinguishers in case the aircraft catches fire or the brakes catch fire or whatever, or the wheels collapse or the pilot does. And the propellers shut down and no one is up the front end, it was a propeller aircraft. Or the
- 27:30 hot gas if it is a jet, shut them down. What would happen and we all know that, there would be other gangs and medics, all wearing different coloured hats medical crew would have been on the flight deck anyway and they would have been there seconds after I got my boys to do their jobs, so no problems with that. I never talked about it to the fellow, I felt a bit
- 28:00 terrible.

Coming back to your growth through the Fleet Air Arm, you started flying Sea Furies?

The first thing one does at Nowra, after we have done that course...I remember Nowra was January '56. You get a little letter saying, "You are posted to

- 28:30 724 Squadron to undergo OSS 1." "God," you think, "what does all of that mean?" Hereby appointed by

the naval board...repair to your duty stuff. So if you repair to your duty and find out where all of these places are, you look around and find there are five of you still, haven't seen each other for a week, might have been Christmas leave in there.

- 29:00 And I looked for a house of course to live with Elaine and they were all bachelors, so they got the wardroom, wardroom is bachelor quarters. And we turn up and we are lectured by the CO and the senior pilot and then the instructors who are going to instruct us, and it is a Firefly they were first, and what they would do is cut the back seat
- 29:30 out of a Firefly where the navigator observer sat and built it all up like a two humped camel. And turned that into a second pilot's seat, so the instructor say behind you and away you went. Once again you're into ground school, you have now got a lot of hydraulics, you have got a lot of fuel management problems, you have got a hell of a lot more instruments. A lot more radio
- 30:00 and you have got to know your radio, and then you have got homing devices. How to switch them on and things like that. It sure did take aviation a long time to realise that radios should be somewhere up where you can see them and change your channels. Because what happened with these aircraft, you would take off, clean up, up wheels flaps and get
- 30:30 your speed up, head off to where you were going, operational area. But after about two miles you had to call changing channels and go to the operational channel and that radio was down here on your left hand nearly out of sight, but oh boy., think about night time. You turned around to see which channel you're on, and you bring your head back and you have got vertigo. You think you're side on because you ear canals had moved, and too many pilots
- 31:00 have flown into the sea off carriers because they turned their head to change the radio and turned their head and back up again. Their instruments will say they're right, but they will feel as if they are leaning. So okay we have got hydraulics, aerlons and we get into the speeds you need, you get into
- 31:30 superchargers on engines. You have got to get to know your engine better. And then you have got to be able to alter the pitch of the blade so you can have very fine pitch or, then you can have different boost, as you are getting higher you are running out of steam and energy and oxygen. So you can go into boost, but you can over boost it.
- 32:00 If you put too much supercharge in it you can blow a hole in one piston or blow it out the side as well, or if you run it for too many hours. That way your mate next week might be flying that aircraft when it decides to go. So you have got to also be good enough to be careful enough to report anything or an engine overrun because the engineers have to do certain checks. Otherwise it will be you or your mate one day if
- 32:30 you don't report these things you see. And once again so much more ground school with my now mate, who in those days was so much older than me, but now turns out to be only seventy-seven and I am seventy-two, so we're much closer in age and friendship, that developed over a period of time. So a lot more ground school, a lot more engineering, a lot more navigation,
- 33:00 navigation at sea as well, a lot of safety, a lot of night flying, a lot of homing. Once again formation. And that's almost before you get off the ground and do it. I took to that quite well, apart from when I was getting a bit dopey, I said before, and a bit tired,
- 33:30 living at home, all of those weeknights, apart from night flying and things like that until the boss came in and threatened to make me live on board, and he never did. And he was my first real RAN [Royal Australian Navy] CO and I still see Tony. Funny enough he was a midshipman at D Day. And of course they never tell you that.
- 34:00 He might have joined the Royal Air Force and then joined Fleet Air Arm in '48 and I don't meet him until '56 and these old blokes don't tell you about their experience, you have got to be clever to work out what medals they have got and where they have been. Admirals, some of the admirals I liked, I looked them up, the good admirals and the flying
- 34:30 admirals and you will find out they have got a DFC and you will find out where they got them sometimes, the battle, things like that.

Again you're learning to fight with the Fireflies?

Yes you're strafing, now you are rocketing as well, bombing, air to air so someone tows a

- 35:00 ruddy long banner so you attack it from side to side and shoot the hell out of the banner and hope not to get the guy towing it. And later you do that yourself. And the Firefly was great and then solo and then night flying. You learn what to do if your radio fails, you can't hear it, and sometimes you can't transmit as well,
- 35:30 sometimes you can transmit but not receive, sometimes you can receive but not transmit and all of the different techniques, what is it? You go around and around to the left hand circle, left means nothing, left I am in trouble so they watch you on radar particularly at night and they know he has got nothing left,

- 36:00 so you will approach and they will give you a green light or something like that and then you will land. But you're watching out there is no one else around anyway. At night it is different because you can't see much. So but they will find out. Right means like I can't transmit but I am receiving, they will understand you can't transmit but you're understanding every word I say.
- 36:30 If you're somewhere near the tower you can waggle your wings which means yeah. Or they will send a buddy up to find you if there is real difficulties, and hope there is time. We learnt all of those tricks. The landing of these things was great. I really don't know many of the downwind checks on that; I do remember them on the Vampire. That's the one I do remember and the Venom would have been
- 37:00 similar. I don't remember them now on the Iroquois. Nor too many other choppers [helicopters], but they were all done in sequence and you can't miss, and if something happens half way through it's like talking to your wife, it is like losing track of it all. You really should start again because you're bound to have missed some check. Landing in them was very good, great aircraft to land. And we
- 37:30 were landing naval landing where you land it on the end of the runway, you don't float down the runway you don't wander all over the place, you have to get a spot which means nose up power on, pretty slow, know your stalling speed and just cut the throttle and you drop like a rock, and this old girl would drop on all three, a three pointer. Beautiful, felt good too.
- 38:00 During this time, yes, here is another death coming up.
- We actually might stop there because there is another death coming up so we don't interrupt the story, but just to finish off this particular tape, the naval landings I take it are to practice landing on an aircraft carrier?**
- Pretty similar.
- 38:30 Not quite the same but later on they are when you get deck landing practice and mirror landing yeah they are, you just drive them on bang. Onto nothing.
- So before that with Tiger Moths and Wirraways they were just normal float in landings I take it?**
- Anywhere on the field. Hopefully not too far down
- 39:00 somewhere in the middle, and also they were from a thousand feet up and somewhere along cross wind you closed the throttle and sort of glided in the whole way. If you were falling short you added a little bit of throttle, but you got used to that. Navy was three fifty feet, now that's pretty low. All circuits to three hundred and fifty feet, mainly because that was going to happen at sea. And that's where you could
- 39:30 pick up batsman, angles, ships, and finally the angle deck and mirror and it got you around on your approach, no, cross wind or finals used to be square in the air force ninety degree turns, the navy one was always a rounded one so you had one wing down and you could see where the hell you were going, and you could line up the deck and things. And you did that a lot of times
- 40:00 on the ground as well.

Tape 5

- 00:30 **The one thing that separates a naval pilot from any other pilot, more or less that sets you apart from the air force anyway?**
- That is about the only thing. The other thing though you could also be a fish head instead of a fly boy and you could then spend half your life
- 01:00 sailing around in destroyers and fighting in destroyers which is once again different from driving a ship. It is the deck landing, that's it.
- Can you tell us about how that's done and how you trained to do that?**
- Okay we had gone away from Fireflies and Furies and we were supposed to take them to the deck,
- 01:30 straight decked Sydney and it was '56, and I was rather lucky, I probably would have killed myself. The Melbourne was coming with the angled deck and jets and the mirror so all I ever did and I was in a Sea Fury, we would go down to another satellite airfield, Jervis Bay, not at Nowra, and you would fly your Sea Fury down there and you had a batsman, and by this time there was only
- 02:00 two of us, Jim and I were in Furies. So we did what we called deck landing practice, you join the circuit, three hundred and fifty feet, you are downwind, you have done all of your checks, but you now are dropping your speed to ninety knots. So eighty-eight was hell, ninety-two was too fast. Too fast meaning you hit the deck and break a wire or pull the hook off, anything like that.

02:30 And you kept a curve all of the way on finals and you could see the batsman and you picked the batsman up, he would have his hands straight out like that if you were in the right position. That's the Roger. Signal side that is Roger.

Just give that to us again but hold your hands closer together otherwise we mightn't get them on camera?

Oh straight out horizontal, that is R in the signals,

03:00 so that's a Roger so you set that way. What happened then if we wanted you to come lower those big coloured bats would be lowered down or if he wanted you to go up a bit they would be going up. They didn't do much else. He checked that your wheels were down, he checked he could see where you were coming from and he had a sight picture too that you had to be somewhere in there

03:30 and if you stayed in there then you would come right down beside him, him being on the side of the deck. The one that was mandatory was a wave off, which is flapping your arms around like that and the cut was one bat right across, that was mandatory, if he told you to cut your engine you pulled your throttle back, bang. And then fell a few feet and the hook caught the wire.

04:00 So we did that on the ground, whereupon you would just land in the three point position, stall it on, bang. What you did then, you opened the throttle rather slowly because you have got a hell of a lot of horsepower there and torque from the engine and blades and took off, climbed away again to three hundred and fifty feet, and you did another one. And you did

04:30 say eight of those before you stopped and set. What I remember about that too, we're now in the navy set, first of all you are sitting on a dinghy and then you sit on your parachute harness, now if you crash land like that you don't need your dinghy, it is another huge heavy pack to heave over the side. And also if you're over land and wanted to bail out you weren't going to take

05:00 your dinghy over land. So that's one other thing you had to do, you flew around with your dinghy unzipped, although you're still sitting on it and that caused a bit of a problem once for me but that doesn't matter. So we did a lot of these dummy deck landings. And then luckily the Melbourne was in sight home from the UK with its squadrons.

05:30 Then I went to jet conversion. We will call it back to, I had been 805 Fury conversions for three months, this is my OFS2; I had to pass that to get my gold wings. And deck landings were part of that too but we didn't have the Sydney so thank God I didn't have to do that.

06:00 And it was just the course in front of me by nine months or so and there might have been six pilots on that they all did their deck landings on the Sydney, some hairy ones too like a wheel over the side and things like that. No deaths. So '74 and twin Vampire trainers, side by side, very comfortable because although you could talk to each other very well, you also could look at each other and had a stick each.

06:30 My side had the throttle and flaps and wheels. Now I remember the take off check on that was 'taffioh' T A F F I O H. And it was trims, ailerons, fuel and something else, instruments and oxygen and harness.

07:00 Very much like light the fires, quick the tyres [UNCLEAR] now cause we're in jets. It was also a nose wheel job instead of a tail wheel so plenty of vision. Very nice.

What were the major differences to flying a jet aircraft to opposed to a piston driven one?

The really major one was the engine, in a jet to increase your speed took a while. You would

07:30 notice this first of all in formation. So you were in formation and tip to tip, pretty close too, several feet only, which put your eye only twenty feet away. So if you were a metre behind nothing happened, you bunted the throttle to where you expected a bit more, but nothing happened. You would have to wait for the compressors, the engine to wind up to get more puff to move you there,

08:00 so that was a big one. Propeller driven were almost instantaneous, you could hold with an inch or two or if you wanted to make up an inch or a foot you could do it a certain way. Like formation in cars if you wanted to make up a distance and hold it, it is pretty good on accelerator and good power, this damn thing you would have to wind up. But you would get used to it. Probably

08:30 because you could see if you started dropping back an inch you can pick it up before you get back a foot or two, probably only needs about ten more revs out of ten thousand. That's the big one. The other best one in formation, close formation, there is no propellers; I was a bit frightened of propellers. If I was right behind my mate or my mate was right behind me you have got this ruddy great propeller trying to chew your bum off.

09:00 So they're between the jets and the props, the jet being a much easier engine for servicing and not giving trouble. When we have props you have really got to have, when you have got props you have got pistons moving up and down, a lot of moving parts, if you want to worry about single engine stuff.

What about speed was there a great different in speed?

Vast, between Tiger Mouth and Wirraway.

09:30 The Sea Fury was about the fastest; I reckoned she was the fastest piston engine aircraft the world has seen.

And when you stepped up to the Vampire and Venom how much faster were they?

Oh more again still sub sonic of course more again quicker to height, higher,

10:00 and still they could produce at height whereas piston engines trying to get oxygen out of the air, still not getting a lot of oxygen and it is not ramming it in to your cylinder as much, so you are not getting as much oxygen. Propeller is the big one and that lag, jet lag, but when you stayed on jets a long time somehow it didn't matter, it is inbuilt to you.

10:30 Tell us a little bit about the Venom, what sort of an aircraft was that?

It was comfortable, I do remember before I went to Venoms and the navy were thinking of new aircraft I do remember flying the Sea Fury and behind my flying clothing locker door I had an A4 the Douglass Sky Hawk that the navy actually got and we were all plumping for that

11:00 and rather surprised when the powers that be and the government decided on the Sea Venom, the British Sea Venom. Still a comfortable aircraft, a very good one in that sense, but to go to the trouble of designing an aircraft and getting it through to fruition and it is a night fighter and finding you can only put so much on it, or so much fuel on

11:30 it, it has always been ridiculous. The Americans put enough fuel on to do all of the work you ever want, put all of the ammo you could want or bombs you want, and still be within the same sort of weight class aircraft that can land on a carrier. The Venom might have taken a hundred and twenty round of twenty mill cannon which are underneath you all together under the nose, great for air to air

12:00 and as I say we had no missiles so it was all air to air combat and you needed those cannons. But gee you could run out of ammunition quick. Now the worse thing there is the fuel. The Brits didn't really, it is probably because they have got an island and they don't have to go too far. Our fuel, we could get forty-five minutes flat out on the deck on the water, top, but normally of course you could get two hours

12:30 at height, two hours twenty if you just dawdle along at forty thou, but generally an hours flight and you had to come home, out of fuel. The Americans with similar aircraft when we said we had so much fuel, he said, "Oh my God I would have to be downwind by then. I am on bingo three" bingo three is nearly out of fuel and that's what we nearly had to start with.

13:00 Having said all of that I had about five years in the Venom, it did have a radar in the front which my mate navigator, observer, and first one Les Pall lives quite close to here and we see each other about twice a week or so. If there was any aircraft in Australia if we must boast about it, go up on his own find someone, say a RAAF aircraft

13:30 and without him knowing about it, day, night, shooting rain, thunderstorm, shoot him down, all of the RAAF aircraft had to have visual or at night you could have radar ground control. The ground control could tell you where you were and try to get him, we could do it ourselves. I remember being very comfortable. There was one thing strange

14:00 about the parachute though, by this time we had learnt to pack our own parachutes and we all understood parachutes and that, and please don't put a blanket in. And it all had to be folded so absolutely so perfectly up until now, but to fit it in the Venom seat it was a horseshoe and it stayed in on the ejection seat so I didn't have to carry it, and you harness yourself to the ejection seat because if you were going to get out

14:30 you were never going to stand up and jump out with a parachute, always had to go with ejection, so it all worked. It was just a horseshoe around the back of your neck and twiddling down to nothing like a horse collar. And the way to do that, you packed your chute very well and you just shoved it in. Bits and pieces going down that end and a bit going that end and a bit across the top and you got on it and

15:00 you jumped on it and screwed it in and zipped it up, but it all seemed to work.

Did you ever have cause to use the ejection seat?

No, got close to a couple of maydays. What would have been one, very high speed and very low, down the Sussex inlet and these Venoms had tip tanks on the end, fuel which was dammed handy.

15:30 And for some reason it was supposed to be located on the end of the wing, well for some reason this got loose and went like that and started to roll around. well we had had one several months before and it got loose so much that it went like that which of course in the air flow, and remember I was going as fast as we could, then you have just got to keep flipping really. So one eye on that and it was loose and rattling

16:00 and called, "Mayday!" and very gently eased back the speed and the power and went for height. Anywhere on right up until I touched down it could have fallen off which could have ruined me. So you just say to your mate, who wasn't Les at that stage, "I haven't got time to say eject if the canopy goes that means I am going to. You have got to go too, if you want to beat me you have got to be quick." So all of the way

16:30 even on two hundred feet standby.

How high did you have to be to bail out with an ejector seat?

You could be on the ground.

You would be safe on the ground?

Not the first day we flew but after a couple of years, I suppose there was a speed and a height, and I have forgotten that but all of the rest of the years I flew them it was something like ninety knots on the ground.

17:00 On the ground at ninety knots still eject, actually I have seen it happen.

When did you see it happen?

At Nowra a fellow came in low knocked his wheels off and the other one is another great mate of mine who did it in Losima [UNCLEAR] but I wasn't there with him and he actually crashed very heavily. And he didn't pull his ejection seat, what happened, the seat

17:30 broke and went through the bottom of the aeroplane, the moment the seat went down same thing, it fired itself and he was shot up. And of course in Sydney Harbour.

In Sydney Harbour?

I lost one of my aerobatic team in Sydney Harbour and his chute opened, he ejected and it opened so...

Just before we move on, we won't have a lot of time to deal with this in detail but you went out with 808 Squadron on a trip on the Melbourne, can you tell us what you did on that?

18:00 808 we were getting to be sort of elite. My friend and I, the two left out of the nineteen joined that squadron, now they were old and bold, they were trained in the UK, they had gone across picked up the new aircraft, they had been over there a year or two. Melbourne was commissioned and built. They had flown with Royal Navy.

18:30 They learnt night fighting. They had been to the UK a couple of times as a group and they were really the old and bolds that we would consider senior and old pilots and we were two brand new ones to go to sea and our first time. So the way, that's why I am saying 808 was quite elite and thought they were, and they were too. To join them in January '58,

19:00 in '57 in Venoms we had to do a lot of practice deck landings and work ups. So Les and I would go out and stay at three fifty feet and join the ship of the coast of Nowra and the first thing you do every day you go out and do eight deck landings

19:30 don't lower the hook, just hit the deck and go. And you get used to it and that afternoon you go and do another eight. And next day eight, and eight, and eight. And then the day will come after about a week, drop the hook, you are going to stop. And I remember all of those because, I haven't told anyone before, the sea was so rough and we had

20:00 little time to work up and you have got a whole ship working for me and Jim, wasn't Jim, just me, Jim joined us later when we had another death, Jim joined us at Singapore. So the whole ship was really for me. The old boys were doing a bit, but they would just go out and do it, they had been doing it for years. So they brought the ship into Jervis Bay, pretty big Jervis Bay, but they would back

20:30 it up one end and roar off into the wind which was coming from the north east, and they would race across the bay and I had to be there on time to do eight, by which time they were running ashore, they would have the brakes on and go back and back right up again and I would go home and refuel and come out again. So the first one, and don't forget I had done hundreds on the dummy deck mirror, around and around bang, no hook on the runway.

21:00 Around and around on the mirror, mirror centred and you're right, hundred and fifteen, hundred and eighteen knots is good, one more for the kids. And I had one by then. And you do nothing, you don't flare or pull back, in other words because if you do that you just glide right down the runway another couple of hundred yards, well if you're at sea you have missed the whole ship. So you're just there, just fly the mirror in, bang you're on.

21:30 Then take off and do many of those. So the first time we're going around to do a deck landing and we're going to call it those, a hook up anyway. It is not called a bolter, something else. I am downwind and we're all set, we have been doing it a while but we have never really hit the ship before, and I say to Les, because he has been around before as well with other people and I

22:00 said, "You have probably done a few of these Les?" And he looked at me and said, "No, this is my first one too." and I thought "Oh gee." Well I was pretty unsteady you could say. Instead of having the orange ball, the meat ball, right in the middle of the green somewhere or other close to the deck I don't know if the orange ball went up or down which means you're too high or too low, but it has two great red lights on it, wave off,

- 22:30 go around again. I didn't even see them, my eyes, I haven't told anyone, I really don't, I shouldn't. I pressed on and I hit the flight deck, bang! And in about one second fell over the nose. It was all too quick for me. So gee, I got roasted, didn't see the lights wave off and dum dum
- 23:00 and also pick your nose up before you go over the front end, and I thought, "Well how the hell can you do that? It is going to take one second, it is gone. Around again and okay we only got the one red light so I got a bit better after that. But there was no way from hitting the back of the ship to getting to the front of the ship to having my nose up and flying off, because I have now gone to full bore again, and wing commander would call me up and say, "No, no!" anyway by the time I had done
- 23:30 eighty that month, all with Les, poor boy. And we're by then stopping and taxing up and going off by catapult and flicking off and going around. By that time I could land on, see with the hook up see whose looking and all of your mates were in the gofers having a look, which wire you might have caught had the hook been down. Go past here, see the engineer officer there, go forward,
- 24:00 raise the nose, six inches off the deck, feel it, check all instruments and fly off before you got to the front of the deck. But not the first day, I kept falling over. So you would say, "Okay, so where do you go?" We work up off Brisbane, Sydney for about a month and then we would head for say Singapore., yeah Singapore in '58 was our first. I was so
- 24:30 lucky with my mate Les, he had been in a battalion in Korea as a private I think and of course he was world wise. I had not been out of Australia. And he took me ashore on our first leave in Singapore and showed me all of the places, where to go and where not to, what to buy and what not. He was very good. In fact he led quite a few of the younger blokes
- 25:00 around who were all starry eyed. From there to the Sea of Japan, working with Americans, I do remember Manila, gosh that was a dreadful place in '58, bashings and stabbings, and murders. And also working now with the British fleet, Dutch ship, a French ship, lots of Americans of course and exercising and fighting. Chasing submarines,
- 25:30 attacking targets, attacking ships day and night. Dog fighting, landing on the Brit carrier, things like that, exchanging. Hong Kong, magnificent. In for ten days and you get a team of ten women to chip all of the paint off the outside, side party and God they would start up early, especially if you were just inside the ship and caught rings of steel.
- 26:00 Hong Kong, and do you know, one pound, which was ten dollars, would take you ashore, late afternoon, drink quite a lot of beer, beautiful food all for one pound and back on board. And then we raced out for ten days, quick exercise somewhere, back in for another ten days, couldn't believe it.
- 26:30 Running out of money by this time. And buying all of the things we called rabbits. Three wheeler bikes from Germany, pearls for your wife and hand made boots for myself, things like this. TV's sometimes, if the TV's were around in '58; just barely, they came in '57 to Australia. Then out to Japan, Ukoska and dinner with the
- 27:00 the governor for the prefecture or province of Ukoska or Yokohama, so fifteen of us turn up with the admiral in the spot there, geisha girl in front of you. Can't touch and not allowed to but she can feed you. And sake, as much sake as you can get, as soon as you finish one, nice and warm she will pour you another. And I think my mate and I had one girl feeding the both of us.
- 27:30 Nine courses, I did write to dear old Dad and told him I had nine courses with the governor and the admiral and everything is very good and I am doing very well now as a lieutenant, I am doing well Dad and learnt pretty well and nine courses and all fish Dad. The only thing Dad, every course was raw.
- 28:00 So I would like to try and pull his leg, we were now becoming friends and he would pull my leg as well, we seemed to be getting closer in age and obviously you are, same years between and maturing. And then I found something on my plate that looked like a carrot, a sliced carrot but chipped away nicely and very prettily. And damn me I got that
- 28:30 God almighty it was some sort of chilli stuff that nearly killed me. Anyway more and more sake, interesting. And then across the great Pacific to Honolulu to Pearl Harbour. That was something. The hospitality of the Americans. Gee, what you want, you got, they were fantastic.

What was the relationship you found on the Melbourne between the sea going navy blokes and the Fleet Air Arm?

- 29:00 Well certainly there is a difference still but the only difference we found we were just called fly boys and they were fish heads. There would be pay officers, supply officers, sublieutenants, lieutenants, captains, commanders. You sort of steered clear of the big fellows.
- 29:30 I had friendships with those, you had doctors and dentists, different ranks .you had engineers, no problems with engineers, always have. Fly boys, engineers, doesn't matter where they are, even army, always somehow get together no problem. Same as the big P & O [Peninsular and Orient] liners, engineers, if you want to go somewhere talk to an engineer. They are a bit more laid back or

30:00 else they're all Scot; I don't know, but it works. So there is all sorts, navigation officers and gunnery officers and TAS, torpedo anti-sub. And they are all sublieutenants or midshipmen, right up to the captain and the admiral on board. Didn't find a difference, it is already worked in there somehow, a bit like Nelson's day with the sailors and the marines.

30:30 One did a different job, that's all; you still all manned the ship.

What were your duties on the ship?

A squadron officer always has other duties, one would be a divisional officer, our squadron might have had fifty sailors, going from pretty young sailors right through to petty officers, we didn't have warrant officers. A lot of petty officers, they do all of the work by the way, a lot of sailors,

31:00 leading seamen or we could call them leading airmen because they are air not leading seamen, leading airmen. We had armourers, one of my great friends was an armourer, it was always, "Sir" on board, but "Mug" when you got ashore. So airframe, engines, armourers, instruments, electricians. So what you would get, I would have ten of

31:30 those and I would have their papers and I would study through it and see how they were, were they training, had they been training did they need more training, how their wife and kids, it went into the counselling side as well, compassion side of it. What his attitude was,

32:00 if he was absent without leave, drunken, abusive, struck the senior officer or chief or didn't do as the chief told him, just plain slack. On drugs. VD [Venereal Disease]. Oh yeah, really their mother and a good divisional officer, I don't think I was, I could have been better, would look after those men

32:30 and say, "Now listen you're a bright kid, I can see here you left school at fifteen now come on, what we can do in the navy," and we have got officer instructors in the navy and they also do the weather and briefings. "I reckon you should get your HSC [Higher School Certificate], we can do it this way, you can get time off an hour every day or two hours every day and you can go down there and sit that exam and you will be passed out for

33:00 leading hand or petty officer." And you look after them. And you certainly look after them if they have got an ill mother or father at home, you do your best. Get them off the ship and home, which later on happened, I had the power, I was commander, I could do that.

You mentioned drugs, what drugs problems were there early in '58?

Well in '58 there weren't too many around so it would have to be marijuana or perhaps a bit of a 'go pill'.

33:30 I didn't know much about it but they were there. You had to learn that and look after your boys. Now when a chap didn't get the ship, or he was late or he was slack in that he didn't do the work he was set or told a chief to piss off or something, there would be a commander's report, so that might happen a few times a week and you

34:00 would hear the pipe, it happens ashore everywhere in all naval establishments. And you get up there and they call Seaman Bloggs in, "Off hats." The master of arms who is the regulating officer who is the policeman says, "He didn't do this on such and such a day and refused a lawful order." The commander has got his books and he has also got my sheet of paper saying, "He is very good.," and then he will look at me and say

34:30 "And what have you got to say?" and I would say, "This is most abnormal sir, this young man is one of the bright ones. I think he will go far and I am trying to get this in." And sometimes you can try and word that before, what you're trying to do is, the kid has made a mistake, it is a rare one, he is a good one, what you're trying to do is admit that but pass him on, give him courage, encouragement.

35:00 And who knows? He might go far. And then the commander says, "Okay two days stoppage of pay, two days stoppage of leave. Carry on." And if he is real bad, the commander will say, "Captain's report." Captains can sort of hang him where commanders can't or it scares the hell out of the young sailors, he could have done this twenty

35:30 times, well, that's a captain's report, that's in the brig I would say. As the Filipinos called it, stockade, well the Americans.

If it is okay with you can I skip a big chunk now and move on because I am conscious we are going to be running out of time, after 808 you obviously went onto shore and to the aerobatic squadron, I will skip that if I can and come back to it if we have time. You wanted to move onto rotary wing aircraft

36:00 **at this stage in your career, after you were already a squadron commander, moving right onto early '60s, what were the reasons for that?**

Well I had been CO, things were a bit slack hanging around, although the formation aerobatics were very good and I eventually weathered through three or four years

- 36:30 and led the teams. I was about thirty years of age, now fighter pilots they can get older and bolder and things like that. But Jim, the two of us we had gone from five pilots down to two, Jim had gone to rotary wings the year before. And Jim and I had flown together, we were in 808 together, and I kept saying to Jim, "I am the CO, come back, we will fly together, we will
- 37:00 have a ball." And Jim never came back to fly fixed wing. He said, "No, these rotary are pretty good." Then again there was the age and I knew, and now I was permanent navy for the whole of life, and I just thought that will suit me, rotary wing and all of that. And I kept telling the CO of the rotary wing squadron, "I am the next pupil." I said it enough and it did happen and I was.
- 37:30 **In the Australian Fleet Air Arm the fixed wing weren't to have a future, was there an inkling the rotary wing would overtake them?**
- Yes we had heard that the Venoms were going to be phased out in '63. And remembering this is only probably '61, so there was a vague rumour, I don't think it had actually come to pass, no rotary was it, I was
- 38:00 getting too old to be a fighter leader, and I had done it all anyway.
- And so you were sent to the UK?**
- That was good, I enjoyed my rotary wing. At the same time I was maintenance test pilot for the navy and I flew several types of aircraft for the navy each day. Just go and select one and take it for a trip. Or, any time a major component was changed it needed a full test flight, all of the aircraft, so I did that.
- 38:30 Then I kept doing a little bit of Sycamore stuff, rotary wing. And then of course if navy days came up or air displays I went from maintenance test pilot and Sycamore, and I have looked it up in the log book, flying Sycamore in the morning and formation aerobatics in the afternoon. I would lead the team, for that period until it came to pass that I was posted, terribly interesting and I won't
- 39:00 speak too long about it. I happened to be in Melbourne for six weeks, and what happens there when we get these chiefs and petty officers who are pretty smart and you want them to go and become a commissioned rank you send them to UK and if it's on gunnery, or engineering particularly, you might do a year or two engineering but then instead of just coming back with a thin stripe because all of their mates have only just left them, and they have always got to differentiate a bit between
- 39:30 the officer orders and the sailors, they would always have two years exchange with the Royal Navy and by the time they came back they were probably lieutenants, things had drifted, they had become officers and this is what happened. There was six of those came back, they sent me to Cerberus again, sports course they called it, funny. Teaching those six how the Australian navy worked and so we got DAPO, director of officer posting
- 40:00 came down, flew down from Canberra and told us how we put round fellows in round hole and square fellows in square holes and I thought bullshit. I am going from Melbourne to Albatross, back to Melbourne forever. And he said, "Now I have been posted I will read out where you are all going." So he read it out
- 40:30 and I didn't expect to go anywhere. "And Waddell-Wood" he said, "Posted to HMAS Carpentaria" Just like that, like I said to you, Carpentaria, the Gulf of Carpentaria, Thursday Island ? And then I remembered, HMAS Carpentaria, isn't Australia House in London called HMAS Carpentaria? And then I must have missed the first, become
- 41:00 a helicopter flying instructor the Royal Air Force and I was starting to pick up now, and two years exchange, well, it means wife and kids now too, not just six months, you can't take them on six months, two years exchange with the Royal Navy, I couldn't wait. So he folded his thing up and went and I got on the phone to Elaine who was in Brisbane at the time with her parents and three kids at the time.
- 41:30 **You were off to London.**
- And three weeks and three weeks served by sea.

Tape 6

- 00:30 **Okay so we were up to the time in the UK, can you give me an idea of what happened there for those couple of years?**
- 01:00 Well we ended up there with three years and three weeks. I have become a helicopter flying instructor with the Royal Air Force Central Flying School and then posted to Cornwall, Colrose which is HMS Sea Hawk; had three years there instructing Royal Navy, Royal Marines and some very senior officers and civilians in little bubble helicopters
- 01:30 called Hillers and the bigger ones, Whirlwinds. And I did some of the hardest and longest hours I have

ever done in my life. Cornwall was excellent. The squadron was excellent, fifteen instructors. And then I was asked to do another six months, and that's how I got to three years and three weeks away with family and three kids and then we flew home and went straight to sea here in anti-submarine Wessex.

- 02:00 Did that for a year as CO and senior pilot of 817 Squadron. It came to '67 and I was flight deck officer and you have got a photograph of me taken by an American admiral as flight deck officer. And then the Melbourne went to America at the end of '67 and of course they didn't need a flight deck officer, they were going to pick up new aircraft and I was a bit put out about it. And my squadron was reduced to half
- 02:30 because the Wessex were being modified and upgraded, and so I got a bit tired of that. And I said to my old CO who was now director of officers' posting, "How about sending us all to Vietnam?" because by then half of my mates were going to Vietnam with the American army, which was the 135th Assault Company. And my great mate, Pat Dickers, who I had spent all of that time in the UK, single man, virtually he was
- 03:00 called Uncle and I will tell you why later. I will talk about Pat a lot later; we were the only two Aussies in the RN [Royal Navy] squadron instructing. We got on well. Uncle Pat spent most of that time with us, and weekends and nights. And he was sort of Irish extraction and didn't like the Brits as much as I did, as so I enjoyed it and he didn't. And
- 03:30 then dammit in late '67 he was chosen to go helicopter to flight Vietnam and I wasn't. I was put out about it. About fifty navy guys went and for history's sake that team was replaced every year and they went for four years, so we had a lot of navy flying inside the country. People viewing this might say, "Hey, navy was all inside ships." It wasn't,
- 04:00 navy was there. Pat wrote to me. Anyway, so they all went, I offered my services and my squadron and finally that old CO of mine rang me and said, "Look I am sorry Rowl, you're going to Vietnam but you're going with the RAAF 9 Squadron." And I will tell you later why he said sorry; I ended up there with a pretty crappy squadron.
- 04:30 **Just so I understand the time line, you asked to go to Vietnam before Uncle Pat and all of the boys were there?**
- No they were all, they had all been selected secretly and we didn't find out for a few months in the Melbourne ship that they had been selected and were going to be sent off. I didn't seem to have a look in. So that's when I said, "Let us go?"
- 05:00 But instead of that half of my flight with four Wessex went on Sydney in amongst parked trucks, and tanks and APCs [Armoured Personnel Carriers] and we picked up three RAR in Adelaide, so having dropped off 3 RAR in Vung Tau and then I came back and by then I knew I was going to go, I obviously knew just about everyone in the 3rd Battalion because I had spent this few weeks at sea with them.
- 05:30 So eventually we met up again, most enjoyable battalion that one.
- So you now you know you're going, what preparation did the navy give you to fly?**
- I didn't get back from Vung Tau in the Sydney until January of '68 and I know it was the 8th of February that I first
- 06:00 saw a navy Iroquois at Albatross. And I had my first flight on the 8th of February, solo in the afternoon, worked like hell for a fortnight. And on the 24th of February, which is really only about a fortnight work up I came across to 5 Squadron and started flying their Iroquois here, and worse than that I started
- 06:30 instructing for the young men to go to Vietnam. I was pretty busy doing all that. The worst thing happened though two days before I left Nowra. We were at Nowra town in our own house and with the three kids, Peter was twelve, Sue was ten, Gay was six, and Pat was shot through the head.
- 07:00 That was Uncle Pat gone. It was sad. I am not crying so much because of Pat dying, someone has to, but I was leaving my family, I am not crying for me either. It was the sadness of my family.
- 07:30 The minute I heard the signal that Pat was killed, I was six miles out of town in Nowra, news like that just spreads quickly, and this is before mobile phones. And I just left whatever I was doing, I just left. So the aim was to get to my kids
- 08:00 and tell them before they heard it, and also my wife. Luckily I knew she was on canteen and it was lunch time. She was buttering bread and making sandwiches. Then I took the kids out of school and told them. Peter being twelve, he was a smart little bugger
- 08:30 because Dad had had twelve years in the navy so he had watched it, and we had TV, it was in the living rooms and he rather thought I was taking Pat's place and history would repeat itself, it was pretty crappy. And that was Uncle Pat. Later when I got to Vietnam,
- 09:00 I know where he died and it is a bit like Noel Nelson used to do, drag the tail and we crept across there low and slow, I had warned the guns and I knew the gunners were ready if the bastard took a shot at us.

It was a few months later, I mean it is obviously not going to work. And then I suppose I turned professional again and thought don't do it.

- 09:30 So here I was in Fairbairn in 5 Squadron, so we had a lot of young men, twenty-nine twenty-two year olds, coming back and a lot being trained by us to go up. The CO of 5 was going to go up a few weeks after me to be the CO of 9 Squadron, Wing Commander. And I will state again to everyone he is probably one of the brightest and smartest
- 10:00 COs I have ever flown with. It worked beautifully because we got to know each other here. I was a lieutenant commander, one rank below him naturally, and we had a squadron leader also and the rest were flight lieutenants or very young fellows. The squadron then in '68 worked very well with John Paul and I.
- 10:30 No one else is going to tell you so I should say we did straighten it out and did the right thing. One reason why my posting officer said sorry was the 9 Squadron up until then was virtually yellow, but I don't suppose I should say that. They sucked, they didn't do many things right. The very senior officers, I have seen this in
- 11:00 writing and I have seen it in a book, didn't really want to risk their aircraft, although you know it was army aircraft, and I have always been a believer; army needed those choppers, they had to ask the air force for them, and all of these years like the Caribous and the Hercules, you ask the RAAF, "I am sorry, we're training. You can do some exercises with a Caribou or jump out of a Herc with
- 11:30 a parachute next Tuesday afternoon." Sort of thing. This is crazy, but it is the old system, what flies should be air force and the air force can look after and service navy ships. In twenty-two years I never had an air force aircraft over my fleet and my sailors looking after us ever. I did have two aircraft come out and patrol all day over the fleet
- 12:00 but they were New Zealand aircraft and they were flying boats. They hunted for submarines but that wasn't much of an effort. And yet chief of air force can still say our task is to look after the fleet. And I am a thousand and two miles to sea and they can't even get there yet. So I give it up the air force for that and I have had locked horns with a few, and chiefs of our staff and a few other things. So they don't get past me there.
- 12:30 What 9 Squadron was doing was bloody hopeless and so stupid, certainly with inserting SAS, it was telling everybody we're putting SAS in here we will be back in five days to pick them up from here. Gee you can't do that.

Can you just give some examples from before you came along of some of the silly things they were doing?

Yes. I was told to do this where you get a SAS

- 13:00 insertion, now this is very important for these boys, they lay low for five days and sneak out again, don't often get into trouble, not in the early month or two. So we would all take off and take a couple of American gunships with us and fly at a great height of three and a half thousand feet, straight to a pad just before we got there, number two with the SAS in it, whether it was me, or whoever was, the big boss stayed up,
- 13:30 number three would go down and the gunships would go down. So anyone on a hill or a mountain top and the Viet Cong and the communist NVA, the North Vietnamese Army, and their advisors. Korean, Russian, Chinese advisors had radios and it was too obvious. We got to the stage and had to think it out and I always put it back to being, it is hard to say yourself,
- 14:00 I can be deceptive, I can be cunning tracking animals or just rounding up sheep, you have got to be smarter than the sheep with two IQ [Intelligence Quotient], and that follows through, you're trying to be smart enough to do the job properly and not risk anything. So I got to it and I had the boss all day and every night anyway at the bar and I explained my problem to him by the time he got there a
- 14:30 couple of weeks later. And so what are we going to do? He is a very bright chap as I said, far brighter than I. He speaks and thinks and walks and talks quicker, hard to listen to at times the words would tumble out of him, but perfect words. If anyone was going to get ninety-nine per cent it would be him. More than half of the time right, seventy or eighty per cent, pretty good. Anyway
- 15:00 I decided and put it to him that we would do exactly the same sort of thing except the real one would be down here on the tree tops and we would make a hell of a lot of noise and we would drop this number two down and he would go over there and hover like hell. And you know what the chopper noise is, the wok wok noise is, no one knows where it is when it is there. And I never turned and looked if I was putting them in. If I was the leader up here, I never
- 15:30 turned I would just keep one eye on them and tell them, "A hundred yards to go. Split arse here." And bang they would drop them in and sneak away and go away a different direction and I would just keep on going. Just simple little deceptions. I am sure it helped although I couldn't have done it any other way.

These were your own deceptions, not ones the Americans have given you?

- 16:00 No this was just, that's not working, we have got to do something. I can't give too many other examples but there were, slowly we taught the entire squadron. Now we have got sixteen new aircraft, that's thirty-two pilots, add fifty per cent, another sixteen and there we are, hell of a lot of young pilots there. And they come and three or four
- 16:30 older fellows grab them and do these special jobs with them three or four times and then I had a huge white board and these are good things about the RAAF, their systems and they were doing it before I thought of it. So I made the program out but I had a flight lieutenant, Royal New Zealand Air Force and for each pilot there are many things.
- 17:00 Young pilots aren't captains of aircraft yet, our aim was to make them captains. So you would go and put an underslung load on him when I was flying with him and he would do that a few times pretty good and then he would be tagged off and then he would be a captain for underslung loads, then a captain for this or that, captain for sniffing or different jobs like that,
- 17:30 captain for dust offs, medivacs, and then SAS. Captain put SAS in, do it a few times with one of us, and then to take them out and sometimes you had to wait, did three or four trips with him before you got shot at, so the young fellow knew. This leads us to another point, I can't see how it could be done better,
- 18:00 but the RAAF had the system of bringing a couple of new pilots in every fortnight, so for the next fortnight or three or four weeks we few older fellows, remembering we were all about thirty-five the older fellows, we would be taking them in and I will mention SAS, on the worst ones, extractions. And then mark him off as a captain back on the board so we would know he was capable but
- 18:30 he may not have ever done it again because we had newcomers coming all of the time. So it ended up sort of watch on, stop on, and it also ended up with SAS coming down to Vung Tau and having a few days R & R [Rest and Recreation]. Well deserved, I can tell you too, at the swimming pool and the back beach and things like that. But they would always turn up at the officers' mess to see us.
- 19:00 And I perhaps took well over ten years before I even looked at my photographs and colour slides and things. And there we are, always the back bar and sometimes during the afternoon or night and there is always a digger there somewhere if not SAS, we did get on very well indeed I know that. And they would say, "Come and have a drink at the
- 19:30 diggers' mess?" "I can't. I am flying tomorrow." "Christ!" So that put a lot of pressure on the older blokes and that's probably how I got a bit tense and a bit cryie sometimes; a bit of pressure. That air force system of programming was excellent. By ten, eleven clock at night we would have the next day's program sorted out, that the army had asked us for that afternoon by
- 20:00 four thirty, I would have all of the crews ready. Now we can go from four aircraft, six or sixteen depending how many were wanted. All done, all crews. And if you didn't know what you were doing the next day, some young pilots did go to bed, that's all right, we always had a duty pilot, if they wanted you up at half past two in the morning he was the one, got up and did as told. The only
- 20:30 things that sometimes was changed and was very good for John Paul, I would find something pretty deadly, who in the hell was I going to send? And it was always me. And then I would have to worry about which co-pilot who hadn't done it or that, and then if I got a bit greedy I would take the best co-pilot I knew because if I was going to die, I was going to die. I may as well take a good one.
- 21:00 And then of course you would get up early the next morning and go to your aircraft and that co-pilot wouldn't be there, it would be the CO, John Paul. We never said anything, we bloody knew though. He just said, "Oh I thought I would fly with you today." What a great time. Because I called them the one ways, there was no earthly chance of coming back. If that sounds over the top it's not because
- 21:30 the Viet Cong let us go. I have no idea why we weren't knocked off a half a dozen times, and every time I tried that trick John Paul flew with me. Changed the program and flew with me so we knew. And then there was half a dozen times where you couldn't make it on a rescue and you couldn't get in to get the patrols out and you did of course, because you did go.
- 22:00 and you kept going. And so there was a dozen and one ways I would name it. And this is not new; I knew this twenty years ago when I slowly got back into the log book thinking about things. And another twenty-five or so were fifty, fifty toss of a coin. So later I will tell you about a couple of these that everybody knows they're not going to get out of and SAS say good bye to themselves and last man makes sure
- 22:30 we're all dead and pull a grenade on yourself, that's pretty tricky.

We will come to those.

It will be hard.

Just before you actually left Australia you were training some of the fellows on the Iroquois, can you just share with me their training, was it sufficient for what they were about to face?

- 23:00 It was enough, it could have been better. It was enough because half of 5 Squadron had returned from

Vietnam. Now this is where some of the teaching was incorrect in my view and most was correct so that was it. But there are still sneaky little ways of flying that I picked up in all of this time to make it better, and this is what John Paul

- 23:30 and I we did. And by the time you run through twenty year old pilots this whole squadron gets a new feel, it takes a few months and the attitude, I mean diggers didn't even want 9 Squadron I mean the general wanted it sent home. Squadron was so piss poor in '66 and '67 the general did write and said, "Send them home, we don't want them."
- 24:00 And this was a hard ship to go to, so I have got all of my navy mates up there and they are going to go on for four years, looking at me in 9 Squadron thinking poor Rowl. Well you know. So that was a fair bit of anger and that also started it. John Paul, he started it too, we saw eye to eye all of the time you know, you can't stay awake seven days a week. Do the right thing, always did,
- 24:30 had only one argument the entire year and that wasn't an argument, I gave an order to someone he counter ordered it and told them to bring the birds back. Mind you, I didn't tell anyone about it. That it was countermanded, the guy who was told to bring our search and rescue aircraft back, we always had to every night, bring the birds back.
- 25:00 he was a flight lieutenant, he called me a lot of dirty filthy names, and he didn't talk to me for two or three days, he was in intelligence as well, RAAF intelligence. But he knew then that I hadn't ducked for cover or anything, I ordered him back. But it was the boss's idea, and that's the only thing in the whole year we missed on.
- 25:30 In hindsight the CO was correct.
- So John Paul was he navy or RAAF?**
- RAAF.
- So what were the circumstances that brought you actually to a RAAF Squadron?**
- Easy. Somewhere in about '67 and I
- 26:00 presume Holt hadn't, the Prime Minister hadn't yet been eaten by sharks or taken by Russian submarines. They doubled the commitment in Vietnam, so they went from a couple of battalions to three. They then took my navy mates up with Americans there, ships increased and air force were told,
- 26:30 "We will go from eight old choppers to sixteen brand new ones." And all of a sudden they didn't have pilots and that's probably why the air marshal, chief of air wouldn't talk to me. He probably had his knuckles rapped so often by defence minister and prime minister and a few others because RAAF weren't ready. So what happened, RAAF took eight navy and four New Zealand air force fellows, that's twelve pilots,
- 27:00 a lot of experience in that to get them through that one off, one year. By which time they got the others going again. The RAAF did another naughty thing I don't like, I will call them RAAF retreads, there was a chap in 9 Squadron when I got there, he was forty-five years old, flight lieutenant. Now the Duke, he was a Pom RAF of course, he came out here with four daughters
- 27:30 and migrated and the way to do it was join the RAAF out here and fly out or do a desk job when you're forty-three or so and hey presto, you're migrated. It is exactly what we want from everybody, an easy way. Gets passage paid, you have got a job. You understand what officers' messes are and you understand the language and the RAAF. He was the CO of his own squadron in 1945 in the
- 28:00 Balkans and one day he was flying along on a perfect day like today in a Spitfire and a Messerschmitt shot him down. And he bailed out, he got out and thank God he landed on the right side. Anyway in the Balkans, half of course were pro-German
- 28:30 and the other half were pro Tito's mob, communist. And thank God he landed on the right side of the hill and eventually got there. But he was CO of a squadron, young, mind you. And there he was junior to me, "Yes sir!" he called me sir and he shouldn't have. And this all came about...the RAAF looked around for experience and roped him in.
- 29:00 He was, did a conversion on rotary and they sent him to Vietnam. They sent many retreads like that. Pretty ugly way of doing things but I suppose if you have got to fight a war. Now Bob, 1 October of '68 one of my young boys was turning...and he was a bloody good pilot, young navy pilot, I will call him Geoff. He was a
- 29:30 captain in his own right and everything, he was magnificent, he still is. He had his twentieth birthday and over a few beers this is where old Bob said, "You're only twenty, aye? Gee I have had my wings for twenty-five years. I have been shot down." And then he told me the story of being a CO of the squadron. So we didn't push him after that but by God the old fellow was good too. I have heard
- 30:00 stories of SAS, you have got the corporal with the radio, and there is a sergeant leading and another three boys, generally a five man team. I have heard when they call up Albatross it is a call sign, "Any

Albatross?," and you would say "Yeah I am heading towards you." But he would say it in the pommy English voice. And I have heard that corporal turn around to his mates lying doggo and say, "It's okay, the Dukes coming."

30:30 So he worked well.

Just so I understand your feelings or thinking on the retreads, do you think they should have been there or not?

No. In all of this hindsight you run out of pilots, but there are things I wouldn't do as a senior officer or chief of air staff, and no.

31:00 **So the duke was quite good, were there retreads that gave you hell?**

Oh no, they were good. There is no reason I think we shouldn't have the older fellows. I was thinking for them, a bit more compassion and their families. I mean they had done their God damn. The reason I say I don't think they should have been sent is because of their age. They were used by the chiefs.

31:30 **Excellent. Can you share with me your trip over to Vietnam in May?**

Yes it was rather hell. I had five days pre-embarkation leave. We spent it here in Canberra and I think I had another week while I was still flying at Fairbairn. This old chief ground instructor, Nobby, he had a caravan and he towed it down to a hill

32:00 somewhere and set us up and we had five days leave but we probably had five days before we had taken the kids out of school. So we lived in a caravan park and I went to fly each day and then we had the five days. To do that you're aiming for this midnight, eleven o'clock take off deal. Qantas would take us there. Yes, a very good and very

32:30 young friend of mine offered to come up to Sydney with us so that he could take Elaine home. Elaine couldn't stay overnight in Sydney, three kids at home. And although married quarters and home and friends are such, "Oh you can get rid of three kids just by ringing one mate," but not for this occasion. There was no point in Elaine staying, so Ted did that.

33:00 We had organised an ex-navy fellow who was now a Qantas captain to fly that flight for me to take me out. It didn't quite happen, he couldn't, maybe he was in London. But he got his friend to do so. We boarded, must have been midnight-ish. I was the only navy guy on board; I was dressed in khaki by the way,

33:30 even my white cap cover was khaki, so I am in khakis and the kids hadn't seen me in khakis much before. There was a major there, army major who I knew. And he was called a Carriborn [?] ground liaison officer with bombardments and things that navy can do and he is the representative.

34:00 Carriborn CBGLO something like that. Ground liaison officer and I knew him, Alf, and that was okay. The beauty is just after take off the staff and I am sure they were all males and all of the rest were digs, replacements and bits and pieces. The army goes through a lot, not just the regiment,

34:30 engineers and armoured corps, RAEMEs [Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] and electrical people, a whole group of them. And they kept coming and going. So out come this beer, it was a can of beer I remember and the captain said, "This is your captain speaking, you diggers enjoy this beer. Don't think that Qantas is buying this beer for you

35:00 this beer is bought by me and the co-pilot and your cabin crew, we put in." That was great. Damn it all, we're descending into Darwin and it is daylight-ish. So its daylight, we get a cracked wing scrim. So we have twenty-four hours in Darwin.

35:30 So we go to some bachelors' quarters and a couple of officers get dug in there. Alf and I? What do we do that night? We're in the air force compound there, so we go to the air force officers' mess. Bloody good thing to do. We're met by an air force wing commander who said, "No you can't come. We have got our ball on tonight."

36:00 The air force for Christ's sake and he knows where we're going. I am a lieutenant commander and I have got a major mate and this fellow is saying you can't come in the mess because there is a ball on tonight. So we went to the sergeants' mess which is always better, I have done that a lot of times. I remember when the aircraft

36:30 wing got fixed to depart at four, board the aircraft at four am, army get up at half past two. They all seem to fall in and stamp around and salute and count themselves and march past. Of course Alf and I we had only just got back from the sergeants' mess and we're trying to get some sleep at half past two, between half past two and four. So we got up at quarter to four, got up and dressed, boarded the aircraft and

37:00 flew straight to Tan Son Nhut and there was a chopper there waiting for me thank goodness, 9 Squadron had sent a chopper and so I was whisked off to my new home.

So what were your emotions with respect to, you're not with navy boys at this time, you don't

really know anyone, what sort of emotions were running through you?

Because I had been in so long and we had done a lot of work with diggers

- 37:30 and World War II, you would be surprised how close army and navy are. Now I know it was different and I know there was a lot of rescues, not just Dunkirk, and if you know what I know, what destroyers and ships did to get people off Greece and Crete and that, it was amazing.
- 38:00 So it still flows and we did a lot even in Sea Furies and jets, ground attack with army. And you do a lot of exercises with army even unfortunately, escape and survive exercises, and you're out there screwing around in mud and the jungle with army. So my outgoing to army is very high and that will come up later in Vietnam too.
- 38:30 I say what a digger wants a digger gets. And that also helped me a lot. It probably flowed through, if I didn't yell at all of my young pilots that thing, it was shown. So the whole squadron got to the stage what the diggers want the diggers get. And that's our reason for being there. I could see no other reason in Vietnam than working with the diggers, thank goodness, I didn't want to work with the
- 39:00 others Filipinos or Koreans or other people there at all. And especially the Vietnamese. ARVN. Army, Republic of Vietnam. They were the locals but half of them could have been cong anyway, there was certainly a lot of spies in those groups anyway,
- 39:30 and could have come through the several thousand people working on the airfield, hundreds of spies the Viet Cong. So there, and eventually for 9, a much loved 9, 9 stayed there through '69 and '70 and '71 and whatever else happened, I really am claiming that John Paul and I turned that around. And 9 now is generally pretty well loved by those older diggers and later diggers, but not in '66.
- 40:00 Diggers and I must tell you about what we found out with SAS, good story, funny story, you're not up to time yet are you?

Tape 7

- 00:36 **You were going to tell us a story about the SAS?**

Well this is funny but, it is a funny story and

- 01:00 it is also what SAS thought of the early 9 Squadron. I was happy and bright and flying past one day and a crewman said, "Have a look at that." We were going past SAS Hill at Nui Dat. And they have got a very long tin shed, certainly tin roof and on this roof in I think it was yellow coloured blondie type of paint, it had '9 sucks'. Bloody hell I had been there for a couple of months and I thought we were starting to get good at this, or at least
- 01:30 turning things around. So without further ado I just pushed the button and flicked channel and I am talking to Vung Tau now, I am talking to my squadron hanger and I said, "Have we got any paint down there I want it sent up on the standby aircraft." Standby is five minute standby off the ground. So this chief, we will have to call him flight sergeant I suppose, this fellow said,
- 02:00 "Yes sir, what colour do you want?" I hadn't thought of that. "Any colour." "Yes we can do that, how much?" I said, "How much have you got?" He said, "We have got ten litre cans here." I said, "Any smaller?" "No." "All right two cans of ten." Sent them up and so in about half an hour they were up there. And what I did on my next sortie, I briefed my crewmen who works the
- 02:30 guns, twin machine guns sometimes, and the winch. And also looks out and he tells me lots of things he is on the starboard side. So he got the lids prised off and I told him, he was the one that saw '9 sucks' and I said, "Well we're going to do something about this. I will come in from a long way away," because I have got numbers painted nose, sides and everything let alone a little red white and blue on the tail, "I will come in and I am going to
- 03:00 run my right hand skid just down centre line of" whatever you call it on his house "ridge capping and you're going to pour it out." "Rodger that." So we did that from a long way away and pretty slow and straight down the ridge line and he started pouring. I mean that's pretty low for a chopper. Well they came out like ants—and all SAS could kill you—by which time he was pouring the second lot of ten litre, we got to the
- 03:30 end, he didn't really want to be seen, and he just, I found out later, he threw the last couple of litres and the can out. Everything was good. And we didn't run or anything, so that sorted that lot out, but it really hit the fan a bit later. The can hit a SAS corporal. Broke his wrist, now these are teams, the SAS corporal, he is in a team, they work together, they sleep together
- 04:00 they bivouac together, and they fight together and we had just buggered one team up. And I rather expected a bit of a court marshal and said nothing. But how could they miss us? The chap hanging out the side was so plainly dressed in air force gear flying suit because the Yanks all wore jungle greens and

04:30 long coats and God knows what. And they have got a fellow like me with a big beard anyway; can see him a mile off. And but within a couple of hours the word came out, we had got this little rumour coming out of SAS that some bloody American chopper and I am sure the SAS started that story, they blamed the Americans.

Is that taken to mean, I assume that 9 didn't suck any more?

05:00 Well you can take it that they actually knew who did it and me as well, and there was no way they were going to tell. Because it was a pretty big misdemeanour shall we say? And then of course we did work together and it was just fantastic, and we have known all year long and we still know today if we meet SAS, it is a huge thing.

05:30 Even marching on Anzac Day you will get 9 Squadron, I have marched with 9 Squadron for some reason a few months ago, reunion I think and the SAS were in front of us, rededication of a memorial, and there was a lot of joking going on between, so you can actually march with both groups and still enjoy one's self.

Coming back to your arrival in Vietnam, 9 Squadron was based in Vung Tau can you tell us what was there and what the set-up was?

06:00 Things had happened by May of '68, we had double storey wooden buildings we had sandbags around them .we had a very good mess food wise, and a reasonable officers' mess. All reasonably new, in the last couple of years. So I had no trouble there, I lived up stairs, behind a door.

06:30 You had two rooms ,two doors of course, but the centre board down separating those two rooms in my case, from my squadron leader, Tom, had room at the bottom and the top, it wasn't just so we could get together in case of emergency, but we had one air con and it just filled these two nice little rooms or cabins. On my left was an air engineer officer. And I think that was the end of a row there so he had a separate

07:00 thing. If some firing started bigger than a fart, all of a suddenly there would be a hell of a fire fight on because the Americans shoot at anything if something upsets them in the middle of the night. So I had long said to Tom, "Hey Tom if there is firing I am coming through to you with my pistol but for God sake don't put your head out the door will you? We'll get together

07:30 you can open the door and I will put my head around the bottom." If you put it at around five feet up some American is going to blow it off, or Viet Cong, you can be overrun. So we had that all teed up. And it was so funny, I came home to Elaine in November on my son's twelfth birthday first night we were asleep I heard some breaking glass or I dreamt it

08:00 and I just pushed her straight out of bed. November, quite warm in Nowra, straight out of bed, rolled onto my side and I am elbowing my way around on the carpet in our bedroom and I am saying, "Tom, Tom they're coming through the window." And of course my wife is thinking, "Jesus, Tom, what's he doing." Of course it was real life, but I thought I was going into Tom's room, that livened us up a bit.

08:30 **How safe did you feel at Vung Tau? What were the perimeter protections like?**

Very good, it was a huge airfield. The only things that would come in would be big rockets, virtually unaimed actually. The rockets were set up on a couple of tripods or a muddy river bank was the way they could go, they would duly light the fuse and away she would go. Vung Tau extremely rarely. They did one

09:00 breakfast; the breakfast I remember. So we had cordon bleu chefs up there. We had great food I know, but do you think for the life of me I can ever remember eating breakfast but this once? So we get onto breakfast. And there was a karump and a kompf and a boomp down near the hanger which is a fair way from me. And I still remember I was eating something like a bowl of cornflakes or

09:30 something and an egg, which we used to call them anaesthetised, they were etherised, sort of thing, to keep I think, or to kill any bacteria, God knows what. But I know at half past ten in the morning you would burp and up would come this ether. So I just got up and left, I mean there was half a dozen young pilots there, it was half past five in the morning or something, barely daylight. I know what it was, so I just left.

10:00 Nowhere to go of course because these things are unaimed. So that's Vung Tau, very safe. It got a little worse later, I finally ended up with a price on my head, so that made things a bit tough.

What about the airfield itself, was it just 9 Squadron helicopters?

No we had several thousand locals and more aircraft then you can poke a stick at. All American stuff. Aircraft everywhere, all sorts of aircraft.

10:30 **And did you have a certain corner of that airfield, how did it work?**

Yes we had three or four rooms and offices and squadron offices and then we had a hanger, maintenance hanger, a lot of work went on there. We worked a six day week and they didn't stop until every beast was serviceable. Now I must congratulate the air force because the serviceability was

magic. We had more than enough

11:00 for spares and to fix. Mind you there was one hell of a lot of engine changes because of dust and that. We ran into trees and sucked up leaves and God knows what. The serviceability was great; on Sundays they would close, so it was a long week, but on Sundays there was a skeleton staff so that if there was a bird that was not serviceable they would work on it. The serviceability was fantastic.

11:30 **How many choppers did you have?**

That's good because they started with the Bravo models, biggest pain you could ever have, I just loathe the Bravo model because of the way it flew and other things. They were old, slow and not so powerful. And I got there, in that week they went from eight

12:00 Bravo models to sixteen brand new Hotel models. I even flew to Saigon with the whole team and we would fly three or four back, nothing on the clock, hugely magnificent beasts. And my great love, not only for rotary but also my great love for Iroquois came through. They could be built to do a job; they could carry one another just about.

What was the difference between the Bravo and the Hotel?

12:30 The hateful bit I can tell you about, in fact there has been one hanging in the war memorial for a long time but now G for George is there and it has gone somewhere else. Funny enough it's T19 and it is in my log book and it really is two aircraft; a very smart engineer officer got two downed, bent and broken birds and hooked them up, that's nearly impossible to do, Americans

13:00 just throw them, "Oh get another one buddy." It is good but it is hanging there and I flew it. All of the Bravos sat on skids and the noise was lowered and so you took off at an attitude that was horizontal. But by the time you wanted to get up to ninety or a hundred knots you bunt the thing forward so you're really pointing the thing at the ground and almost falling out of your seats. And also

13:30 head back to see where you really were going. And they rolled and rough and bounced and made noises and wobbled instead of being smooth. Now the Hotel model sat up with its nose like that and hovered like that so by the time you got to a hundred knots you sat like I am sitting in this chair, just beautifully screaming through the air and the power and other things like that as well.

14:00 And the newness.

What happened to the eight Bravos?

We kept two there, they probably came home in the Sydney; I know they did come back. They came back to 5 Squadron here. So we were the first with the Hotels. I saw the Hotel again only a few months ago, the same ones, flown by army pilots now and I met the army pilots at the yacht club here in Canberra.

14:30 **Can you for someone who has never seen an Iroquois helicopter, can you take us through it and the crew and where they all were?**

It was big enough in Hotel, I will talk about Hotel because it was a bit bigger. Co-pilot on the right hand side, captain on the left. All of the instruments were normal like the other aircraft. There was something different about the radios than any other aircraft I have ever had.

15:00 Because it is important wherever the radios were on and they were switched on we had control of them here between us. And you had little bits of metal sticking up but this is a quarter of the size of a match stick, it's on or it's off. So okay the radios are on, but if you actually want to hear these are the things you used, these five or so, you flick them back

15:30 I say and I can hear you. This is where you learn to talk and listen to three or four people at once, still fly a beast and still fight it. And still plan, know what your buddies are doing and where you want them, know what pick up you are doing and you are still talking to three or four people. Now when it gets a bit more exciting and someone else comes on the air

16:00 or even on guard channel, some American might be shot down and he might be screaming for help. Well that's just not what I want to hear while I am talking to the diggers on the ground, or the rest of my squadron or my crew of four, but before I can do anything my co-jo's just lent down and click, switched it to him just in case it is important, and he has relieved my ears

16:30 of three sets of conversation, it is back to about two of us now. It is handy if you have cab rank. Cab rank is some United States fellow orbiting at about twenty thousand, and you just call any cab rank and bang, they're down there, got you little buddy. So you sometimes have to call cab ranks on that channel.

17:00 You're talking to SAS on the ground, you're talking perhaps to your leader if I am going to do the pick up and you're talking to a couple of other people. Now you have got a pair of American gunships on a different freq as well, so you really are moving around and your co-jo is careful, he is supposed to be on the controls

17:30 too in case I take a shot so we're both on the controls, or he, but you can have this fraction of a second

to just cut the channel or he takes a message. And the moment it is over he will flick it back again so we're all set. It is a great system of talking and listening, planning and doing everything at once. It came over a bit later in my spooking days.

So there was you

18:00 **and the co-pilot, known as co-jo, what was the captain known as?**

Captain of the aircraft. Probably sir.

And the other two crew members?

Now right behind our shoulders you could actually put up two funny little chairs, canvas seats. But behind that, it has got a huge floor space, behind that is a row of canvas seat that pulls down

18:30 off the wall, that seats five. Behind that now this new chopper has got two new seats, starboard side and port side, and those two seats, one of them is taken by my crewman and the port side by my gunner. So there is two other seats, so we can fit five, two singles of seven and two behind them, nine. So we can tie in nine diggers if you want to tie them in.

19:00 Vietnamese, you could put about twenty in, they are all slight and little; make sure you don't fall out.

Was it nine that you kept to taking if you were taking out Australian patrols or SAS?

SAS were always about a five or six man patrol. Taking a Battalion or two you would fly all day, you would land. And how many you put on they worked it out,

19:30 don't forget with all of their gear they are heavy. It would be seven or eight. The two behind us were for other reasons, so it was five, six, seven.

What were the roles of your crewman and gunner?

Now the crewmen were all leading air crewmen, or corporals or one sergeant at that time up there. The crewmen I must admit were just magic.

20:00 I remember so many of them now, I am able to look back through my log books and remember their names and actually see them and re-meet them, and remember what they did. We will talk about the crewmen on my right hand side, on the bad days we got to the stage of still having one machine gun set up on a pod, and we got a little bar welded so you could have two machine guns because we needed the fire power and sometimes you only needed it for thirty seconds. And it would be very horrible

20:30 to have your machine gun jam because there was nothing else on that side of the aircraft. Mind you if you were hoisting he also came out on a long doggy lead so that he couldn't fall too far out and he had the winch sticking out on the starboard side which he could lower; he could pick up a wounded in a stretcher pipe or he could put down a penetrator a jungle penetrator which

21:00 when it dropped down there diggers just pulled down each side, two little seats. Put your bum on the hard little steel seat and hung on, and he just winched you up. Now of course when he gets up to winch you up you have got no gun on the starboard side, even if we had two sitting there we couldn't use them. That got a bit fraught and that's what crewmen did under fire when you didn't have assistance and you didn't have gunships.

21:30 Or if you had gunships there was a bit of a lull in the gun ship coming past again and everyone on the ground knew that, so old Charlie would put his head around the tree and have a shot at my crewmen or at any of us. Very gutsy crewmen for winching up things like that at tree top level. Very exposed, hanging out, pulling them in. That's

22:00 crewmen and they were permanent crewmen, they had lines of crewmen that went up through the hierarchical; structure there. Excellent. I don't suppose I will name any names but by god they were good. Eyes and ears for us. Other jobs he did, coming down into jungle or as close to ground as you could get to pick someone up or do something, he would watch the tail rotor he could watch starboard side, "You're getting too

22:30 close to trees." The old system is that nothing has to be higher than a couple of feet high for a hundred yards around and then nothing higher than ten feet for two hundred yards out and all of this. Well you get there and Jesus it is totally different, I mean we might have had a B52 strike in and it is just chaos, split bits and huge trees, and some of these two hundred foot trees.

23:00 And you might have to run your blade tip down them without barely touching them. And them moving forward the crewman can tell you where the tail rotor is and he will say, "No you can't do that because if you go down another five feet the tail rotor will hit the top of another tree or stump." And so we come up another five feet again, turn around and he would put the tail, not just the rotor, the tail down between a couple of trees a couple of feet apart. And he would tell you,

23:30 "You have got twelve inches on the right hand side." And you were watching also. It was good flying.

How difficult was it to fly an Iroquois with that much precision?

It was easy; we had been doing it a lot. I don't know if you were nineteen or twenty, but I had been doing that a long time now. In fact I used to practice by going up to trees and taking one leaf off, if you took six leaves off you were bad, because that means you would have hit the tree. I did in fact run into a few trees up there.

24:00 **Does a helicopter pilot have a sense of where your blades get to and how much room you take up in the sky?**

You can see your tips, your tips are painted yellow, but it is very hard to see you generally look sideways or forward, you make sure there is plenty of room, you are moving forward so you have to notice. If you are moving sideways a few feet, well, you will be certainly looking.

24:30 Yeah you can see all right but it is touchy, you wouldn't want to hit something too hard; crewmen a wonderful thing. Gunner on the other side, he has got the guns and on the bad days he has always got a pair there. But I must tell you about the gunners; where did we get gunners from? Airfield Defence Guard. The air force has a thing called Airfield Defence Guard and they are everywhere. But it

25:00 could be boring shall we say. So that is a structure in itself. So what would happen, we would ask our Airfield Defence Guards who we didn't know, come in, I would interview them and we would pick six who want to be a gunner? So they were volunteer, they would come through and I would interview and pick half a dozen and we would train them

25:30 only for six months and then we would do it again. Well I know the half a dozen I picked, by gee they must have been, perhaps whoever picked another group would find them the same, they were all good Aussies you know, almost like a digger these Airfield Defence but we got a fellow called Martin and I got down into a real bad place and I was just a few feet off the ground and we had a fellow come out at one o'clock

26:00 and so the crewman is looking at him, no backup, no gunships. And there was a chap started at three o'clock putting a few past us, funnily enough generally in front of us, and I thought, "Hey these boys have been told to fire in front of an aircraft"; they were young kids don't forget and they were more scared than we were. Until you get the commissar there who would probably boot them up the bum and tell them to get up and run the wire, "Get up and run at them!" But on their own

26:30 they would come one at a time. Then we got one at seven o'clock. Now things are getting a bit rough there. No one tells you but you just move around so he can get a better go at seven o'clock one and he can have a go at one and three. Well now they have turned around to like two and four o'clock and eight o'clock. And all of a sudden there was bugger all coming from behind my left ear. I was getting a bit excited and there was not a lot

27:00 of talk on the radio, radio was very good, you kept it down to what you had to do. Martin just said, "The gum jammed." Single gun it must have been that day. "Gun jammed." Okay silence, we knew there is a guy at eight o'clock now and I know because things are coming past me, you see very sixth or seventh one it's a tracer, and you hear them actually too, breaking the sound barrier.

27:30 Martin was so cool and good, I said, "What about the eight o'clock?" "Oh," he said, "They're all going under me." Bloody brilliant, aye, gravity drop in a hundred yards or something. "What's happening?" and then I hear brpp, brpp, brpp. "Martin?" His surname was Martin. He has got the SLR [Self Loading Rifle] now, his own bloody rifle,

28:00 and what he is doing, he is trying to stop the blockage with one hand and with one hand he has got his own SLR, short burst to keep him behind the tree. "That's beaut, right oh, what about the bullets are they still going under the skids?" "No not under the skids, under me bum." That makes me excited because it is above the skids but under his bum. It is all happening a lot quicker than I am saying there.

28:30 And I had number two and three, actually they were both navy, navy was a lieutenant and number three was this Geoff. The lieutenant was ex-college, very pukka, very good. And I said, "Come in beside me sideways, keep your feet up and cover my so and so and three likewise fifty feet up and hover there." Bugger engine failures, you're dead at a hundred feet if that happens, you haven't got time to get down on

29:00 that one. And of course Andy, very pukka [proper] said, "Two already in sir." That's good, no wonder these guys are being kept quiet. And this fellow is still going pop, pop, pop, trying to fix it. And Geoff the nineteen year old off civvies street [civilian life], "Likewise boss." So sirs, no nothing.

29:30 They had already got there, they had saw the predicament before I had even got excited. Then I heard pop, pop, pop. Very quietly, "Martin?" "Run out of ammo, I have got my pistol." And he was taking single shots because there was a lot of smoke around, a lot of firing going on. Cordite smells great, like napalm in the morning, isn't it? As the saying goes. And next thing brrrrmmmm.

30:00 He didn't have to tell me that the port gun was going again. But that's what a gunner does, not just him, so many of them did these things, it was just great.

That story was a good example of how the helicopters would support each other in formation, was there a text book of sort of flying manoeuvres that you would execute or was it made up

as you went along?

It was always known, this particular one, you would never do it in

- 30:30 peace time because any trouble or any failure there, he wouldn't have time to get the whole thing collected and land gently like you can in a chopper. I was obviously extremist a bit, the shots were coming past a fair bit and now I knew they were coming under us as well, which I really couldn't see some of them.
- 31:00 I decided I had to risk, because of what we were doing. I don't think I really cared, I must tell you why I wasn't frightened, it is a really good story, it had probably happened to others, I didn't care for us but we had a job to do and boys to pick up. But strangely enough before I had given them this job they had thought of it themselves there was a lot of
- 31:30 self thought. Some things were pretty obvious. Had I not told them, well they were already there before I told them.

How many choppers would fly at once or again was there no rules?

Again no rules, the day before if there were no battalions out, three or four choppers could do the job.

- 32:00 And I mean the general might just want to go around somewhere or someone might want to go to Saigon. But don't forget there were fire support bases even, without a company or a battalion around them, they would want resupply and a bit more ammo and a bit of this and a bit of 105 shells for the guns that might be out there. There might be some Americans on hills. There might be some Vietnamese hopefully in our
- 32:30 towns that were better protected, sort of, and so you would just hash and thrash, that's just two or three or four choppers. Then we would make sure there is always a couple at five minute standby and they were noted crews. And I would have a couple at one hour and a couple at two hours. Just in case
- 33:00 the fan was hit with things. And you would find something under siege, or even a quarter of Nui Dat, all of a sudden an attack, and then a wounding and I would have another four at three or four hours notice, around about that. And everything after that was free to go and have a drink and go to the beach, others had to be within, but you could fly all sixteen
- 33:30 on the troop lift, if a battalion wanted to move twenty ks away and set up there for the next six week, you did that. So for the next six weeks you had a battalion out there and they always wanted people, there were people who were heat exhausted, wounded, pain, broken arm, they wanted water and this and now and again hot food
- 34:00 and they would have these big hot pannikins in the back and you could smell it, like pumpkin soup and roast potatoes and boy you could go out there to a whole battalion out there, and you would probably go every couple of hundred yards and drop it to patrols or platoons of seventeen and they all got one of each of these and God I remember the smiles. These hot smelly, filthy, sweaty diggers and Maoris, two
- 34:30 companies of Kiwis and half of the Kiwis [New Zealanders] were Maoris anyway. You could see them when they smiled, they were pretty good. So we could get sixteen all day long. Mothers' Day in May so it wasn't long after I got there we joined in with an American company and wonderfully enough was with the 35th so we had eight of our pilots up there, and we joined them, there was about seventy-five of us at one stage, I mean there were choppers everywhere
- 35:00 you often saw twenties and thirties going past, which worried me about coming home because my freedom bird, Qantas bird, had to take off at Tan Son Nhut and I kept thinking are we going to run into twenty or thirty choppers before we even get home? And I kept looking out of the window and when I got up to about five thousand feet which I recognised I thought, "Phew, no choppers fly up here, in eight hours time I will be home in Sydney." That was a relief.

35:30 What did you fly those seventy-five choppers for in May?

Taking an American Division or something like that. Huge, it would be a troop movement, not just putting in SAS or anything like that. Those things varied, I did fly a gunship, and some days like I said, the Americans would send you a pair from anywhere. Those things slept all day,

- 36:00 the Americans were always overworked, the Americans were too hard on their equipment. The Americans' body count was false; if there was six fellows here in the yard they would land here, whereas we would go half a mile away and spend a couple of weeks but we would get them; we couldn't afford that.
- 36:30 Pat Vickers who died there Feb 22nd, he had written to me on about Feb 10th and he was smiling, his company had twenty-two choppers, he had eleven. Pat was 2IC, he had eleven, and his mate over here had eleven. And he said, "Oh boy it was going well until lunch time Row1, I was the only one, I had my whole eleven choppers and not one scratch,
- 37:00 I was really smiling, like yesterday," he said, "I was really smiling. The other choppers were here, they were there, they were limping home and had wounded and dead and killed. That afternoon I had ten

shot down. Three write offs and the others were saved. But you have got to land, get a helping hand." Once again flick channels, "Any helping hand?" "Roger that albatross, where is your position?"

- 37:30 "What do you want?" "I have got one down and need a lift." And old helping hand would be there in no time. Crewman would sort of shimmy down and we would tie the rotor fore and aft and they would just put something around the head and phht. "Where do you want this thing?" "Squadron Vung Tau." The system was good, but to
- 38:00 stomach that and to read some of those reports of what my other mates went through was sheer hell. Stupidity. Now we had one of the gunships was there, an American chief and he was the crewman but he was also the engine airframe chief, he worked on his aircraft. But he flew with it all damned day. Up half of the night
- 38:30 patching it and fixing it. Not good for tiredness and that. Anyway he had a tail rotor gear box had a weep on it. You could see all of this oil dripping and he has got his little bag of things and there was two or three litres of oil. Ours were a hundred per cent serviceable, we didn't fly them with a leak but they had to. If he didn't, the lieutenant colonel would probably have him court marshalled, or written up so that he would never be promoted or if he was bad
- 39:00 enough they would send him back to the States for failing to do his duty. So and he wanted twenty-two aircraft next morning. Good God it takes all night to fix the bullet holes and fix the radio and all of that. So they were flying unserviceable in that small unserviceability, it works, but we wouldn't accept anything that wasn't perfect. So this chap said, "Have you got any oil there?" I said, "No but I can get you some." He said,
- 39:30 "Gees it has been leaking all day like a bloody sieve, I haven't had time to fix it, I will do it tonight, I have got to take it off and put a gasket on." "I understand." "But I don't think it will get us home, run dry is a bit of bad news" if you lose your tail rotor you will probably lose the lot over the jungle. So once again you just press the tip and you "How much do you want? Couple of litres." With the standby chopper or the dust off chopper it will be
- 40:00 there in a couple of minutes and you give it to him. He told me he had two hundred and forty-three hours that month. Twenty hours is good enough for a fighter pilot. Twelve hours just, fifteen just, twenty hours is better Thirty hours is enough. If you start getting a hundred hours you are overtired, two hundred hours you are bugged. Twelve hour days, poor buggers.

Tape 8

- 00:30 **You mentioned you could get a helping hand or a cab rank, can you just explain how that system worked and where those choppers were coming from?**
- Well to make it a real life story when I got a hole in my fuel tank I had half a dozen diggers on board and I was heading
- 01:00 back to Bien Hoa because I left Vung Tau for six weeks with a detachment of four aircraft, the boss had sent me away and my four aircraft would look after one of the battalions up there, one of the Australian battalions would go to help the Americans because the Viet Cong were closing on Saigon or Bien Hoa. So at this time with a hole in the fuel tank and of
- 01:30 course streaming fuel and rocketing through the air of course we all getting covered with kerosene shall we say. I got a bit worried and I didn't know what to do as a pilot because if I went fast enough it could atomise to a very fine atomisation and with a big flame out the back I thought we might all just go poof. And that wasn't a good thought. And then I thought well if I slow down the fuel drops
- 02:00 will be so large they won't go poof see? Petrol might but kero won't. So I slowed down but then again I have got twenty ks to run to my secure base, this is over infested country we call it, so it is a matter of how far you run before the fuel gauge gets down to here. And then you have got to think further forward, because I want another aeroplane and I am fifty ks from Vung Tau, and of course we did, we won,
- 02:30 two little stories here. Hit a safe pad, got down, got out the diggers were there, they had to get a truck to come and get them to take them to where they were supposed to be going. They were going somewhere else in the jungle and all of a sudden we were back at Long Bin. And would you believe all of a sudden the Salvation Army tent was right there. Salvo are fantastic, there is no doubt about it. And he came out with a couple of bickies and a cup of coffee for me, by this time
- 03:00 I had turned around and all of the fuel had run out. But on the last few miles there thinking ahead, you pressed the tit and you called, "Helping hand?" You pressed this in, twisted the frequency and pressed your button and say, "Any helping hands? This is albatross zero two." And they will come back and say, "Where are you? What are you?" and you say, "Look I am here I need my aircraft taken to Vung Tau" "Okay little buddy, no trouble I will be there in ten or fifteen or twenty."

- 03:30 But then you flick, then you say, "Flick," which means you're out going to another frequency. So you go to your home frequency, and say, "Listen I have done this to my aircraft and I want another one up here now." So you get one of the five minute stand-by ones. One single pilot will bring it up. Within fifteen minutes or so of
- 04:00 landing there I had a new one arrive, because I had called ten minutes before that of course. Same as 'helping hand', that's a photograph of it, they do it, just make sure your helmet, and if you have got a boxed lunch, make sure you don't leave that there and off you go.
- We didn't see that photograph, can you just describe the helicopters they used for helping hand?**
- Chinooks called Helping Hands. They did other work as well, there was a whole
- 04:30 squadron of Helping Hands they were probably scattered every hundred ks or so around; every American base probably had a helping hand on. They were good at this job. The Americans, I have no idea how many choppers were shot down, a few thousand anyway, but a lot were able to be picked up quickly, before dark, before they were overrun. And in a lot of
- 05:00 cases picked up, taken home and patched up. Fixed up on that. Now the cab rank, I have told you the story of helping hand and what I saw and used, cab rank is even more interesting actually. I knew cab rank was all up there if you ever wanted one, but I hadn't wanted one. And so we're thundering out and we get the call sign from SAS, half surrounded, want help pretty bloody quick!
- 05:30 And SAS whispers, because if they talk someone fifteen metres away in the jungle can hear you. So you get this, "Any albatross? Any albatross? Call sign eleven?" Call sign eleven so the hair goes up. So you whisper back, "Call sign eleven albatross zero three." Or whatever the hell you are that day.
- 06:00 "Turning towards." Because they were a direction finder, so the first thing you did while he was talking you can see where is his and you would have a direction within a few transmissions and of course you go to full power, get the gunner, get the crewman, you know what's going on, tell home base you're going. Request the gunships if you can get them there in time, if it is going to take ten or fifteen minutes
- 06:30 to warm them up it is too late. Especially if SAS say, "Got a couple of hundred chasing us, sneaking up on us." And this happened a lot of times. There were many ways. "Sneaking up on us. We're on the tree line" or "Seventy metres in from the tree line." "Okay got that."
- 07:00 They don't have to ask you, you know they want to know so you tell them. "Three minutes out." Get the grid reference, three, five minutes, it all makes the difference, half an hour and they are gone in these situations. So you don't have a briefing, don't go and pick up gunships, they know it and you know it too. So I knew we were in a bit of poo and it was just me. I was flying singly doing things
- 07:30 and I just happened to be returning from somewhere empty, so away we went. It was to the starboard actually, it was out to the west of Nui Dat, so I thought, "What do I do? Cab rank." You have got to try everything, so I pushed the right frequency, "Albatross zero seven I am at such and such position and I am heading for such and such position, our SAS patrol was being overrun."
- 08:00 Well he came back, he was a Captain Usaf and he had an F100, a super saver. Phantoms are pretty good, the F4s, he had that. I just described where I was and he said, "I have got you little buddy." And I said, "How come?" And he said, "I have been watching you, I can see you turn off. "and he is obviously listening to our frequency because he is the cab rank in the Australian area, so he is
- 08:30 probably onto our operations, he hears us talk all day long. And I told him that and he said, "What you want?" I said, "What you got?" He said, "I got thirty mill [millimetre]," which is thirty mill cannons, "I got nape [napalm - defoliant], and I got drag bombs." So I said,
- 09:00 "Drag bombs no good, how about cannons and nape?" "Roger that buddy I just got to get rid of my drags first, the drags have got to go before the napalm." "Do that." So he probably bombed some poor buddy running around in the jungle. Drag bombs, fins open up and they don't go sailing along, they're rather accurate and if you drop them a hundred yards short you just pull up and two hundred feet down there bang.
- 09:30 So then I talked to the diggers. Then I called him and I said, "I am just running in, I am thirty seconds out." "Throw smoke," so you throw smoke to the diggers, then I say, "I see that." He says, "I got it." "Pass in twenty." All pretty good stuff. So this is real life.
- 10:00 And then he said, "Where do you want the nape?" And I said, "Along the tree line." "Against the rules, got to be two hundred metres from any friends." So I said, "Well I am about a hundred metres from you and they're about seventy or so, perhaps they're maybe a hundred metres from you." "I would have to drop it down behind them in the tree line." So it is no bloody good. They would shoot the crap out of us, it was clear country then.
- 10:30 It was a pad, it had been cleared and bulldozed, not clear as we know it, crap everywhere, trees fallen over dead and dying. So, "pass in ten." We're talking five seconds now. And I said, "That's no good it is too far bloody behind." He said, "Yeah I got you, that looks like two hundred metres." So he just broke

the rules.

- 11:00 And I remember not much, I don't remember much. Too many things happened, too many bad things. I tell the boys things are going to get real bloody hot behind them real quick and they were much closer than me and to run, and he would make a pass with his thirty mill, thirty mill cannon is pretty bloody good, it is like a gattling gun, phhhht and that's it, you don't hear bang, bang, bang. Just phhhht. And of course napalm at the same time. Well guns all of the way in and the last second nape and the gun.
- 11:30 All I remember is hugely hot, flaming hot I got very burnt on one side from the nape, SAS ran while all of this was going on, jumped in, pissed off. Cab rank. Good stuff. Had to use nape by the way, we wouldn't have got anyone and we wouldn't have even got me because I would
- 12:00 have persisted.

What does the napalm look like when it goes in?

He was just not right on the tree line, he was probably twenty or thirty metres in the tree line because it does spread. I was burnt, hot as hell. It also burns all of the oxygen too. It is the heat that gets you. But we had no further trouble. Now as I say it really would have got me had we not used nape.

- 12:30 I wouldn't have left them and that brings me to this thing I would like to tell you about. How does one do it? So I was there in the first couple of days, it was interesting it happened to everybody obviously, how will I behave when I am under fire? You know? So I got myself under fire and that's okay, I am just sitting here doing what I can because
- 13:00 I have got my hands full. Cool, still talking, walking, working, hovering., picking someone up and I flew back and I flew to Nui Dat base, kangaroo pad, and I landed. "This is interesting," I thought I would be okay but I didn't know, I mean I could have run.
- 13:30 I had no idea what we all go through. And I thought, "Gee that's good" and I got out of the aeroplane and lucky I was walking on my own. I had a hundred yards through rubber plantation, bit of barbed wire and a little path up to the RAAF crew hut. And half way up there I heard...have you ever heard a leopard cough like, not quite lion but tigers and leopards cough like that and that's what I heard.
- 14:00 Holy God I nearly jumped. I got my revolver and I turned and it is happening in fractions of seconds now. No one told me there was tigers or leopards I haven't heard that you know. And I really had the gun out and I was looking around because I thought I was going to be jumped on and I was really frightened.
- 14:30 And it wasn't there and I thought that's funny. It was pretty open, the rubber plantation. And I took a few more steps and I heard it again. And this time my throat was shaking, it was me. I was so angry. Absolutely boiling angry that someone would try to stop me getting the diggers. Once again it didn't seem to be me.
- 15:00 I took the chance, to get my diggers. You have heard of the soldiers, generals and people like that, I don't know if other people have this in them too, I don't know, I don't ask. And I am putting this down for posterity; I really haven't talked about it much actually. But I do want to get it down because it gets really bad at the end.
- 15:30 So on this little path and I found it was me and I was absolutely furious. And then I made a pledge and I didn't mean it in any other way, I just thought this is not going to bloody happen. No patrol, no digger is going to die alone. Of course saying it to you takes time, for me it was just a second, it goes through the mind quickly.
- 16:00 What it really was, if they were going to die I would land beside them, force in somehow, crash beside them, I don't care. What would happen I would have more fire power, four more of us and low and behold with an aircraft on deck, if we could have ten or fifteen minutes whatever, all hell would break loose. You would have every chopper, every cab rank,
- 16:30 every guy there because aircraft down seems to be different from just killing diggers. You can kill half a dozen diggers but you put an aircraft down and boy you're in trouble. And I thought that was very smart of me. The first one, they wouldn't die alone that was a piece of cake and then afterwards I realised of course all hell would break loose and you would get all of the fire power you want. So I used that for all of the year,
- 17:00 that little pledge.

That's all right.

So there was a spin off, the first spin off was excellent and I didn't know it was going to happen this way. I had no fear ever any more because I knew what I was going to do. I knew what I was going to do and therefore I didn't have to make a decision any more and therefore it was done for me.

- 17:30 And that would be fate see? No fear. And that worked all of the time and that was delightful to do these things without fear and know I would do them and know I would do them on and on while I was there.

Now the other little thing that hurts so much and I am so pleased that I am able to talk about it without bloody crying,

- 18:00 its ruined my life in this regard that I realised when I got home that I put the family second and I have had thirty odd years of hell. Thirty-five, thirty-six years of hell, half of my life,
- 18:30 I find it terribly hard to say I love my wife to her. I get on with the kids okay, we say it a lot and it is lovely. So I have ruined that. I think she knows and the attitude has been there and I am still a Dad and still a husband, but I really cannot
- 19:00 say, "I love you" because once I didn't, I put others ahead. That's the bad of it, that's a small part of that history, she doesn't know that. I try to tell her sometimes and then of course I break down and
- 19:30 she pats me and tut tuts me and I can't get through. Some of these are the reasons why I have put myself forward. And I must say today I am much better. I don't think there is much worse than that, so I got through that.

On that occasion that you just talked about, what had happened on the preceding operation?

- 20:00 I don't know, it was the first time under fire and it was the first time on rescue under fire, so it happened in the first week or so. There are a lot of things I can't remember. As I said I can't remember one dinner at night, I can't remember one breakfast apart from the one when the rocket went and even then I can't remember
- 20:30 much what I ate. I can remember lunches, always boxed lunches somewhere. Here is an efficiency too. God knows I wasn't counting that wasn't my job. Well you had to refuel after two hours flying, so if you had an eight hour day you would be in and out and you could go to any American base,
- 21:00 tell them nothing, just land there pick up the dickos, out, fill up, sign nothing do nothing. But most times you were really operating out of Nui Dat and so you pulled into Nui Dat and refuelled and the next thing your crewman would come back with four little boxed lunches. Open the box there is a lettuce leaf, well how the hell did a lettuce leaf get there? And in it was chicken or a drumstick or tomato, little pepper and salt, those paper things. I just remembered that. Probably a plastic knife and fork. These appeared from magic.
- 21:30 Tell them nothing, just land there pick up the dickos, out, sign nothing, do nothing. Either eleven o'clock if you are going away for a couple of hours or two o'clock if you were late getting back. This was a great efficiency, efficiency with food. So I do remember the lunches, mind you I think it was chicken bloody every day. Other good thing with the RAAF like that US crew chief who was bugged. Twelve hour flying days, you really
- 22:00 couldn't operate that well. We had a system, eight hour day that was it, quit and come home, you told someone an hour before. A hundred hour month. Ground yourself. So I am just remembering that my second last flight in Vietnam was eight hours fifteen and I flew with an old group captain who had fought in the war who was in Pierre Closterman's squadron, the French Squadron after D Day as
- 22:30 the Allies pushed back through Belgium, France, Holland, all of our squadrons went there better to attack the Germans. Bay Adams was in that. The whole squadron one day went across an enemy airfield knowing, and the only way to do that was to line up, line abreast all eight together,
- 23:00 Pierre got out the other side of this, we're talking one and a half minutes to get across an airfield, shoot everything.

Sorry I just think those dogs outside are probably interrupting the recording, I will let you finish this story,

Well see I have forgotten it. Yes Adams, so Pierre Closterman the French leader crawled out the other side of the German airfield and called up his two three four five

- 23:30 and the Australian voice of Bay Adams said, "It is just you and me boss." Lost his squadron straight away. Bay finally came up as a four ringer just to look after the Australia squadrons on the airfield there; There was 37 Squadron Caribous as well. They were the airfield defence guards, he was looking after the air force personnel. He had never flown a chopper, he had instructions not to fly.
- 24:00 Active service, somewhere in 5 Squadron he had got something like twelve hours in a chopper and demanded, now he is a big boy demanding my wing commander that he fly in 9 Squadron and we all know he is not allowed, great war horse, I have got two hour stories on him. The way he got around it, my boss, every time the group captain flew and
- 24:30 sometimes he flew once or twice a week he flew with me and blamed the bloody navy. But oh boy we had a lovely time and I admire him very much, he has died just recently. So there is eight hours and there was your hundred hours so you really weren't overworked or overtired; bit like the aircraft, I was serviceable all of the time.
- 25:00 **Obviously it took a great toll on your nerves; how did you deal with that at the time?**

I had no problems at that time, it was fate and I wasn't frightened so I had no trouble. It was...yes, the nightmares started nearly a couple of years.

What about the anger you talked about?

Oh well anger settled. Well you're angry but you knew you were going to fix it anyway, you were going to do it and you were going to get the boys so what the hell?

- 25:30 Didn't get angry any more there. It took a couple of years for the troubles to start, we will call them. And it was this, after my sea time and this and that and my joint services staff college and after we settled here, some of my navy pilots from 9 Squadron had come back, they had also had their hours up then so they had gone to the UK for six months and become instructors.
- 26:00 Remember it was only 1970 and the RAAF was still going along and chewing through the men and they were instructing at Fairbairn, they were on loan from the navy to instruct. And of course Vietnam vets, who better? And they lived at Harmon at married quarters and so they said, "Come out and have a barbecue?" So somewhere in 1971 early, Christmas '70, anyway I pop out for the barbecue and we're having a great
- 26:30 old time and we all like each other as well, still all together very much so the boys, only one of us has died. The boys are still, I am boss and that's it, they give me a cuddle and the bullshit they do as they did a couple of weeks ago. And I said to Geoff, "Hows Hoong?" Now
- 27:00 I think I can get through this one, Hoong was our house maid, and I think she probably looked after about eight. Once again I wasn't interested but I knew she looked after about eight. She was quite an attractive Vietnamese; she might have been, like an Asian, anywhere between twenty or thirty, had no idea. I do know I was very careful of her, I never turned my back. Bit sad now.
- 27:30 I teased her a bit, I hardly ever saw her because she seemed to appear in my room, just open the door and step in at seven thirty and I was never there. Occasionally I would stay in, would be sitting up writing letters home. Would have had breakfast or a sleep in. Once she caught me in bed, but I always had my nine mill just under here and I just took the safety off, you never trust anyone on your own.
- 28:00 It got worse after the price on my head; I had to watch carefully because I reckoned she was the way to get to me. So I started with the English/Vietnamese dictionary and I would show her this, and it would be, "Please book a first class passage for me on the
- 28:30 train to Hanoi" and she would look at that and look at me and think how do I know? Then she realised I was joking and that was good. The English got a little bit better as we went on and I could understand her. I left her always a piece of fruit in a certain place, if I had another piece of fruit in the room it was mine. Hers was there. I found out she was looking after her sister's children, her sister having been killed; I have no idea how. It was very
- 29:00 vicious, there was very nasty atrocities happening there. Internally, some family stuff too. Lots of other little things happened, I went away for six weeks and I left my tin trunk and boots, she polished my boots and they were there for six weeks. And one day I was sitting, I had come home and I was sitting writing a letter and she just barged in and she just collapsed in heaps of tears
- 29:30 and sobbing and I did touch her and held her. She just sobbed and sobbed. I didn't know. She was westernised, she was a Roman Catholic she had told me before the sobbing, and she had the cross and her family had come from North Vietnam in '54, '55 after Dien Ben Phu and the French pulled out. So okay she is on our side, but I think hang on there is double
- 30:00 double agents here. And all she could say to me, "I thought you dead." Because the cabin looked as it had been packed to send Rowl home. "I thought you dead." So we got over that one, I still couldn't trust her of course and then the boss in his wonderful inimitable way raced past as he does at night, if he is not actually talking to me very fast he walks past and talks faster, he starts there and finishes there and that's it.
- 30:30 He said, "We must be doing something good, they have got a price on your head and my head." I thought, "Christ!" so I pulled it up a bit and I said, "How much boss?" He named a figure and I don't know if it was five thousand or fifteen thousand or five hundred, or fifteen hundred and I don't know if they were in dollars or pesos or dong or what. Probably not much. Dong would probably feed you for a year. He said, "Watch your back." And we thought about it and I never talked to him about it again much.
- 31:00 No one could get me on the airfield with a big bang, because there was a lot of people around all of the time. I had to be alone. And the only one that could get me was Hoong so I was very wary of Hoong, no one could throw a grenade at me because if you're seen you're caught, so if it has got to be silent I thought okay it will be a knife. So things got worse and worse, anyway they pulled me out a month early, I was suddenly told to go in April,
- 31:30 and this I think was good because everyone probably got that, by now we're getting lots of replacements and the boss said, "Oh you're going home in a few weeks." "Okay" Told the navy, told Elaine and everyone knew except Hoong of course and Viet Cong, and next thing I knew I was gone. So

two years later when I said to Geoff, "How's Hoong?" he just went white.

- 32:00 At her mention he just went white and said, "Oh haven't you heard boss?" And I said, "No." "They just cut her throat and left her to die. Let her bleed to death in Vung Tau." Now I think there is several thousand here, she is the only one who was assassinated in that whole bloody airfield. So I put two and two together and if I have got it right she wouldn't do me in, so they did her.
- 32:30 I have no other explanation. Got too close and she was definitely the only one, this is my thinking right or wrong, but they did it, and so she flapped around until her blood ran out. A good lesson to everybody. She was the only one of all of the thousands of, 'indigenes' we will call them, on that airfield. So then the nightmares started.
- 33:00 And I have always had these two buggers coming up that laneway at me. Took twenty years. Twenty years to get rid of it, self, I was self counselling. I was lucky too because the counsellors in those days were atrocious, they probably made more people suicide than they saved. Tough on them. I would go up, they would come I would reach down, God I have left my
- 33:30 weapon, so we fought and he had a knife and his little mate behind him. And I fought his knife and parried it and parried it and I just knew, fast asleep of course, God help me I didn't hurt Elaine. Always the same one. It was scripted and I cut and cut and there is no way and then he had
- 34:00 one giant stab at me instead of what he was doing before, he was doing it slowly. This was stab pull back stab, and what I see in my nightmare is the stab pull back and of course my hands gone down and as the knife enters me, goes about an inch in, I wake up. And I reckoned if I didn't get rid of that I was going to die of a heart attack. So I was farming by this stage,
- 34:30 no I wasn't, this is probably a reason I went farming too. And all through the next twenty years of farming it happened. The way I could do it was go up on the tractor all day to do some work and think how can I do it, how can I stop it? I am not telling anyone, Elaine knows I have a nightmare but not what and doesn't know it is the same one and doesn't know it is this way; assassination.
- 35:00 And so I willed and willed and willed and the only way I could do it was to wear my side arm all of the time in my mind or dream and I talked to Rotary about it in 1982 or '3 and around about 1990 the nightmare started again around the corner he came and I put my hand down there and the nine mill
- 35:30 was there and I got him right there, I can still see it a nice dark round hole. And his skittish little mate went around the corner in the dark and I didn't get the shot off. But before as he went around I realised he would never come back in my nightmare, he wouldn't come back because he wasn't the leader. Haven't had that nightmare since, twenty bloody years. Mind over matter.
- 36:00 Tough.

Pause there for a second. Completely off the topic of what we were talking about, you were as you said in charge of rostering people on and off and the eight hour shifts as you said and hundred hours flying, how did you manage that, can you give us a bit more detail about how that was done?

Well it was well set-up and I think I did mention the flight lieutenant from the

- 36:30 New Zealand air force, he was my assistant and he had this great big board. By dark or seven or eight o'clock at night and he didn't fly as much as me, as I said, our leaders generally flew because we always had new fellows coming through. So George if he had time off and I made sure he wasn't programmed too hard because this was another job. And he would just put all of the
- 37:00 names down what the army wanted the next day and which aircraft and who was doing what., what names, what call signs and then I would just run my eye over it sometime by eight or nine o'clock and adjust a couple of things and suggest I would do that job and boss would fly that or I would fly high and boss would fly low. He would say, "No the boss said he wanted to do this." "Okay." Wanted to be red leader, lead the troops and I would be up top looking on
- 37:30 telling the boss where to go to. And then before we went to bed, we did have quite a few drinks too by the way. Before we went to bed we would just check that there were no further jobs and sometimes they would be phoned through and the boss and I would quickly get together and decide who was doing that one. So George was handy in that regard. Got a minute left, I was there one day
- 38:00 leaning on the officers' bar and it is made of lino type stuff and I saw young Geoff, and shellite for lighter fluid in Zippos was always free so from the bar girl he got this shellite. Well I didn't see that, all I know is Geoff was sort of coming towards me and he slipped in front of me and said, "Excuse me sir." And then he went around and lifted my arm with the beer in it, "Excuse me sir." And he kept doing something and while he did he went right along the bar with this shellite,
- 38:30 and around the corner and everyone is leaning on the bar and drinking there talking away. And he lit the God damn thing one end. And shellite doesn't burn with a bright yellow flame; it is a purpley, bluey, whitey, a bit yellow at times. And then next thing, you have got to remember it is always summer time up there. Next thing, all of the hair under ,my arms got burnt. This flaming shellite went past, and you could look around, "Oh, ahh."

39:00 And that's the sort of daps that happened, and that's Geoff.

Where was the bar?

Officers' bar, officers' mess which was separate to the eating place because everyone ate in the eating place. Only twenty yards away and probably only twenty yards away from my steps that I could get up and go to bed, my naval cabin up there, and

39:30 the bar was one quarter of that room.

And how far away was the airfield from that bar?

Oh the hanger could have been several hundred metres, it took a kombi van full of us, or my jeep, the keys were always in my jeep anyone wanted it they could have it. I would sort something else out, and if I knew I deliberately wanted it I would take the key out, but anyone could drive my jeep.

40:00 So it was quite long way down to the hangar.

Tape 9

00:36 **Just to paint a picture of Vung Tau, was it an American base or what was the make up of the base; who was there?**

01:00 Yeah this airfield of Vung Tau there was also navy docks and other things there too. It was an American base. We were given a hanger and a few rooms. Half a 'k' away we had a cabins, our sleeping quarters our officers' bar, the sergeants had a mess as they call it with beer in it and the airmen, three

01:30 types of bar just like here in Australia. But being the American base, our airfield defence guards, we might have only had a few dozen I don't know how many, but they might have only patrolled a few gates and at night patrol a couple of hundred yards of the wire. But I have got no idea of how many Vietnamese worked on the base. The Americans

02:00 do this by thousands, there were thousands. I mean the chap who wrapped our parcels to send home was Vietnamese. The hoochie maid Hoong. The bar girl who obviously came on at night and was very beautiful, and poured the drinks until ten, eleven, midnight, whenever we finished drinking, and the obviously went home to Vung Tau. You walked out the main base gate and we were in Vung Tau. We weren't a long way out of town.

02:30 So they had thousands of Vietnam working there. We had a few Vietnamese men working around the hangers sweeping the dust up. Anyone could have been a friend of the Viet Cong or threatened by the Viet Cong to be a spy. The old ladies, talk about, you have pretty ones behind the officers' bar and you have ugly ones shall we say, unfortunately, doing the washing.

03:00 And I used to see those snaggle toothed old hags, two or three black teeth left in their heads, poor old darlings, and pretty stooped. Hard life. So it turns out now and it is probably only for the last year or two that I have heard from one of my navy fellows that the bar girl was an informant, Viet Cong informant.

03:30 Now how did I get a price on my head? All I can work it out, someone has the either saw me in the bush picking up SAS because it did happen often and there was an awful lot of people around. Half way through the year SAS instead of just sneaking in and getting the information, right inside battalion headquarters sort of thing

04:00 they don't stuff around they get peed on and walked on as they're watching. Very close these boys. And then coming home quietly and obviously getting a quiet pick up maybe, without getting shot at, it got to the stage to really harass the Viet Cong in the jungle every SAS team lay in ambush on the fourth or fifth day and then there would be one hell of a mess because you could imagine, I said to

04:30 one sergeant Blue, "Well okay you set the ambush. How many came down the track?" he said, "We had been watching the track a couple of days and so we knew. We warned you to keep with us. Eighty came down." I said, "Well how in the hell do you cope?" "Oh," he said, "We're trained, we stand up and fire one at a time and we take over from each other

05:00 and start backing off. But you never go to ground, if you go to ground they would be around us in no time because they have got their tactics too, so whoever stays up the longest, and of course we have got so much firepower we make them stay down and head off calling you." And I said, "Thanks." Because this is one of the questions I asked when I got this ginger headed sergeant together because boy did he

05:30 cost me a lot of hearts and worries through these things. So at times through July and August we had five patrols out at a time. Overlapping, by the time you pulled one out who had obviously ambushed if they could, you would have put one in that morning; so during that bad period I generally kept myself

there

- 06:00 on the program, no days off just to be there. But boy it put a lot of hard work on the squadron. And if you ever read a SAS report they tell you, it is five days of hell and then five minutes of hell then you get chased by a couple of hundred, you throw all of your gear away and go like the clappers and call for 9 Squadron. And their story always ends up, 'and we were
- 06:30 winched out.' That's where our story starts. I got, did get one lot out, I hope I am not digressing too much, I got one lot out because it was impossible and I was on my own and I knew where they were and they were holed up, they weren't running. Oh my God I know the day I think it was my birthday, I was turning thirty-six. Same thing happened in the morning, you wouldn't credit it
- 07:00 That was open savannah, just open and those SAS digs were running and they were being chased. It was quite easy, I had another fellow with me and no gunships, it happens too quickly, and everyone is thinking well you go back and have a briefing and get the gunships, what a load of bullshit. By that time the diggers are dead, so that's the way I worked it out and as I wasn't frightened, shall we say I jumped in.
- 07:30 The idea was I flew alongside behind the last digger and kept firing at the ones coming, and as soon as you do that we can see them slipping around a hundred yards away, we can see them it is not heavy jungle at all, it is almost savannah country. And my mate did the same and that gave our boys just enough time to get a couple of hundred yards further along and what you did then, you had
- 08:00 your friend stopping the guys going around the pincer movement, I am on the trail stopping them coming for long enough to make quite a difference, and then you just bend everything flat out for only a few hundred yards, crash land they jump in and you piss off. And that happened on the morning of my birthday so I was getting a bit sweaty. And then the afternoon was probably the worst one ever. Once again
- 08:30 been surrounded, it was a decent clearing but still the trees were a couple of hundred feet high. Room to get in but it was nearly vertical, so it took a long time going down. Normally on flat country you can just appear out of nowhere like a bat out of hell, wrap yourself into some sort of a loop upside down fall to the ground and just before you hit the ground you pull full power and touch down they jump on.
- 09:00 This was normally; what happened was they had thrown smoke and I could see them., this was the wet season I remember, the weeds, like the weeds in my garden. One the farm would grow to a couple of feet high, up there the same looking weeds by the way, ten foot high. And you would cut through all of this crap and you would have it all over your windscreen, sticky weeds and stuff. And on the way in the SAS decided I wouldn't make it.
- 09:30 They knew, there was a couple of hundred around them and they were having a go at me. So the SAS decided they couldn't make it, and this was Ginge, he had ginger hair and a crew cut sergeant, so they decided then that they would make them pay dearly .so they stayed very close together and the last one
- 10:00 had to make sure they were dead, had to shoot them actually to make sure they were dead, you don't waste time checking the pulse you just shoot your dead body, hope he is dead and pull a grenade on yourself. So they had done all of that and I didn't know that. I am still coming and bloody got there. Now on the way you're checking how many there are. Five. And just to make sure there is no static you say,
- 10:30 "Confirm Fiver?" And you get back, "Confirm fiver." Then you say, just to make sure they know what you're going to do, "We shoot number six." Because number six is going to run in and number seven too you see. And in the wet season they're all black, the diggers are black, the greens are all black and black faces too and wet and sweaty, so everyone knows what is going to happen, "Shoot number six."
- 11:00 So we get down and I just had time, the weeds were long enough almost to hide us, so we were known only by sound not by sight, and also where they were in the tree line is still pretty jungly, you can't get a good shot at a chopper if you have got a lot of trees and bamboo all around, there was tracers all around. I remember the first two SAS men come like a bat out of hell and one shooting under
- 11:30 my feet and around the front and past my windscreen. And the other guy shooting under the tail rotor, they don't take long, that's just a few seconds to run in, I got to within probably twenty yards of them and I hit the ground. The next chap, those two fellows they have got nothing on them, just this weapon and just before they hit the chopper they
- 12:00 stop firing thank God and they slide on their guts right past me and virtually out the other side and they are starting to fire virtually before they come out behind me and they are coming out my side now are picking off spots where there could be Cong. It all happens much quicker than this. Middle one he comes like a bat out of hell, he probably does the same, he probably stands up behind me and fires out that side and the last two are facing backwards at this stage.
- 12:30 The middle one fires back towards them; of course we have got our guns going, I think we had four guns in those days, the double. I tried to fly in those bad days with the twins each side because I could pick my own aircraft and knew what was going on. I didn't tell anyone else what the hell was going on. So in came the last and by this time what you do is you have the chopper sitting on its cushion, you're springing it,

- 13:00 well we had a long way to go up and I didn't know if we would actually get out of the top and still have power to fly off so I'm bouncing along as beautifully as I can and as soon as the last, the crewman yells, "Go!" that means the last fellow is in and I just pull and I am sure I was allowed to pull a hundred and four per cent, now how you get a hundred and four per cent I don't know, but you're allowed to do it, it is past the hundred per cent power point, it is a very good aircraft and we went up like a lift.
- 13:30 And the technique now is to start trying to move forward. I have only got twenty or thirty feet, but you do get air flow in which helps climbing rate. And the SAS God almighty, our guns each side, I could see the tracers going from behind me, and I glanced down at a bush or a tree and I think, "Gee," and before I had said, "Oh God," because I expected fire coming out of it,
- 14:00 there was fire going into it. The SAS man is doing it. And another twenty or thirty yards ahead and you think, oh gee. And another really good ambush point and a lot of outgoing, that's good. Well we got up to a couple of hundred feet and lost hydraulics, hit up the bum and hydraulics went but you just manually do that, that's not
- 14:30 much of a problem, but you start scanning everything else and start to watch if anything else is going to go wrong on the instruments. You wouldn't be a professional if you didn't do that. So we clamber up to a couple of thousand feet. Everything is a bit relaxed, and that's normally when the co-jo would take over and I would turn around and look at them and hold my nose, because they stunk, they stunk like pigs.
- 15:00 That was a way of saying, "You're okay but gee you smell boys." And they got used to that system. And ten minutes later we were back at Nadzab which is the SAS base, and it has got one landing, landing pad, dropped them off, they got off. We're all pretty stunned by the way; they're more stunned than I am because I didn't know what they knew.
- 15:30 And I went back to Kanga pad, called for another aircraft went up to the crew hut, got into a wooden chair like this, put my head against the wooden wall and went to sleep. My birthday. Before that I made sure that all of the SAS looked and my co-pilot, I took my yellow china graph out of my sleeve here and wrote across my big windscreen 'Happy Birthday Sinbad' Everyone called me Sinbad.
- 16:00 Happy Birthday Sinbad Love, and I got slower and of course as I am going there are half a dozen eyes watching what I am writing, 'Love from Sinbad' because no one else knew. Landed, went to sleep. Next thing the world got sort of darker, and I opened my eyes because there was noise and here was the sergeant and his four men. The sergeant, corporal and three other fellows. Half an hour later, most apologetic.
- 16:30 And he said, "I am sorry sir." Normally I can't tell this without crying so I am doing fine. He saluted me, shook my hand. Next one saluted me, shook my hand, I am still sitting down, stuffed. And then he said, "Look sir we're all terribly sorry, we just didn't realise. We haven't thanked you." And they normally didn't, all of this is still coming out. "We hadn't
- 17:00 thanked you and as soon as we could get out of the briefing we grabbed a jeep to come down and see you sir." And I thanked them and they said, "No thank you." And then they said, "We still rather think we're dead," and then they told me the story. I knew I would get in, they didn't think so because they didn't know my story and I didn't know how stunned they were because I didn't know they had agreed to kill the last man.
- 17:30 That's a hell of a one. It takes a long time to tell. I took ten years, perhaps twenty years before I mentioned that to my son. I haven't told you too many funnies, but the first ten years was nearly all funnies.
- 18:00 Drinking, and drinking a lot. And sleeping with a rifle on my farm and always carried my knife. I have had one escape and survival knife I have had now for fifty years, I have always had it near me, but it is not as near now as I used to carry it.
- 18:30 So how did I get the price on my head? Now the price on my head meant dead of course and I quickly worked out there was no one going to throw a grenade or hit me with a rifle shot around the base it would have to be a knife and have to be close and couldn't be seen, so I started going back to Hoong, my house maid.
- 19:00 Little did I realise, how did it get there. Well it was the bar girl who obviously knew John and I were leading, she either fingered me, well both of us see, so it had to be the bar girl would get both of us because she knew he was the boss. And maybe we were starting, after several months, starting to cause the Viet Cong in the local area a lot of pain., they were so keen to get SAS, and when they knew they had them and all of a sudden gone.
- 19:30 Now I don't think they looked through the window. They could have and seen it was me. But I don't think that because they got, they named both of us, the CO and me for the price. So the bar girl who later turned out to be Viet Cong. As for informing, I know about the SEALs [Sea Air Land Team - US Navy Special Forces], the US SEALs were good like SAS, and the Sea Wolves had their own gunships, we used to go drinking a lot there, I went drinking
- 20:00 on the night of my birthday. I had also done eight hours and about thirty sorties that day. I drank myself

to oblivion that night at the Sea Wolves just outside the gate with a few of my navy mates, and smoking cigars. I have got a photo of it and I am hell. I don't show my wife that one. She thinks I am the greatest drunk she ever saw, but she doesn't know it was that day. Now I flew the next day.

20:30 And I flew the next night, I only flew seven sorties, I flew a couple of hours in the day and a couple of hours in the night, it was night dust off. And which is a night medivac, so you just got over these sort of things. Got over your drinking, I would have been drinking rum so that, I never had a headache. What do you think of that, Michael [interviewer], three hundred and thirty-odd days into it and I never had a headache,

21:00 I put it down to rum and the sugar in it. Beer might have given me a headache.

Now the operation that you just shared the story on, was that what you were awarded the DFC for?

That after twenty years or so, well yeah it was probably in the 1980s, fifteen odd years. I told my son that and he said the same thing.

21:30 And I will tell you what I told to him. I said, "No Pete," No I can't tell you, part of it I guess of course. Older people don't seem to do something and get a DFC. A flight lieutenant will; it makes it all look good, he will have a DFC in country virtually that day. It looks good,

22:00 press coverage and all of that. Old fellows they wait a year after you get back and trot up the well twenty-five you have been dead and the other twenty-five times you should have been maybe and the other times you should have run up a tree or should have drunk yourself to death. You get a DFC for that. And there was a lot of that and I have no idea who wrote it up and where it was. There are worse things that aren't wrote up. I didn't get a debrief at the

22:30 end of that, nor did I give one. My version is where, like, the SAS, got a call, picked up sign eleven, extracted a call sign eleven today. So you said that. I have no idea who dobed me or whatever, perhaps it comes from the boss, I don't know. And they only know half of what you do so I don't know.

So you're saying to me that you don't know

23:00 **what particular operation it was that you got the DFC for?**

No I really don't think I got a DFC for an operation, it was the whole year type of stuff, that's the way it went. I think some of the writing was 'rescued many patrols under fire, often within minutes of getting there'. The whole story I was telling you, if you wait half an hour you may as well not go.

23:30 And I had seen this happen and once I used that aggression, not anger, once I used this aggression you scared the living daylights out of them, especially if you had three or four mates and a couple of gunships. Although it looked bad and it probably was bad, they were more scared than we, we were professionals, we had fire power and we used it. Jump right on them to get your boys; I wouldn't jump on Viet Cong out in the jungle

24:00 just to get a body kill but I would jump on them to get diggers, nobody gets between me and the diggers and that was it. And I think it became a standard in 9 Squadron for some reason, who knows, the boss was probably doing the same thing. Thinking the same, we don't talk about those things. So perhaps we were all doing the same, perhaps the young men were doing the same too. Mind you they're immortals, a lot of them don't have prior troubles,

24:30 because at nineteen and twenty and single, bit of a problem but not as great as perhaps an old man who just keeps doing stuff that hurts. So when did I get a bit twitchy.

You shared with me earlier in the day about one way missions, where you thought it was going to be one way, can you talk me through one of those where your commander actually joined you?

25:00 Yes, there were some jobs that came in and I knew there was absolutely no way you were going to land there. It would be on a ridge line or a mountain top one way in and out, one single pad, a bit smaller than this room for your skids to land on, probably a timber pad or a perforated steel pad.

25:30 And I can blame the army and air force for not being smart enough on this. Because I would land on this base with the first group of several diggers, heavy fire power and then we would go around and one by one come in and drop off more and more diggers. Now those diggers on the top of the mountain or a ridge line and we will call it...Fire Support base Trennon is one, it used to be a support base, a small one

26:00 maybe with fifty diggers on and lots of mortars and maybe if you could afford it big 105 Howitzers, and that's in support of, when your diggers go searching through jungles and villages from there, if they run into trouble you can help them, so that's what a fire support base done. And then after six weeks of whomping around and finding Viet Cong and tunnels and that, our diggers

26:30 come back to base. Well that's beaut. But the real problem happened three months later when they said, "Oh we're going out north west again, we're going to reopen Fire Support Base Trennon." You know three times in a year. Well the first thing we should have had was a mine under it. They are not too

heavy to carry up a mountain, what they should have had under it was a two hundred and fifty pound

27:00 bomb under it. Really it should have been booby trapped; we should have been just nothing. And there were three of those that we repeatedly went back to. And three times when I saw it the night before I couldn't think of anyone, so I put me down and picked anyone, didn't have to be a brilliant co-pilot because when you're scattered you're scattered, no good taking a good one. Funny way of saying it. And yet when I got there next morning or whenever it was

27:30 I would find John Paul there. Not my co-jo, the boss. And he would just say something like, "Thought we would do this together." And we would head off. We would just head off, bloody hell the last hundred yards was a bit funny for both of us, thinking, this is it. Now the RAAF did it without question, the army said, "We will go back in three months time and do it again." We did that north, south, east, and west.

28:00 What really could have happened, we could have put a team down on the winch a hundreds yards away and checked the pad out. It would have made my palpitations less. I didn't tell...the generals think that way so okay I accepted it. I was in this accepting frame of mine, I would say to the boss, similar, that he couldn't see me go sky high without joining me. So why else?

28:30 There was no importance to have two experienced leaders just land the first half a dozen diggers there well half a monkey could have done it just about. It was just that I reckoned it was pretty dangerous, I reckoned the boss did, we didn't talk about it. He must have, otherwise he wouldn't have come with me.

So are you suggesting you were under fire or attack as you were coming in?

No. I just expected to have a two fifty pound bomb, I expected them,

29:00 I mean a mine, anyway set up to blow up. Not so much ambushed, ambushing you were thinking they could fire. Just set up there a month before, set up to go off when the chopper landed on the pad. They wouldn't have to be there at all, they wouldn't have even had to know when we were coming back. Mind you

29:30 there were spies everywhere in the American system, and the SEALS too I know damn well, if they went to do a special work, you had better watch out because they worked, the Americans worked not only with all of the peasants cleaning and sweeping and the bar girls and things, they worked alongside the ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. We will call them the good guys.

30:00 The South Vietnamese army, or the South Vietnamese and you say to them and you plan these attacks, well by the time you got there they are all bloody gone because one of those South Vietnamese army officers was deliberately planted there or held to ransom or are Viet Cong. So there you go. So Americans and America Special Services, they had a lot of

30:30 trouble because they used to work with the Vietnamese forces on their side. And it leaked like a bloody sieve, at least we didn't have that. No one quite knew where we were going and out of Nui Dat of course none, they had no extraneous people there at all at Nui Dat. So what we talked about there and did was a well kept secret, thank you very much. Only when it happened, people on hills could see people moving out. Now it is the same as getting a B52 strike in.

31:00 We have a thing called 'snifta', not the dog sniffer, but snifta. And I have got a little badge, I never put it on, the Americans have badges all over the place, they gave me one. And they have got a little beagle and they have got his tail up with a rotor on it and he is sniffing you see. So my chopper had a sniffing device in it and you would just race across the jungle a couple of miles, turn around come back two hundred miles away and they just did

31:30 that again, they had two gunships eight hundred metres behind you. Well you only went...well you knew there is a whole battalion and a group centre and all of that. So those guys on the ground knew what I was doing in the afternoon, or anyone in the afternoon, I was training young guys to do it too, and also training them to be up top navigating, very hard to do over the jungle. And what you did, the fellow in the back would call, "Thirty," and the fellow up

32:00 top, well thirty on that spot, "Forty." "Fifty." "Nil" Turn around and come back, "Fifty," "Seventy." You take all of this map home with the numbers on it and take into account prevailing winds and you know where all of these smells came from, cooking fires, breathe, farts, the lot you know. Dung if they buried it. And I would lie in bed in the building at two o'clock in the morning and

32:30 the whole thing would shake and the bed would shake and I would open one eye and think, "Oh. B52 strike, of course, about forty ks away, oh that's where I sniffed today." But I knew then they would have all picked up there and put on their running shoes and toddled off, and then we would put SAS in the next day, only for a day. And I said to one sergeant,

33:00 "What did you find?" Because three B52s all dropping together in formation great. Oh hell of a mess, almost turned the garden, terrible actually. And they said, "Well the moths and the ants are still on the trees, they're shocked, they're not moving." Whatever animal was there was just shocked next morning, but they didn't find any VC; of course they had all run away.

33:30 They knew from someone's sniffing, it wasn't a matter of a spy saying, "They're going to hit that." The B52 would come from Guam, don't forget the trawler, the Russian trawler sitting at the end of the

runway, saying, "Yeah three more coming in."

In respect to your birthday pick up of the SAS, was that the worst pick up you were involved in?

- 34:00 I think so. Yes because I think it must have been pretty bad because of what the diggers said. I thought the old napalm was bad but I had to get them. There were half a dozen bad ones, but that's the one I don't like most. There was one and I think it might have been old Blue again,
- 34:30 I dropped him in pretty open country but he took me aside before I dropped him and said, "Look sir, can you wait around for thirty minutes?" Normally we wait twenty. Drop them, we go to ground, lie still and we go off and head off and make no noise, ten twenty ks and make no noise and they just did nothing but lay still and watched. And this time I said, "Okay thirty minutes" and I went away and slept, co-jo flew around.
- 35:00 Somewhere between the twenty minutes and the thirty minutes, "We need you come, come!" And of course it is loud and clear and you know they have been seen and are under fire, so there is no use being secretive about this, no whispering any more. And they were pretty shook up and we got them back. But the leader wanted to talk a bit because he was all shot
- 35:30 down on his right side and he was very happy to be alive. And he said, "Well they got me." And I said, "What happened?" And he said, "This chap just stepped out behind a tree and just gunned, me I couldn't do a thing and I felt them hitting me and I fell down and I thought, "Well I am dead." And he said, "It was just a fraction of a second and I thought I am not dead,
- 36:00 and I looked up and I saw him coming with the biggest grin you have ever seen because now they have got a SAS man. Biggest grin you have ever seen and he lowered his rifle and was just coming in laughing and my rifle was still there in my hand and I had my finger on the trigger and I just pulled the trigger and moved it up, got the bastard. So then we got together and you came back, got us and we headed off." "Well, what the hell, being dead?"
- 36:30 He said, "You should see my pack," The pack stuck out just between, you wouldn't believe it, between his arm, his rifle and his body. And about four shots hit his knapsack and that's what blew him off his feet. So he was stunned telling me this. Now and again we had a chat with these boys.
- 37:00 **In respect to the pilots, you had new fellows coming in all of the time to be trained up; did you have fellows that didn't have the nerve to make captain of the pick up zone?**
- That's a great one, no never had a refusal I did run into three yellow backs I call them. One a very senior RAAF officer,
- 37:30 one twenty-eight years of age and one an old and bold as well. Three I know, I am not going to talk about them.
- To give the archive a picture of bravery and also of men who aren't so brave it is important to share those stories.**
- 38:00 I can tell of circumstance but they are not quite making captains going into pick up zones like SAS. There was one like that. What can I say? We will say they he feigned sickness, he got the shakes, used other methods, changed aircrafts on one occasion.
- 38:30 Got out of his aircraft and went across to a mate and said, "Listen the CO said you have got to take that aircraft and I will take yours for training purposes." It wasn't actually; it was a SAS pick up. That's the middle one I mentioned. Definitely a problem. I say twenty-eight years of age, experienced enough.
- 39:00 The other one was a senior fellow and I picked him up at Free Wheel Saigon and landed in the compound there and I had to take him somewhere, probably back to Vung Tau and he was sitting in the seat behind me. And I lifted out of there; I was the captain of the aircraft
- 39:30 and I was rat cunning by this time and we do pass around what to do and what not to do and how to do it. And so the idea out of Saigon, because anywhere from rooftops and what have you you could take a shot, yes of course you could. But the idea was and same in the jungle, you went to full power bat out of hell stayed at several thousand feet. Now you're going far too fast for the man in the window or
- 40:00 hiding upstairs to get a good shot at you, and you're in a curve all of the time, no one has a clue where you're going to be. And you get up as fast as you can and then the height, that's getting the distance between you. Speed is very handy because speed, boy they have got to really lead you to get a good shot at you when you're going that fast.
- 40:30 And the moment I started that he dug me hard on the shoulder and said, "Up." Now he was a pilot, no one does that to an aircraft captain. And also if I had gone up, I was thirty-five knots and now I was going to be a hundred feet, two hundred feet at thirty-five knots you know. Everybody in the world could have got a good go at us, well that was my attitude. And so I stayed where I was doing what I was and he did it again.

- 41:00 And that's when I thought this bastard's shitting his pants. We crossed swords back here later when I was a commander, he made a lecture at the Joint Services Staff College and he rubbished the Fleet Air Arm. Not needed; whatever flies the RAAF should have. And I know why the army
- 41:30 have got choppers these days because Phil Bennett the CO of 1 RAR up there, we got along pretty well too and did a lot of work with Phil and his boys. You get to know all of the battalions, so I got to know 6 Battalion. So he came along to be chief of the army, and then Chairman Chief, big boss.

Tape 10

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

- 12:41 But you seemed to come home and you're on your own. Bit like some of the Nashos [National Service soldiers] but they weren't Nashos they were proper diggers, come home, demobbed [demobilised], back home you go. No homecoming much. If it was a battalion, they marched
- 13:00 through the street, that was one thing. By this time the tide had turned a bit. Whereas we went with great Australia push and help, it was gone and that hurts a bit. That type of coming home. Caused a lot of things like child murders by far out crazies.
- 13:30 **Do you think a homecoming would have helped in getting over some of the trauma of Vietnam?**
- Oh yes but of course we had sort of gone simply, come back simply. When I came back I was the only navy guy on board. I was in khakis, khaki cap cover, clean shaven.
- 14:00 Eleven o'clock or twelve o'clock at Mascot, you know how you go through customs, I got a bit pushy in that way, out goes my little tin trunk with my name on it, I am the first through, I pop through a door, one hanger to another door. There they all are a few hundred delighted wives, mothers and fathers. And there was Elaine in the front and
- 14:30 by this time I had known what I had done so I was a bit...she had...Gay was six and eleven and thirteen and Elaine said, "There's Daddy." Well she brought the hanger down, the six year old looked around, because I had been in blues in England all of the time, been in whites around Nowra. She had never seen me in khaki and I had had a beard all of her life.
- 15:00 And she is six, turned seven and she yelled out as a seven year old, "That's not my Daddy." It broke the ice and then all of the diggers started coming out and it was a nice homecoming but I don't know how in the hell a group of eight can march down Sydney streets or Nowra streets or anything like that. There was the homecoming in '87
- 15:30 October and I didn't take it. I went up the back paddock. I had been going up the back paddock and kicking my butt to pull myself together and not drink as much, I hadn't quite got rid of the nightmare, so I didn't go. I should have, but it was a fair way away and no one talked about it so I didn't go.
- You didn't want to go because it would rag up memories that you didn't**
- 16:00 **want to remember?**
- Yes I think so. I was having a lot of trouble in that way. I do know I used to have to leave the room if there was anything on TV with choppers or fighting; I would have to go. Anzac Day was always a week before and the week after, always TV footage and I knew bloody well I was going to have a bad night.
- 16:30 So I tried and I worked on myself and I worked on myself then for thirty-one years. I joined the Vietnam Vets in Cowra I had known them a bit and the first time we got together and took the wife, and we had the greatest big meal at a warrant officers' place, warrant officer of the army,
- 17:00 that's as high as you can go, not of a regiment or battalion, of the army, Greg Kirk. And by about three o'clock I really couldn't stand. We had a great night, all of us drunk as skunks and my wife drove me home and she didn't like that. I could handle the plonk like that, I didn't mind too much, but that was the first time we started talking and this was around
- 17:30 '87, '88, something like that. So we kept apart from the Vietnam Vets in Cowra because they were really a hard drinking mob. And it wasn't a good thing to do and Elaine was quite right, I certainly wouldn't

drive in there; I couldn't drive home. It upset a bit as well. And then we went to an annual dinner and someone spoke

- 18:00 at that dinner, a colonel, and he was just talking to Elaine, and he said, "Oh a navy pilot, I knew a couple of navy pilots. One old bastard was called Sinbad, god he was good." So Elaine said, and she shouldn't have, "That's him there." I kept to myself a lot,
- 18:30 the only thing, the only way I talk to men is my own six pilots now. We can get on the hops and we can talk until two or three about a lot of funny things and a lot of sad things. Mostly funny. So that was okay, he knew Sinbad and I had a cousin up there in the army and he knew me. And that was good too. I
- 19:00 am rather losing track. So everything was going along and I was kicking myself along just about to get rid of the nightmare, which helped a lot. Pretty hard on the drinking although I never drank in the daytime and thank god I still don't. It has to be rare. Unless it is a barbecue lunch and that's rare too. But five or six, seven, and sometimes I pace
- 19:30 myself here, and tonight if we're gardening, it might get to until half past six or even, seven, and then Elaine says, "Are we having a drink tonight?" And so we have a drink. And I try to slip another one in and I invariably do, well she has got a smaller body than me of course, I need another one. So it
- 20:00 got to '98, we will go thirty years to '98. Elaine's brother's seventieth birthday, they said, "Look, you will come up?" And we drove up for his seventieth and it is a big marquee, very rich brother, big marquee, next day we took wheelbarrow loads away of full ones, that's how he caters, full ones have to go back into the garage, fifty hundred bottles still not drunk yet. We tried hard.
- 20:30 And Joy said, "We have got a Vietnam Vet there." So they sat us down and had a lovely luncheon one o'clock, two, three and so three I stood up and I looked around and there was an upstanding guy there with a moustache and he looked a bit stuffed, and he wasn't, and hells bells we had six people on our table and it was this very nice fellow I was talking to. He was one of the SAS guys.
- 21:00 Up until then I had been caring for diggers still, even when I was picking them up. And I saw that way as the responsibility of officers and old hands have to look after diggers and sailors, it is all, I call everyone a digger, even if you're a sailor you're a digger. I call myself a digger sometimes. Doesn't matter at three o'clock I have met him and we got on and that was fine and had a drink and then I said, "Gee I had bad time."
- 21:30 But he wouldn't talk to anyone else you see? And I think he was on his third wife as well. Things were bad for him; he was in a bad way. So here I am counselling and helping him and being nice and caring and all of the rest of it and he started telling a story about a pickup and this was that and this was that. Well holy Christ, I said, "Okay Rod." And I told him the other half.
- 22:00 So from three o'clock to six o'clock we cuddled, I wiped his tears, he wiped mine and every now and again we would reach around and get another bloody bottle of wine and drink it straight out of the bottle. And I had no idea what the other seventy guests did or thought or what. Then we would cry again and talk again, pat each other,
- 22:30 dry his eyes and he would dry mine. It was August, dark, at about six, that's all I know, I put to bed my mate. And when I got up because I was capable of thinking I realised the next morning that all of the diggers I was helping, I needed help, obviously I couldn't cope.
- 23:00 It was all, on the farm that didn't happen; here I was hand in hand with one. Too close to comfort, I still know him and he has written to me about the pick up and explained it all. So that was August of '98 so I knew I needed help, I didn't talk to anyone I just kept myself
- 23:30 around the place. I rang Greg Kirk the warrant officer and said, "I really have to do something, I need help." I explained the situation. "What'll I do?" He said, "Thank God you rang me, I am your man; come and see me in a couple of days time at the RSL." He does this and he does it honorary
- 24:00 and he has a little office there and I started from there. Pushing through to the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] any problems and went to a psyche here in Canberra and others, it took three years, DVA didn't really want to know me. Now DVA front office, they'll tell you DVA is good, the minister will too. I disagree. The front office are the best you can get, not head office,
- 24:30 every known device imaginable and I said to Greg after a year, "Look just leave it at that. Forget it." And he said, "No way." They got to the stage of saying, "You're in this case because you have got a bad back." They will first of all ask you, "What's your problems?" So I listed everything I could, but being tough I don't even go to doctors, I didn't even have a doctor.
- 25:00 If I got a headache once a year I would go to Elaine's female doctor. She wasn't much good either, I got gangrene one time and she told me it wasn't. I was cutting bits of meat off myself; I knew it was gangrene for Christ's sake. All she did she gave me some tablets so I got rid of it. Fingers, legs, motorbike accidents, nine broken ribs and a sternum. Don't go to town, walk a bit quieter, it doesn't hurt as much for three or four or six
- 25:30 months. I didn't go to doctors so I hadn't gone to a doctor for my back some years ago. Anyway and it

obviously doesn't hurt and my hands are crippled and gnarled closed as you can see, that's about '99, 2000, 2001, that's the DVA doctor, I know his bloody name if I ever meet him, "That's your problem, nothing to do with us or the war."

26:00 Well you can see my hands are pretty bloody bad. So that was the reason. So my mate Greg Kirk, warrant officer advocate, went all of the way through the tribunal and I told them I would be in Tassie in February, and guess when DVA set it up? When I was away. And it did happen. So they actually phoned me on a very windy day at Bernie and they

26:30 said, "Look we really can't hear you." And I said, "You have got to, if Greg is there, I am here." And I was asked an awful lot of questions and the chairman of the three introduced himself; names meant nothing to me and I could hardly hear in Bernie anyway with the wind. And he said, "Oh Rowley I have got a photograph of you and me here." That stunned me, I thought shit what's going on here, I don't remember him. Obviously it was at the back bar,

27:00 I am not going to say too much more. Obviously a SAS man, I have found out since, obviously I had rescued him or something and we were having beers together. He had now gone from a corporal when I knew him to a lieutenant colonel. Anyway I thought that's all right, I knew he had a photo of he and me

27:30 together somewhere. And the second man was a name and I thought that sounds a bit navy I know that name. It happened to be a navy rear admiral actually, who I knew way back when he might have been a commander. Don't forget this is thirty-two years on from Vietnam, so he had done another thirty-two years on and retired a rear admiral. And the third one I had no doubt about, but there were five points,

28:00 so I am not saying I slipped under the net. There were five points had to be argued and that tribunal argued all five and proved by section twenty-four bracket C signed two A that so and so and so and so, and proved that my advocate and they believed him that I was still farming and I wasn't giving up because of my hands that were gnarled. And my back that I couldn't work with. Greg said, "You should see this old bugger."

28:30 And after a while I will tell you what, my advocate turned up, DVA sent no one to argue their case. They knew, they were just putting it off saving money; one less. I went straight through to special service TPI.

29:00 **I might just hold you there for a sec. I might just ask you a couple more questions, on how you came back.**

Yeah well that's going to help a lot of people understanding how long it takes.

Well we have got about ten minutes left, just a couple more things I wanted to touch base with you and wanted to share, firstly how you bought the gunship; can you tell us about that?

29:30 Okay. Well first of all I certainly wasn't looked after by the hierarchy of the air office, they gave me one magazine, one lousy magazine in my nine mill.

30:00 When I had finished the twelve or thirteen that was it and that wasn't nice at all. So I stole another magazine, made a gun belt with about thirty rounds in it as well and a spare magazine. I didn't want to be sitting there trying to load a magazine, at least I had two magazines if I ever came down. If I ever came down I was going to be coming down in bad territory.

30:30 I wasn't going to have an engine failure somewhere where there was no Charlies [enemy]. And same as the helmet, I had a plastic helmet, bullets go straight through, Americans had Kevlar in them or whatever. My chest protector was steel, all of our chest protectors were steel, generally shots came from the ground. If they hit your chest, very heavy steel, the shot went straight up spread out and took your whole throat out, so I thought bugger that.

31:00 So I got onto an American cart one night, lovely wonderful ride with my American buddies somewhere and my hand was back here and I stole a bloody good chest protector and a bloody good helmet. So to get to the gunship now, I was getting angry because as I say my method was to turn towards to go full ball because I knew if the boys were running, now they were running because they were ambushed, things had changed.

31:30 And where upon we were promised a pair of American gunships every day and we generally got them sometime and if you planned something you take them with you no trouble at all but this quick ambush and run stuff, it was too quick for anything. And I know the army would like to go home and sit around a table for half an hour or more and have an appreciation, which means a plan. I just knew

32:00 country boy cunning; it is not going to work like that. So I got very angry about not having gunships and things I could control and have them with me, we used another method to have them airborne a lot of the time or one at least. Certainly when we got the five SAS patrols out at one time, all setting ambushes and running. So there was another flight lieutenant, Brian Deru.

32:30 And I was watching him a bit too because I made out the program and I knew he would be zero two or three or whatever and I would be flying that day and I wouldn't see him, never hear his voice, never see him. What the hell is going on? This happened a few days. Sometimes I made the program out and did not fly but he didn't go either but I didn't know that. After another week I would be flying and I didn't see him around.

- 33:00 And I was getting a little edgy because he might be skiving off somewhere so one day I was down the squadron before dawn and I heard an aircraft start up. I am first off, what the hell is going on? So I raced out and caught it before he took off and it was Brian Deru and the aircraft was full of beer, slabs of Pilsener, like a tonne you know. And when he came back late that night I got it out of him.
- 33:30 He had been flying down the Delta and any American base anywhere and of course he would make sure it's a RAAF chopper. They would all come around, look at the beer, drooling and offer anything for it. "Have you got any parts of mini guns?" "Rocket launchers? Wiring? Switches? Hydraulic motors that move your mini guns?" And then he took me into the hanger and he had a floor space cleared there and there were
- 34:00 broken ones and bit parts and that and all of our armourers were working on them. And we got parts put together, our electricians were tremendous, they wired up a gunship on one of our Hotel models and the boss did a few test flights and I said, "Well okay, what about the beer?" Where are you getting it from?" He said, "Well I buy it sir." He was kind enough to call me sir.
- 34:30 So we were getting on okay, I was the boss again. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I just buy it." It was cheap, fifteen cents a can. I thought, "That can't go." So I went and told the boss who probably knew or maybe didn't, and he said, "Well we had better have a whip around." So every week would come to me and Tommy Ward, squadron leader, and we would all put as much money as we could into the beer machine to get this
- 35:00 thing going. It did fly before I left and I took photos of it. From a Bravo model, gees I nearly killed us, the Bravo couldn't keep up to the Hotel. The boss was having a good time he was doing the firing. And then he said, "We will do another run Rowl while you photograph me." "Oh brilliant boss." And all he did was dive at the jungle and fire and I had to dive beside him and of course I had trouble pulling out at the other end. He had this nice new machine
- 35:30 but my old thing was rickety. And that how we got the gunship. It came into service and killed its first Viet Cong after I left. Quite unforgivable not to have your own gunships.
- Since we're now coming to the end and you have served in Vietnam and told us of your service over there, given that this is for the archive and future generations, what would you like to**
- 36:00 **say to future generations about war?**
- Oh we all know war is hell and it shouldn't happen. But if you're smart enough, it does happen, and if you look around now there is not a war on, there is about forty on. Rwanda, Nigeria, Congo, any God damn where you care. And now it is a different one; we won't go into that. I must say I have a deep hatred for communism.
- 36:30 It was pushed as it was a sort of a civil war between the north and south, I am well read not stupid if your ideology is to the left you can disagree with me but your spouting ideology. I am trying to be like my father and a free thinker and say, "No, we know." We know the Chinese backing, we know the Russian backer, we know the communist threat.
- 37:00 We know the North Koreans were there, we know the money was there. It annoys me when I hear Nixon bombed Cambodia, I was there. Cambodian soil did catch the bombs but no Cambodians. There were a hundred and sixty thousand North Vietnamese regular army, no one in Australia or certainly on the left wing has ever admitted to me that North Vietnamese were there
- 37:30 and supplied by Russia and regulars. And this is what we chased; one major with our Labrador sniffer dogs, interesting. It certainly wasn't that, there was certainly a lot of civil war in it and brother against brother. The Ho Chi Minh Trail is a good one, but when it happened, by the time Saigon was falling if you do read history or even care about it, you will find that the
- 38:00 Viet Cong leaders were just totally ousted. Communists came. It was run down, it cost a lot, it cost them a lot. Tet, they were on their knees. The loss of that war, a lot of stupid American 'jumping on' stuff, body count lies, all of that sort of stuff. I particularly hate the ones who are card carrying communists
- 38:30 and I do know a few of them. Do you know the postal union would not deliver my mail to my wife? Communist led, Jim Cairns think again about what he did and how he changed the rule, and I could have taken control and stopped the war too by using these methods, war is wrong. But don't take it out on the soldier. That was...now it is not of course. We learnt that.
- 39:00 But Jim Cairns only in '79 renounced the Communist Party of Australia and tore up his card. For Christ's sake. What about the seamen's union, wouldn't take tugs to sea. The seamen's union would not man the ships to take our stuff up there. University students sent
- 39:30 money to the Viet Cong through Hanoi and comfort parcels. I got some knitted socks too. Of course the Viet Cong wouldn't know what to do with a knitted sock, would they? But they did that. There was a lot of support for it and really from Jim Cairns it wasn't support for civil war, it was support for communism, there is no doubt about that. Painters and dockers, all of these sharkies and that were known card carriers. And if you realise the pledge they make

40:00 is to bring about the downfall of the government of this country. So bugger them. Great hate.

Since we have come to the end we would like to thank you for sharing so much today; is there any last remark in the last five seconds of tape you would like to add?

I have tried to make it a standard history as much as I can and as much truth as I can.

40:30 Well I thought a lot about would I be active in it? It has to be done, not for me but for history. There was a little off shoot, that I did feel that it might end my crying and choking and really it has, even though I did a bit, that's the best, so I am on the up. I am terribly pleased.

Thank you so much for your time today.

INTERVIEW ENDS