

Australians at War Film Archive

Leslie Reading (Les) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Good morning Les. It would be fantastic if for starters we could hear a bit about the early days as it were. Where you were born and grew up and about your family.**

Well I was born in August 1925 at a place called Meckering in Western Australia. Meckering was the

01:00 focus of that major earthquake in 1969. I was in Darwin at the time and it put my chair all around the office and I thought, "Gee, this is a doozy of a quake." And the centre of it was basically down at Meckering. Meckering was written off. I was the first of nine children. 3 of them were triplets but one of them died at birth so we sort of finished up with 8 kids, 4 boys and 4 girls. My youngest brother is about 21 years

01:30 younger than I am. Mum was a country girl. She goes far enough back that she used to play piano for silent movies and that's a fair bit back. Dad was a shearing contractor and a hard worker and he needed to be to help raise 9 kids, 8 kids of course.

02:00 I suppose my earliest recollections go right back to Meckering when I was probably less than two I think. We had a little house and a big house which I will refer to later. I remember being on the back verandah of the little house standing in a little tub being washed by my Mum and picking up a cloth with my toes and the lady next door

02:30 thinking this was pretty smart stuff so that's my very earliest recollection and I was probably I don't know, 18 months old or two years old at that stage. We moved to Cunderdin when I was about 6 I suppose. Dad built a house there. He built a shed for a start and we lived in that for quite a while while he went on building a house for the family to live in.

03:00 It was a little wheatbelt town. Pretty hard to describe but there were a lot of people there that were on reflection somewhat inbred. Odd ones here and there but it was a good little town and it was a fairly close community in one way or another I guess. I went to school there and actually I skipped 3rd grade. They put me straight from 2nd class we used to call it in

03:30 those days and gained a secondary school scholarship. One of only 50 in the state to enable me to go to high school down in Northam about 40 miles away. Do we need to talk in miles or do you want it in kilometres?

Let's talk imperial, as it was.

Easier for me. So I spent 3 years in school there and that was my formal state

04:00 education if you like. It was an interesting time. I managed to become the Junior Champion in athletics in 1938 I suppose, or maybe 1940. The same year that Shirley Strickland was Junior Champion. She was Senior Champion at the same time and was way ahead of me. But I always recall that with some pride.

What were your

04:30 **pet events?**

I took part in 7 if I remember rightly. There was high jump which I won. Hop, skip and jump which we call triple jump now which I won; broadjump which I won, the shot put which I won; 100 yards which I ran second in. 220 which I ran in and 440 which I ran second in. That's a pretty... At that stage I was

05:00 aiming to be a pilot. I had always wanted to be a pilot. When we had fancy dress balls at Cunderdin my Mum would make me a pilot's uniform and we would rustle up some sort of a helmet from somewhere and goggles. I remember at one, I was about 10 I guess, no I might have been 10 or 11, a fellow had come along in a Tiger Moth

05:30 giving rides to people in the community and I was down there at the time and I raced home and asked Mum if I could use some of my, I think we used to manage to save about a pound a year in those days

and the ride was 10 shillings so she gave me that. I'm surprised because she knew nothing about the aeroplane or the guy or the flying or whatever but I got my 10 shillings and raced

06:00 down and went to jump across a little creek thing that was on this farm where the guy was operating and didn't notice the barbed wire fence. A strand at the top which went straight into my eye. So that put the kybosh on what was to be my first aircraft flight but as it turned out on his next flight he tipped the thing on its nose and wrote it off so it was probably just as well.

So where had that interest in flying stemmed from?

06:30 I don't know. I think it probably came from. It certainly wasn't family but it probably came from watching the mail plane come over. I forget how many times a week but it used to be way up there coming on it's way from Perth or on it's way back. I guess a DC3 or 47, Dakota in other words. I remember seeing a gyrocopter. One of those early versions of a helicopter down at Perth.

07:00 A little later I saw air force people I guess doing line astern chases in Boomerangs and all along it was fuelling my interest in flying. I wanted to be a pilot and I specifically wanted to be a fighter pilot.

Did you read all the adventure comics, books? Biggles and all that?

I did when I could get a hold of them. All related to flying but later on of course.

07:30 I guess other recollections of the place. Now let me come now to World War II is that all right?

Can I ask you some more questions quickly? I know you were born in 1925 and you were just a young lad in the Depression years, but do you have any recollections of that period and how the family struggled?

I do, I do. Mum and Dad were raising

08:00 a big family and he was earning pretty good money I guess in those days building up a shearing run. Shearing a number of plants and all that sort of stuff but things were pretty tough and we would go out shooting rabbits for example for our tucker. There were times in the very early, early parts of the Depression which started

08:30 in '29 if I remember rightly and I do recall '29, '30 era where we actually had bread and dripping. So the Depression, and they were very, very tough times for lots of people. We would regularly have what we used to call tramps coming through looking to chop wood for a meal

09:00 and that sort of stuff. What else? It was just generally tough times for people and there were a lot of people out of work and fellows would come through and they just wanted something to eat.

So would they be given a job to do?

Oh yeah Mum would not just deal it out willy nilly. She would give them a meal. She would make sure that

09:30 they didn't go away without a decent feed but she would ask them to chop some wood. That was my job really but she would make them do something to make them feel useful.

And right, so can you tell us a little bit about your parents? You mentioned what they did but what sort of folk they were?

10:00 They were both very hard workers. They had to be of course because of the size of the family. They were under a lot of tension I think all the while because of the need to look after this family so there were squabbles from time to time but I suppose that happens to most families where things are under a bit of pressure. Dad was a

10:30 very strong man. He was not tall. He was about 5 ft 8 I suppose and he worked hard and he worked well into the night and up again the next morning and away at times up to the north of Western Australia and sometimes down to the southwest on shearing runs. Occasionally Mum would go with him. Mum was a hard worker. They both sang well. They both sang well together.

11:00 She loved playing piano and generally I think they just enjoyed helping people. They were those sorts of people. I remember them very fondly.

It was a big family, how many siblings were there?

We started with 9 and finished up with 8. We are down to 7 now but

11:30 it was effectively 8 kids. 4 boys and 4 girls.

The triplets, were you one of the triplets?

No, no. The triplets came much later. They were born in 1938 if I remember rightly and as I say one of them died at both so they have been twins, effectively twins ever since.

And how did all the kids get along?

Extraordinarily well. They

- 12:00 met every year at rotational homes and have an annual get together and an annual dinner. I make it sometimes. Kath and I, my wife and I made it to the last one and then they have another time of the year, a little later if I remember rightly they have a sort of picnic day where not only the siblings get together and their wives and partners
- 12:30 but the children and the grandkids and all that kind of thing. There's generally quite a gathering. Generally about 40 people get together. Some few years back a guy who wrote a history on my mother's side called Westward to the Avon. I haven't got it with me at the moment but it is a very comprehensive, well-researched book
- 13:00 that deals with every member of the family right through until a few years back and there was a get together at Northam on the Northam Oval where I had done my athletics, in fact, of family members and their offspring and so on and they got something like 3 500 people there, all related to each other. Absolutely amazing. I didn't make it but I've seen photographs of it and there were
- 13:30 great big bench things laid out. But the people, each and every one was related to the other in some ways.

Is this from WA?

From WA. All WA stuff.

Sorry Les, I don't mean to be holding you up. I know you've got a rough idea but I'm just really curious to hear a bit more about that pre-war

- 14:00 **time. Your father, did he have, see any active service in World War I?**

No he didn't. He was in a protected industry. They, was in what they called Home Guard I think. They had a uniform and went on parades and that sort of stuff for wartime activity but he was unable to join because the whole sheep industry was absolutely critical to our operation in those days

- 14:30 so he wasn't able to go.

How much did you learn yourself about that very industry?

I did some shearing and I did quite a lot of crutching at times. Yeah, I did quite a lot of crutching I suppose 3 seasons during each of which I would

- 15:00 crutch I remember rightly around about 60,000 sheep. I did a bit of wool classing, rousing, rousabouting that is in the wool sheds. A little bit of wool pressing. I did a little bit all of that sort of stuff and got to know a little bit about wool and sheep and the people that bred them and reared them.
- 15:30 I don't retain much of that as an interest or a memory but it was pretty tough going and I was pretty much into it.

Sorry, what's crutching?

Crutching is cleaning up all the back part of the sheep where things come out you know. You gather and make bags and all that sort of stuff. It's a matter of preparing the sheep for lambing season and just generally

- 16:00 get them in a situation where they can develop and don't get bound down by a whole heap of stuff hanging off them so that's done early enough where not too much of that gathering has taken place. It's hard work because you go in and catch each individual sheep, lift it up and bring it out to where you about to crutch it and about a minute later you go in and do the same thing again. Sheep get pretty heavy at the end
- 16:30 of the day I can tell you. I guess during that period too Dad built a semi-detached place next to ours, a brick place and my younger brother Ray who is about 14 months younger than I, we were labourers on that for quite a while. We helped to dig the foundations and pour the concrete, mix and pour the concrete and we made
- 17:00 all the bricks for the house and stuff like that. We worked pretty hard on that and when it was all over Dad gave us 25 pounds each with which I bought a motorbike.

That's all right. How old were you at that stage?

I would have been 16 I guess. Pretty young.

And how did you go with the motorbike?

It was good. It was a thing called a Levis, Levis

- 17:30 3/12, 4 ¼ it was described to me. It was a 350 or 500 cc. An English type bike. I don't know if they make them any longer but it was a lovely bike. Good stuff and I later had a Harley Davidson and I had a Norton and stuff like that. But the Levis was my first transport.

What had your schooling been like? You were a decent scholar.

- 18:00 Yeah I was. There were a couple of us who skipped what we called 3rd class and went straight from 2nd to 4th. There was no need for that intermediate year if you like and we continued to vie for those top class honours right through until she left school at least. I was generally
- 18:30 on top I hear and as a consequence of that and of a consequence of having skipped 3rd class I was able to stay on to what was called 7th class to sit for the scholarship and that helped of course because I had an extra grade up my sleeve in terms of the English and the maths and that sort of thing. The scholarship was
- 19:00 50 pounds a year. I don't know what that would be worth in today's money but it was 50 pounds a year and that paid for board. It would just pay for my board. I think my board was 22 [shillings] and 6 [pence] a week and there was an allowance to for books so it was a bit of a relief to my parents really because I could go to school for 3 years and at relatively
- 19:30 little cost so that was good and it got me to secondary school to.

I know you said before but what was the name of the secondary school? Where was it?

Northam High School.

So what subjects did you have a particular affinity for?

Maths. Maths A and B, French most certainly, English. German

- 20:00 not so much but I was pretty good at it. I did Latin for a while and didn't like that and I think I changed to physics. I liked physics. I didn't do chemistry. I certainly didn't like history and I didn't do geography. In those days it was pretty hard to like them at all and be good at them. It was very grim. But I guess English
- 20:30 and maths and languages are those things that I tend to fairly good at. In fact I just started a course of professional editing and proofreading to further an interest I have in the language to do more formally something that I instinctively and automatically do anyway.
- 21:00 When I hear people talk or even when I read I immediately see where it should be changed and mentally change it. I'm doing that as an interest which will help to teach me more about the language and perhaps earn some income if I can interest publishers or whoever to use my services and I expect that I will be able to do that pretty well.

Do you recall any characters from those days, be it in the school yard or

21:30 teachers even? People who have stayed in your memory?

Yes. The Headmaster at Northam a fellow named Dick Halliday who was very much a physical ed man to whom I am always eternally grateful because I have always remained so myself. I work out each day and it's a pretty decent sort of workout but he used to get us at school there of a morning before classes started

- 22:00 and do exercises, the whole school. Regardless of the weather almost and this really antagonised a lot of parents. They didn't see the benefit of exercising in this sort of way and they didn't see the value or the benefit of having people out in all sorts of weather. They just didn't understand I guess and Dick later became
- 22:30 Director of Physical Education, yeah I'm pretty sure he became Director of Physical Education in the state after he left Northam. He left the school I think probably because people wanted him to leave and then the fellow who came along to succeed him, a fellow named Bernie Horan really worked with and on me for my scholarship preparation.
- 23:00 Smoked like a chimney and probably died of lung cancer but he was good. He would be doing his after school work and I would stay behind and do previous papers and papers that he had planned and we would go through them and it just made it a piece of cake really. So I was quite grateful to him to. As for the kids. There were certainly characters but I don't think there was anyone that was
- 23:30 in particular. I know that many of them for some reason or other wanted to fight me and I had so many fights. I didn't win all but I won most of them but I was friends with them all anyway. I don't know why they wanted to fight me. Hasn't happened since, not with fists anyway.

How distant did the eastern states feel at that time?

- 24:00 That's a first class question. It was the east, the east and you didn't know anything about them. It was a, I think to most of us it was just a foreign, almost a foreign country and in many cases not terribly well regarded because parents, and I'm not talking now about the children, because I think parents sometimes were a little anti at the
- 24:30 Federal treatment that West Aussie got and I couldn't even explain that because I don't know what that

was about but I suppose it was rights and allocations and that sort of stuff and anybody who then... No it was in the east it was "over east." Anyone who had been over east had really experienced something and could come back and talk about it. My Mum and Dad went over east on one occasion to meet up with

25:00 some of his relatives, a couple of sisters and yeah, two sisters of hers and they had been over east and that was a big adventure.

Did you ever go as a boy or a teenager?

No I didn't go until I'd joined up in World War II. That was an interesting experience actually because we did it by cattle truck.

25:30 Genuine cattle trucks. There was nothing in them but palliasses filled with straw yourself and I think there was a little loo in the corner somewhere and the whole train would stop and you'd get out and eat fruit salad and bangers to eat. It was a pretty interesting experience. I must admit I got smart at one stage and I decided I could swing a hammock between 2 of the uprights in this cattle truck

26:00 and I tied it up and with all the sway and everything the ropes just frayed through in no time flat and I fell down and had nowhere to sleep because it had all been filled in while I was up there. So that was a lesson for a young man.

Well maybe it's time. We'll just go back a half step and talk about the rumblings of war, the late '30s. How informed was the community, and you personally? Was there a sense it was imminent?

26:30 I don't think we were particularly well informed to be honest. Obviously when Hitler started to move into Poland and all those initial moves the game was obviously on and I think there was probably some rumblings following Abyssinia as it was called in those days and the Italian activity and that sort of stuff. But no we didn't

27:00 particularly. I remember the night war was declared. To me it didn't mean a hell of a lot I suppose. I was 14, 15 and just secure. Mum went in and prayed and that's my first memory of World War II because she, I guess she had some boys

27:30 so it developed and I was terribly keen to do anything to join up and become a pilot and meanwhile I cooled my heels and we lived at Cunderdin and there was an elementary flying school there with Tiger Moths and it was also made for B24 Liberators and some other training that went on with our Boomerangs

28:00 and that sort of thing. Accommodation was quite scarce and Dad and Mum boarded people from the aerodrome because there was no family accommodation out there. No wives accommodation so we had 3 couples staying with us to the point where he built an office for himself on the verandah and that was

28:30 converted to a bedroom for a couple of the people and we retained, well we did until a couple of years ago, we retained pretty close contact with most of those people. They were family friends. They didn't have much room to live in because it was only a pretty ordinary place that we had but it was full of people. They appreciated it I think and I guess it was a little bit of income for Mum and Dad as well.

29:00 I suppose petrol rationing about that time, we are immediately going into petrol rationing and I say almost immediately after the war started and Dad had a pretty good ration because he had a number of shearing plants and 4 or 5 vehicles to pull them around that he needed to operate with so he wasn't too bad. But he did convert two of the vehicles to

29:30 the main family one if you like to gas producers. Are you familiar with gas producers?

No.

Okay. It's a great big cylinder thing that you put on the back of the car and fill it up with charcoal and if you are able to make charcoal yourself it makes it all that much cheaper. So with the charcoal you set fire to it and that sets off a gas up through the car

30:00 through some filters stuck on the front bumper and into the gubbons of the car that makes it work and generally you had to kick it off on petrol and then let it go and a wheat bag full of charcoal would probably get you 50 or 60 or 70 miles at which case you would stop and we used to have a ute covered

30:30 where the kids sat and there was also 2 or 3 bags of charcoal in the back and there was charcoal dust everywhere and when it came to refuel you lifted the lid of this thing and stood back and it went whoof like a small atom bomb going off and let it settle down and then pour the charcoal in. Dust everywhere so that's how we supplemented the petrol ration in those days.

Was that, I've heard someone mention that before,

31:00 **and they said it was frowned upon by police or was that standard?**

Oh no, no, that was pretty standard in the country. People had to supplement their petrol because petrol, people, if I remember rightly private use might have been done to as low as a gallon a week, 6

litres a week that sort of thing and that's pretty light on. That represents almost no travelling at all.

31:30 The, yeah I guess it wasn't too long to because of the recruitment and the uptake of young people from the country that the Land Army came into existence. The Land Army and they were marvellous. They came and they worked hard, they worked all day. They spent a lot of time on tractors and things. I remember one

32:00 farmer just north of us, a little fellow about Keith Meggs' size and I remember he was talking to Dad on one occasion when we were talking about shearing and he said, "Leslie, come out here and get on the tractor and they go all day without beer." He reckoned these women were pretty remarkable.

So were they country girls or had some of them come from...?

They come from

32:30 cities. They came from all over. They were marvellous. They volunteered to do tough work on farms and elsewhere I guess. In our own case it was farmers they were involved with. They were marvellous and I believe there is still get-togethers of women who were the Land Army

33:00 people in those days. As you do you form associations and they last for years at time.

So was that solely on the job training or do you know if they had had any sort of...?

No, just on the job training. I mean driving a tractor or pulling a plow doesn't take much. It takes some understanding and some knowledge but you can do that on the spot and they helped out in the shearing sheds from time to time. When we would go around

33:30 which caused the language to quieten down a bit.

Sorry, so they did actually help in the shearing sheds. What sort of work were they doing?

Just roustabouting. Picking up the fleeces and throwing them out for classing and things like that.

So everyone was on their best behaviour.

They had to be yeah. So where do we go from here.

34:00 **Well just on the land girls. Where were they quartered? Were they just in camps or were they based somewhere else?**

No I think they lived on the properties. In some cases they would live with the farmer and his family. In other cases they would live in a shed. I mean when went shearing we would doss down just in a shed with the machinery or sometimes

34:30 they had a separate little shed about the size of our kitchen, no not even that big where people, casual workers would doss down and you would eat with the family generally. So it was a mix and I think the girls, I don't know, I was not with them when they were, other than when they were working and watching them working in the fields

35:00 and that sort of thing you know.

And what sort of age group? Were they just young girls mainly?

They varied but none of them were terribly old. I guess they ranged from 18 to 22 and from 28 to 30. That sort of thing. I don't remember women of 40 doing this sort of stuff. I guess they were tied up with families. But in the main they were fairly young and

35:30 pretty strong. Lots of endurance. I always had the greatest admiration for them and even more so now having in mind what they were doing and the circumstances. They were very good.

Did you have any mates at the time that joined up perhaps with the army, or...?

Yeah I think most of the young people

36:00 around Cunderdin who were not held on essential duties joined up. I think most went army. That seemed to be pretty much the pattern around the country, over in West Aussie anyway. Most people went army. You needed some qualifications, some educational qualifications for air crew but

36:30 no greater for ground crew than perhaps for the army. Most certainly. I was fortunate really. These days you almost need a degree to become a fighter pilot in the air force. My Junior Certificate or Intermediate as it was known over east in those days was sufficient and that was beaut but yeah, most of the people who weren't held on essential

37:00 duties certainly joined up. There was a very... I mean we were very royalist in those days. We were very much part of the Empire. We were very much part of the old country and people felt very, very strongly that it was their duty to get in there and do their bit and every small town lost quite a few of its citizens in that way.

- 37:30 There are lots of things happened between that time of the start of the war and when I joined but I just can't bring things readily to mind at the moment. I'm sorry, another thing I suppose which would be even a bit strange to some people considering the war was not right here, people had to fit hooded lights to their cars. I don't know if you have heard of those or not
- 38:00 but they, on the headlight you would have a hood over it like this with an almost like a little visor to let a little beam of light out on the road so you couldn't be seen from above by aircraft. That worked all right as long as you drove about 10 miles an hour and no faster because then you couldn't see much at all.

So there was a brownout?

I guess, yes, I guess you'd call it a brownout yeah.

- 38:30 There were times when there were blackouts and I can't remember what occasions. Whether it was practices for given states I don't know, but I do remember blackouts and there certainly would have been in Sydney I suppose when things started to happen. Miniature subs coming in and firing at the North Shore and all that sort of stuff and certainly Darwin of course. I think few people realise how often and how much

- 39:00 Darwin was bombed and other parts along the coast south of Darwin. It was pretty full on there for a while. Dick Creswell incidentally, have you done Dick Creswell?

I haven't. The name rings a bell, but we haven't.

I'm sorry, well he's in Canberra now. He formed 37 Squadron during the war and he shot down the first enemy aircraft over

- 39:30 Australia up in Darwin, but that's just by the way. He was a friend of mine.

I guess that's when the war took on a different complexion, talking about the Empire and "for the old country" and when that threat was more imminent the complexion changed, didn't it? What sort of effect did that have on the community and it's involvement?

I don't think the community knew enough about it

- 40:00 to be particularly concerned other than that. They knew the Japanese were doing it by air. It was highly unlikely they would do it by land and if they did they probably wouldn't make it much further south than Alice Springs or something or not even that far so that didn't cause too much concern and I think in the main the extent of the activity in Darwin was kept very much quiet from the community at large, from the

- 40:30 population at large. I'm pretty sure that was the case. There was talk at one stage of whether Bob Menzies or not, I can't recall, but there was talk at one stage as you may be aware that there being a line set across, I forget exactly where it went but to which the enemy would be allowed to advance before we really

- 41:00 took them on but I think, I'm not too sure they could have advanced that far anyway because they had a lot of desert to come through and they wouldn't have any mapping to support themselves in those days.

So there wasn't a feeling of vulnerability to any great extent?

I don't think so. I don't think so. I was pretty hard. It was pretty hard for me to judge that. I certainly

- 41:30 well, I suppose I'm not quite right there. I suppose the population at large saw the possibility of Japan taking over. When that was, when they first started to bomb Darwin I think the thinking was restricted to that area in some way. I might be quiet wrong. I'm thinking of my own reaction and my parents' reaction.

Tape 2

- 00:30 **What was the story of the Italian POWs [Prisoners of War]?**

The Italian POWs started coming to the country I'm not sure when. I guess it was probably about 1941, '42 or something like that and they were prisoners of war but they were allocated to farms and they lived with the farmers and their families.

- 01:00 In many cases they became virtual members of the family. They worked away on the property. In some cases they were allowed to come into town with someone with them as a bit of an escort in a sense but as for being prisoners of war I reckon nothing could be better. In some cases they were probably more pleased about being a prisoner of war in Australia than fighting in their own country. But they

- 01:30 did a good job. People loved them and not in all cases of course. There were obviously people who were POWs, they had been sent out here and so on but in the main they got on very, very well with the people they were allocated to. I don't know whether Italians were incarcerated in detention centres but

certainly there were quite a lot on the land

02:00 and they had a very useful life and I think they enjoyed it. Easy war for them.

Did you have any personal encounters?

No, only on meeting them on farms from time to time when I was out working or visiting or whatever and there were quite a few around the Cunderdin area. Lovely people.

02:30 I had dealings with Italians later but I'll come to that a bit later in the piece when I talk about Malta.

Maybe it's time to tell us about your efforts to sign up with the air force. You said from an early age you wanted to fly, you wanted to be a fighter pilot. Was that something that you saw as a career or were there other options open to you?

No at that stage I

03:00 didn't have a career path because I figured the war was going to go on for a while and I reckoned I was going to be in it. I didn't, I was looking almost entirely at the wartime situation to be honest. I didn't even think in those days of

03:30 taking on commercial flying as a career. I think basically I saw the long term airforce involvement and that is strictly limited as a fighter pilot. I didn't see beyond that at that stage so I joined in 1943, August 1943 about 8 days after my birthday, when I turned 18 and regretted later

04:00 of course that I didn't have the gumption to try signing up earlier because I do have friends who managed to get in earlier when they were 17 and got away with it. It never occurred to me. I guess I was just a country bumpkin who was too honest. I'm not too sure about that so I was just 18 when I joined and went to an initial training school at Clontarf just out of Perth. Clontarf

04:30 was a sort of a...monastery is not the right word I guess. It was a home for people who did good things and as I recall it was for young men and I can't remember the name of them but anyway it suited the purposes of an initial training perfectly. It was tucked away and we did

05:00 all of our subjects and spent about I don't know how many weeks it was there, probably 8 or 10 weeks I should think. The highlights for me. Not long after we had settled in there a group of my friends all in uniform came bounding around waking me up saying,

05:30 "Come on Les time to get up. You're sleeping in." So I got up and went down to the ablution block and I thought I must be late because there was no one here and by the time I got upstairs they were all in bed. They had been out all night and they were having me on. So I remember that quite clearly and one or two names shot up from time to time. The other, I guess the most important thing apart from

06:00 the academic results, and mine were good, was they had a thing called an assault course and it was a series of obstacles and they were pretty severe obstacles. You climbed ropes and you went over this and you went around that and it was generally acknowledged that 5 minutes was the sort of requirement. To do it in

06:30 5 minutes was to continue as an exit person. When we got there the record was 3 minutes and 4 seconds and I ran it in 2:45 and was accused by the previous course, who had the record holder, of cheating. If I missed I don't know, nobody knew so it was arranged to be a runoff between him and me and

07:00 mine went out to 2:48 and he went down to 2:58 so he reduced his by 6 seconds and I opened mine up but it proved the point and what I'm getting to here, I guess when I came to our final interviews the officer who was interviewing me seemed to be very, very dead set on that assault course record. "And why was that?" and I said I wanted to

07:30 be a fighter pilot. I don't know what it had to do with it but I said I wanted to be a fighter pilot. And that was the beginning of my, what do you call it? The beginning of my campaign to become a fighter pilot, right back at that stage. So I hope he put something on the record but it all worked out eventually anyway. I went from there to my home town of Cunderdin to fly Tiger Moths. But first we went over digging gravel in a gravel pit for something

08:00 like two weeks because of timing and all that sort of stuff and we flew Tiger Moths and I don't think anything exceptional happened there.

What was that like flying the Tiger Moth?

It was great. It was great.

Had you flown them at all?

No I hadn't. The first flight was marvellous. I'm reminded of a poem called 'High Flight'

08:30 which is well known. Do you know it?

If you'd like to recite it.

It's interesting. It was written by a fellow named John Magee Junior who was a Canadian flying with the RAF [Royal Air Force] and he wrote this thing called 'High Flight' and it goes, and it's the first line that reminded me of it what it was like that night:

09:00 Sorry I.

Do you want to stop for a moment?

I get a bit emotional about these things.

Take your time.

Okay. It goes:

\n[Verse follows]\n "Oh I have slipped the surly bonds of earth\n And danced the sky on laughter-
silvered wings\n

09:30 Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth of ..."\n

I'll come back. It has very, very strong memories for me because of various things that happened later. I'll come back to that in a minute.

Would you like a glass of water?

That wouldn't be a bad idea. I've got one at the back there that's sort of got a little bit in it.

Gives me a chance to put my microphone on.

Sorry about that.

No please don't.

10:00 **No we understand totally.**

And just marvelling, getting away from the ground. 'High flight' goes:

\n[Verse follows]\n "Oh I have slipped the surly bonds of earth\n And danced the sky on laughter-
silvered wings\n Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth\n Of sun-split clouds"\n

10:30 Dear oh bloody dear.

Well, you have done the first verse.

\n[Verse follows]\n "And done a hundred things\n You have not dreamed of - wheeled and soared and
swung\n High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there\n I've chased the shouting wind along and flung\n My
eager craft through footless halls of air.\n "Up, up, the long delirious burning blue\n I've topped the
wind-swept heights with easy grace\n

11:00 Where never lark, or ever eagle flew -\n

And while with silent, lifting mind I've trod\n The high untrespassed sanctity of space,\n Put out my
hand, and touched the face of God." \n

And John Magee was only 19 when he wrote that and he was still only 19 when he put his hand and touched, he was dead bones at 19 in a Spitfire and that poem

11:30 has a lot, brings back a lot of memories for me because it cropped up in many ways. I can and I have in various presentations I can put a story of my own experiences to each and every line of that poem and some of it just fantastic. When I put the stories to those lines I reflect on how lucky I am. What an exciting

12:00 life I've had. Anyway. So that was Tiger Moths at Cunderdin so my brothers and sisters could see their big brother flying around in a Tiger Moth at different times if I went beyond a rule and buzzed the township and from there I then went to Canada. Across the Nullarbor as I said before

12:30 in a cattle truck and to Melbourne, into Sydney and then to Brisbane and then we all camped and then we all boarded this great ship which was a, pardon me. I forget whether it was a victory ship or a liberty ship. It was the smaller of the two and I think that represented about 3,000 tonne and I reckon it had 3,000 people

13:00 aboard and it was interesting run because we weren't too far out of Brisbane getting over towards Guadalcanal when the thing had to start weaving because of submarine activity and so on and I think there were at various places pretty strong looking out for mines and so on. One of my strong memories of that trip was one of the crew members.

13:30 I might go back a little and say at this stage, and we are talking 1943, later 43 at this stage, you couldn't buy stockings in Australia, silk stockings or anything like that and a crew member told us he had contacts in San Francisco and he could get silk stockings and for a small fee he could buy these silk

stockings and send them home

- 14:00 to our Mums and our loved ones. So I, and certainly many others, I don't know how many hundreds of others gave him 10 bob [shillings] and never saw a sign of the stockings. He was going back and forth, back and forth. He probably made a fortune out of the war you know doing that sort of stuff.

So Les we sort of talked about your first flying experience in a Tiger Moth, which was obviously extremely meaningful

- 14:30 **for you and then going across to, over east. What kind of eye opener was that seeing the big cities?**

Didn't see much. I mean we camped down in the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground] for example so really on that particular effort it was a transit thing so we remained overnight and camped out in the MCG. Hopped aboard another train and went north and we stayed

- 15:00 somewhere out of Sydney. A similar sort of thing. Didn't really see much of over east at that time. So it was not a very educational experience in that sense. So we are off to Canada and we went to pulled in for a start to Sans Francisco and I suppose my first impression

- 15:30 was of inertia. My first true demonstration of mass times velocity. This ship however, small it was was coming in towards the wharf with tugs straining back, straining back on the thing and it must have been getting along at about I suppose the speed of 2 snails and it struck the wharf and just kept going and going and going

- 16:00 until it got down to the speed of one snail and nothing and I guess it went in about 30 ft, 10 m so this is mass velocity. I thought, "My God, there is a lesson for me." So we went from there to Vancouver and across the Rockies. A lovely trip on the Canadian Pacific Railway I think at that stage. Stopped here and there.

- 16:30 Actually saw snow for the first time in my case and in the case of many others actually and went to a place called Dundas which was the No. 6 Training School in Ontario. Dundas, Ontario is a lovely little spot not far from Lake Ontario. Not terribly far from

- 17:00 Buffalo. Not terribly far from New York. Not terribly far from a lot of very, very nice places and we started our flying training there. I had 6 ½ flying hours up when my instructor who was an Australian took me out to teach me precautionary landings and he did

- 17:30 a little bit of demos on this and cut the speed back and flap and gear out and all this sort of stuff and he came in to do it over a river and I guess he, the kid was about 19. I guess he'd only just graduated himself and I guess his techniques were not terribly hot and there might have been a bit of vortex type thing along this river thing so we came over this river, hit the far bank,

- 18:00 ripped the wheels off, took the wings. I've got piccies here that you might be interested to have a look at later, took the wings off and went belting into the snow and went over on its back and crashed down on my cockpit. I was like this and upside down and it took quite a while to get me out. He was okay. He had a bit more clearance than I did but he and a couple of other people helped me out and we went back

- 18:30 to base and I was immediately the envy of all the other pilots. That's the way it is in those days, those young days.

What planes were you flying up there?

They were Harvards. An American aircraft called the T6 or Texan I think they were called. They were Harvards as far as the Canadians and Brits and South Africans were concerned and

- 19:00 they were an aeroplane on which our Australian Wirraway, an equivalent advanced trainer was essentially based. It looked a bit like it and pretty much the same sort of performance. A nice aeroplane. I flew one again just as matter of 2 or 3 years ago at the museum out at Point Cook and it's a lovely aeroplane. It stirred the memory cells very very much.

Can you describe what they were like to fly?

- 19:30 Yeah, I guess the first impression of a Harvard when you see it and hear it from the ground is its prop tech noise. It makes a hell of a racket. Props rotating at the speed of sound and therefore causing you know the old sound boom boom bit and it just makes a

- 20:00 very, very loud high speed clackerty sort of noise. It's a harsh noise. When you hear that you know it's a Harvard but in a Mustang you crank a Mustang up to 400 plus knots with a fair bit of boost aboard and it makes what is called a boom noise. If you hear that you know it's a Mustang but with this thing when you hear it you know it's a Harvard.

- 20:30 It was suddenly a big aeroplane. It was as big as a fighter so coming from Tiger Moths, this little biplane with two cockpits it was a big aeroplane and it was an excitement. An excitement to fly these things. It was pretty viceless. It stalled pretty cleanly if you took it too far into a stall it would bite you

- 21:00 but in the main it was a good training aeroplane. It would do things, it would do most things you would want a fighter training aircraft to do at the time. It was tandem, instructor in the back, student in the front. The student has got the equivalent of the whole fighter thing. Have you flown aeroplanes?
- 21:30 **I've been in them but I certainly haven't flown them.**
- In this sort of aeroplane have you been?
- No, not that small. That's why it's great I guess, most of us haven't, so to get an idea.**
- We'll have to get you up one of these days.
- Oh please. I know Cath [interviewer] would like to as well.**
- It's a nice little aeroplane. You can do all of the things as I said you need to do to prepare for operational conversion to something like
- 22:00 a Mustang or Spitfire or whatever. It can do all the aerobatics that is needed. Yeah, a good trainer.
- So what did they have you doing? You mentioned the aerobatics, circuits and bumps. What else?**
- You start of course with circuit flying and you do various types of circuit and landing type work. You do flapless work,
- 22:30 you do precautionary flying. I mean when you are talking about precautionary flying you get in some situations where the weather is completely clagged and you are right down on the deck and you are really looking for somewhere to put the aeroplane down so you get the speed back as much as you can with flap and now that's one example of the application of precautionary flying so there are all sorts of
- 23:00 circuit work that you do. Flapless for example is entirely different from landing an aeroplane in the ordinary way using flaps because it is a very much longer approach, very much longer glider approach and the thing is much faster when you put it down when you are using flaps which you use to reduce your speed. So
- 23:30 there is that sort of thing. There is navigation and the navigation exercises were fairly complex. They were good. In that territory of course there are generally railway lines and cities around the place as opposed to some of the outback areas of Western Australia. As I said you do aerobatics.
- 24:00 Just a whole, I guess you could say the whole range of. You do instrument let downs. You do quite a lot of that sort of thing. Pretty much the whole range of flying apart from armament work that you are likely to encounter in a true fighter. It's pretty wide ranging. About 100, I think in Tiger Moths we did about 75 hours.
- 24:30 In Harvards it was 110, 120, 130 something like that. I can't remember exactly so by the time you got your wings you were almost a 200 hour man, at least 200 hours. My God.
- And how long did it take to go solo on the Harvards?**
- About I think it was about
- 25:00 7 hours. I think I went off first in about 7 ½. It was normally about 8 ½ where some people took about 10. You couldn't come down because you had to cover a certain number of procedures and as I flew the Harvard. I had 6 ½ hours when the instructor pranged that aeroplane so I think I might have one more check and went solo then. I never saw, in Tiger Moths
- 25:30 it was always a bit of competition. You sort of thought going solo was a bit of game at this stage of the game but when I got to this stage I didn't see it that way at all. I saw the need for a thorough preparation and if that took an hour or two longer that was all right by me and we got it. We got, even the newly trained instructors, they did a damn good job, very good job.
- Did that instructor that pranged the plane instruct again after that?**
- 26:00 He continued instructing. Well you know, I don't think there was even an inquiry held. He made his report and I've got a little report there somewhere amongst this stuff the fact that this happened but it was wartime. Yeah, he stayed. He continued with me until I got my wings right through
- 26:30 and I must say he developed as an instructor as we went along. As he should. So that was the training in Canada.
- You mentioned the fact of the proximity to all those wonderful locations. Did you actually get much leave while you were there to see the sights?**
- We got a little. Toronto for example was fairly close. You could hop on a train and get to Toronto in about, from memory about an hour and a half or two hours
- 27:00 so we would occasionally go up there and on weekends perhaps when they were free. It wasn't all that

often but wherever you went in the States and Canada there were facilities for servicemen on leave. Toronto was a bit passionate about that. All sorts of organisations that would grab you and look after you and take you places and feed you

27:30 and do all that sort of stuff for you. They were very, very patriotic people. Very vehemently patriotic I guess and the Aussies got on well. From Dundle there was a lady whose name I can't remember at the moment because I didn't go there all that often but she lived at Wellham and there were probably 8 or 10 of the people on our course that went there

28:00 at every opportunity and she looked after them, she looked after them all the way through all that time. So I don't think anything terribly exciting happened at Dundle. Other than that we were the first course not to go England. The war was coming to a close and that was a terrible disappointment, terrible disappointment because we were looking forward to going to England and flying Spitfires.

28:30 But we were the first course not to go to England so we came home and we were also the last course at that base. It closed up after that and is now a turkey farm.

So sorry, when did you finish the course there?

That would have been about November, December, probably December

29:00 1944. Yeah, December 1944. I stayed on for a while because I got an infection and I think I came back to Australia about March or something like that. So I spent a little while in hospital but that was okay. I got back and joined up with them all. But we came home and went to Uranquinty in NSW.

29:30 We went to the Service Training School to do some refresher training on Wirraways with the idea of going to an operation conversion unit, an OCU, but once again the war was getting pretty close to an end and we became surplus to requirements and it was suggested that we go for exchange. So about the time the war ended we ended and I had no idea that there

30:00 was such a thing as an interim airforce. Had I known or had I been told I would not have applied to leave the service at that stage but I did and then spent 3 ½ years in civilian life so that was. I must say when the war ended I went into Perth on the day it ended I went into Perth

30:30 because there was obviously going to be some celebrations and I have never seen so many people performing in such a way as they did. Everybody was in the streets dancing and I guess I must have danced with 40 different women. All around Hay Street, William Street, back again. It was just an incredible thing and everybody was there in the streets. All laughing, drinking, singing dancing.

31:00 It was just incredible time. Great experience.

Did you have a girlfriend at that stage?

No I was pretty much in the interim at that stage. When are we talking? Right at the end of the war? No, well I did, yes I did but she was still in Canada and that's another

31:30 story which we will leave to later or maybe we won't but very soon after that I had a girlfriend. But we were moving around a bit in those days. So if I may just pull that aside and talk about the time that the three years or so I was out of the air force.

32:00 Would that be all right?

Yes, absolutely.

Well once again I was doing some crutching and shearing and I didn't have a particular aim I must admit. In the long term I had in mind that I might take over Dad's business and I think he might have had something of that in mind too. Not by me entirely but certainly by me and one of the brothers.

32:30 So I stretched on there and did some shearing and crutching and the old sorts of things that I did as work before and then learned that the air force was calling for active intake again. But meanwhile I had, I'd gone to Derby, way up west in Western Australia. Spent 12 months there and worked for about 6 months with

33:00 a general agency looking after the airways agency, an element of that general agency for a fellow called RM Rowll. Have you heard of him? And when I say looking after him I was chief clerk, chief booker of seats, chief meeter of passengers and lugger around of passengers and all that sort of stuff you know and then for the last 6 months I stayed on with a

33:30 former native guy who I befriended. He had a general store. A pretty rough and ready thing but it was a lot of fun and I stayed and helped him and then rejoined in October 1948. The interesting thing about rejoining or I might just come back a bit.

34:00 We talk about. I mean there are so many things that I can remember that people don't even begin to know existed. I remember ballpoint pens came out when I was in Derby and this looked like a pretty good thing so I bought one. It cost me almost the equivalent of a week's wage. It cost 5 guineas if I remember rightly and in the present day that would have to be in the

- 34:30 order of \$300, \$400 or \$500. It was in a ordinary pen case like a fountain pen and I never did learn if you could refills for it or not and it wrote how would you put it? It didn't write uniformly. It was like a pen just running out that sort of thing. A ballpoint that's just running out.
- 35:00 So that was when ballpoint pens came into Australia and that's what that damn thing cost. I don't think it could even be refilled.

Pretty high tech.

It came in from the UK. Astonishing stuff.

It sounds like you were basically longing to get back into the planes somehow.

- Yeah, oh yeah. I had made enquiries because I learned there was such a thing as the interim air force
- 35:30 which I could no longer become involved in. Whatever happened. I did become involved in what was an interim air force but the interesting thing about rejoining was that the recruiting officer when I finally got there for an interview explained to me that the airforce was adopting a new rank system. Nobody these days knows about this. I've now got the information. I'm going to write
- 36:00 a verse on this for RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] News and various other organisations because people ask me about it and those who experienced it don't know what it was about. I now know. He explained that the RAAF had introduced a new rank system with the intention of having, and this is the most absurd thing of all, all air crew in one mess and everybody else in another mess. Now this
- 36:30 idea started in the UK where I don't believe it would have worked anyway but why would you ever want to separate your aircrew from the rest of the people in an area where you do so much of your work over a bar or over meals you know. Anyway he explained this to me and it sounded all right and I said, "Well what about?" Because I left the service. When we graduated I was one of only 4 people of about 40
- 37:00 to be commissioned so I left the service as a Flying Officer, so I asked this guy, "Is it likely I will get my commission back?" and he said, "I think it is quite likely," and he didn't really. He wasn't able to go beyond that so I was going to come back anyway regardless and I learned that I was going to be a trainee pilot while we did some
- 37:30 refresher work, some refresher training at Richmond, some flying refresher training at East Sale and during this time I was a trainee pilot which is equal to about a LAC [Leading Aircraftsman]. That's what my rank was the equivalent of actually and I didn't like this terribly much and at the end of refresher training flying
- 38:00 I was posted to Williamstown and I became a P3, pilot 3 which was the pilot equivalent of a navigator 3 or air electronics officer 3 and so on and I learned that this had the superiority powers of a corporal. It was really the powers of a corporal but we had the privileges of a sergeant's mess and I couldn't believe this was so. I remember I actually went on guard duty one night from Williamstown. I had been flying right through the
- 38:30 day and I was scheduled to fly the next morning and I was on guard duty that night and the OC, the Officer in Command came out and said, "What are you doing here?" and I told him and he said, "This will never happen again." It was a pretty absurd set up and so I became a corporal pilot and incidentally when we first started operating in Korea there would be times when people were given flying officer bars
- 39:00 in case they were shot down so they would have officer status. So that was the rejoin.

So how easy was it for you to get back in the cockpit? Was it second nature still or..?

Pretty much. Yeah it was. It was no trouble at all. No trouble at all. We flew, yeah we went straight to Wirraways

- 39:30 and I'd flown them a bit at the end of the war but it was just straight forward as though it was yesterday really. Some of the guys that came with us had a bit of a problem, a bit of trouble because not being, they had not flown singles and with a single engine aeroplane for take off for example you've got 3 things working against you in terms of swing.
- 40:00 Firstly you've got the propeller going around at a great rate of knots and when you lift the tail of the aeroplane it affects the gyroscope and wants to swing you one way or the other. You've got the engine torque that wants to do the same thing in the same direction and you've got the propeller wash against the tail plane at the back that also wants to do the same thing in the same direction so a Mustang is a good example. As you are taking off you
- 40:30 have already cranked in quite a lot of left rudder but you are also slightly increasing it as you go. If you don't you will go off the runway and that happened to some of the guys in the Wirraway because it does the same thing. Not as heavily or as savagely as a Mustang or another aeroplane but one or two cases there that the guys who had flown Ansons and that sort of stuff during the war just couldn't get it for quite a while. They in fact

41:00 swung off the runway and did damage to aeroplanes but for those who had flown both Harvards and Wirraways it was easy, quite easy.

Were there many from the...

Tape 3

00:30 **Yeah it would be good to go over some of that training you did. We started in Williamtown is that where you were?**

We did refresher flying at East Sale Central Flying School and it was when we completed that the P3 rank came about. You know and I was posted, I had continually

01:00 plugged for fighters in all aspects of everything I did and was posted to Williamtown which is the home of fighters of course in Australia. I was posted there in, when was it? 1949 sometime, I guess about October 1949 or something like that. No it wasn't. I can't remember the dates on that but after completing the refresher

01:30 I was posted to Williamtown to 75 Squadron to fly Mustangs. That was the ultimate as far as I was concerned. I think there was 3 or 4 of us posted to there from this particular course. The Mustang was generally regarded as the best all round fighter of World War II. The British Tempest which was a very late development in the war was a better fighter

02:00 in almost all respects below 20,000 ft. The German Focke Wulf 190 was a better fighter than the Mustang in some respects above 33-34,000 ft but overall the Mustang was the best all around fighter. It was certainly the best fighter with a range of over 1,000 miles. If I remember correctly it was probably

02:30 about 1,600 miles. Incredible. It was developed in that way to escort bombers over Europe as far as Berlin and get them back home. No other fighter had been able to do that before and of course, the bomber losses were terribly high particularly in daytime. So this magic machine was what I was just about to fly. We went through

03:00 obviously a ground phase of learning about the plane and it's systems and it's procedures and the text that you do and all that sort of stuff and as with most aeroplanes we were, I'll use I because I think only 2 of us went there. I was able to taxi the aeroplane. When it had to go from A to B you could get in the thing and taxi it very, very carefully. You could learn how

03:30 to put the stick forward to control it's rudder and all this sort of stuff. A feel for the throttle and then after that when an aeroplane was ready for it's full run up and that happened at the beginning of each day. You ran up to what was known as 61 inches of boost. It was actually tied down to the tarmac, a rod went through the back of the aeroplane

04:00 and was tied down to very, very heavy concrete and then you could run it up to 61 inches and the aeroplane felt as if it was. It felt as though it had taken off and it was taking the earth with it. It was the most incredible feeling of power you know and then from there you go off and you do your first solo in the thing

04:30 and a bit of this and a bit of that. A few circuits and so on and that is really something. Whereas with the Wirraway and the Harvard you got airborne and you sort of grind away. You got airborne in a Mustang and started to climb at 150 knots and you felt as if you were pointed up like that. You weren't of course but that is what you felt relative to what you had been accustomed to. So

05:00 for my first solo, my first flight in the Mustang I brought it back into the circuit and did a couple of buzz circuits in those days and decided to bring it in to land and I misjudged my height and dropped it in and it burst into fire. I was very, very embarrassed to be towed in by a tractor from my first flight so that was the conversion to Mustangs.

They are single seater, aren't they, the Mustangs?

Oh yes, yes.

05:30 **So how long did you spend with it anchored to the ground before you got off?**

You just ran it up to 61 inches and checked various pressures and temperatures and various things and it's only a matter of no more than 4 or 5 seconds at 61 inches and on the way back you check various things at various inches and so on

06:00 and then right back to the idle.

Can you just explain to me what the inches should have been?

The inches are a measurement of the boost. I don't know what they represent in terms of atmosphere but they represent the amount of boost being produced that you are causing the engine to produce by throttle. I can't explain it much better than that.

06:30 **No, no that's fine. How did that show up on your dashboard, on your instruments?**

It shows as boost on one dial and as revs on another and the co-relation between the 2 are something that you check anyway. A certain amount of boost should give you a certain amount of revs

07:00 when you are static as part of your run up set of the morning. When the thing has been run up in that first and sometimes often that is done by the ground crew, getting the aeroplanes ready for the guys who are going to fly out or fly them and when the pilot himself has done his run up he probably from memory runs it at something like 40 inches

07:30 and checks various things. For example, you throttle on to say 40 inches, check the revs and then as an example of one of the checks you then pull your pitch lever back to course to see how much that reduces the revs for that much boost and if that is within a certain range then that's hunky dory. That's just an example of the sort of checks

08:00 that you do.

So every morning or before you go out on any operation the ground crew will do this check and then the pilot will as well?

The pilot does when he comes to fly it. Generally the ground crew prepare the aeroplane for flight. They get them up, line them up or take them out of the hangar or it depends on what base

08:30 you are on and how it works but they get the aeroplanes out and prepare them for flight and that preparation at the beginning of the day generally required that engine check to 61 inches of boost and then maybe it might be 2 or 3 hours later before the pilots get to them and do their work and get airborne. This is early in the morning

09:00 and everything is ready at 8.00 for example and ready to go and then it might be 9.00 before, after the pilots have been briefed and check the weather and done their flight plans and that sort of stuff before they get into the aeroplane, strap in, start up and go through their little engine check before they move out to the end of the runway and then come the end of the runway. If you had been idle for

09:30 any length of time you do a fairly full powered check to make sure you are not missing revs and that sort of stuff. Get into formation, crank the revs up and take off.

Who was instructing you during that time flying the Mustang?

The Mustang was simply a conversion and if I remember rightly a fellow named Vic Markell,

10:00 yeah. He was the guy who did my conversion. He was the guy who would get up on the wing and look into the cockpit and did things and kept an eye on things and generally watched out for me. He died some years back but as far as your instruction generally is concerned it then all comes with airborne work. You know your

10:30 battle formations, your tactics, your armament, all that sort of stuff comes when you are airborne. You are briefed, you are taken up. You learn for a start how to fly a battle formation, how to fly and do all that sort of stuff and that's where the instruction comes. That's an equivalent of an operational conversion unit in other words compared to an operational conversion which gets you up after I don't know how many hours

11:00 and I can now say I'm a fighter pilot. A pretty raw fighter pilot but nevertheless.

And what was Vic's background? Did he fight in the Second World War?

He, Vic was a warrant officer who under the new system became a pilot 2 I think, equal to a sergeant. He had, I think he had been in BCOF and had come back to Williamtown. BCOF being

11:30 the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan but I'm not certain of that but I think he had been in BCOF and had come back to Williamtown and there he was acting as a Squadron pilot. He was a good pilot. Later Vic left the service and became a helicopter pilot working for a company along with a chap named Peter Clemens who was

12:00 who was probably the most experienced helicopter pilot in the country. He was a fighter pilot. He helped convert me to Sabres much later but Vic was so good that on one occasion there was a need to rescue somebody from a, what do you call it, factory type chimney and this is the big thing of course and he flew his chopper down that, seriously.

12:30 Peter Clemens is probably the best chopper pilot. On last count he had something like 18,000 hours just on helicopters. He watched this operation. He didn't believe it could be done and Vic flew this thing down this very dark, dark chimney and picked somebody up and pulled them up again. How he did it I've no idea, there was very little clearance, but anyway that was the guy that converted me to Mustangs.

13:00 **So I just want to get an idea of how new it was to have Mustangs here in Australia and have our fighter pilots training on them in Australia?**

We had previously used the Kittyhawk P40 as our main fighter. That was the fighter that we used up in Darwin and the islands and so on and when the Mustang,

- 13:30 the Mustang was produced as a British requirement for that long range over Berlin, escort type mission and the Americans put an Allison engine in it and it was just a pretty medium sort of performer. The Brits put a Rolls Royce Merlin engine in it and it was a top world fighter and we then,
- 14:00 I don't know when we first began to get them. Probably about 1943 I should think and we then began to build them here in Australia. I forget whether it was CAC [Commonwealth Aircraft Company] or UAF [?] but we were building them here in Australia. I have a feeling that we built something like 200 but please don't quote me on that. I'm not certain about it and that's how it came about and it replaced, essentially replaced
- 14:30 the Kitty Hawk and of course, when 77 Squadron went to Japan to form the air element of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force or BCOF they had Mustangs. They had Mustangs there. In fact they went from Labuan in Borneo to Japan.
- 15:00 It was, I always felt it was coincidence that later when I was commanding 77 Squadron, much later flying Sabres I had an occasion to take a flight of 6 Sabres and about 120-130 airmen over to Labuan itself, 77 returning as part of the Confrontation with Indonesia and we flew actual operation missions there in Borneo and at that stage
- 15:30 77 Squadron had never been home from having been overseas during the war. It came home later when I was Air Attaché in Jakarta but it was the longest overseas unit that we had I think. That's digressing somewhat I must say.

No, interesting. Interesting. So you were saying before that really you learnt

- 16:00 **how to fly a Mustang in the air in doing formation work. Can you tell me a bit more about that, how that was practiced?**

Well I didn't do much of that at Williamtown because I was just getting into conversion when the news came through there was some vacancies in BCOF so I put my name forward and was posted to Japan

- 16:30 to 77 Squadron to fly Mustangs there and that's where my continuation training continued. We our role there was peacekeeping. There was some anti-smuggling stuff and some odd things like that but it was essentially being there as a top fighter Squadron presence to keep the peace and to protect the
- 17:00 whole peace as it was you know. So there my training continued and it consisted of various types of formation flying; battle formation flying, combat manoeuvres and armament work, dive bombing, air to air live gunnery, air to ground live gunnery. Those sorts of things that fighter pilots get on
- 17:30 with or fighter squadrons get on with in keeping their up to datedness if you like as fighter squadrons. By the time I don't know if anything else happened of tremendous. Well a lot of things happened of tremendous consequence there but I don't know if I can bring them readily to mind but we were packed up
- 18:00 in June 1950. The squadron was packed up and about to come home finally and we were really packed up. The aeroplanes were starting to be, what do they call it? Covered and there's a specific word for it that I can't remember at the moment. We had flown our last flight and we had, we were having a big party. I was the entertainments member
- 18:30 of the sergeants' mess and I arranged a shipwreck party and it was a shipwrecked party I can tell you. We actually built a shipwreck at the entrance to the mess probably 40 ft long and people had to enter through that ship, walk the gangplank and get a little squirt of something on the way in and the entire base, virtually the entire base was invited. So that went on to about 3 or 4.00 in the morning
- 19:00 and sometime during that morning, I think during the next morning Razor Bilko who was the orderly sergeant had word that North Korea had invaded the south. Now we had, there had been some inkling of shenanigans over there and massing of thousands of troops and we knew something was up but it came as a, I suppose to most of us a bit of a surprise
- 19:30 so we immediately tried to sober up and went down to get the aeroplanes ready again or help the ground crew get the aeroplanes ready again. So that went on. General Macarthur. Let me say 77 Squadron at this stage was the most operational and proficient fighter Squadron in the entire
- 20:00 far east. In fact we came to a point about the time the Korean War started we were the only Mustang Squadron, we were the only piston engine Squadron and therefore we had range and therefore we had great ground attack capability. General Macarthur who was the supreme commander of the Allied forces in that area wanted 77 Squadron.
- 20:30 We had a fellow named Bay Adams who was one of the flight commanders who had just won the Middle East Air to Air Shoot against all comers and Macarthur wanted 77 Squadron and Bay Adams and then General Stratmeyer who commanded the entire East Air Force put it to General Robertson who was a British Forces

21:00 Commander that he would like 77 Squadron to be involved and it came down to Menzies and in no time flat the approval came through but it took, it was the 25th June I think when the north invaded the south and it was the 2nd of July before we were able to fly our first missions.

Can I interrupt you there?

21:30 **You said 77 Squadron was the best there was but what had you been doing in Japan in BCOF to enable you to maintain that standard?**

Continually training. Continually training and all the fighters were fighter type aspects. The work, the competition, the tactical. I mean, you

22:00 **So can you, can you sort of take me through how you would train in tactical manoeuvres?**

All right. Okay, you have 8 aeroplanes. Set 2 leaders and gives them 3 fellows each so you've got A and B and this is just one example of what you might do. You've got A and B and you say okay, A goes

22:30 up to such and such and is coming in as an enemy attacking from a certain direction. B gets word of this by radar by, yeah by radar or whatever and is scrambled to intercept them. B goes up to intercept and they are homed in on the enemy aircraft and try to gain an advantage or height or whatever tactical way and then

23:00 those 2 lots of 4 fight. I can tell when the sky gets all full of aeroplanes all there and controlling them. When you fly in fighters you always fly as a pair; a leader and a wingman. The wingman can search back off the tail, the leader can search back there to cover tail. If you are by yourself with a nice canopy that the Mustang has you can not cover your tail properly,

23:30 down particularly right down. So whatever you do that man has to go with you. Go over there and all that sort of stuff so you've got these pairs all trying to stay together and all trying to get advantage on the others and you end up with camera shots and claims and you come back and debrief. You debrief through the entire thing from the time that you, well from the time that you first started

24:00 on them until the time that you finished the fight and then make claims and then you discuss it and talk about ways in which is may have better been done. Now if I might just digress a little here when we got to flying Meteors in Korea against the MiG [Mikoyan-Gurevich, Soviet aircraft manufacturer] a hell of a lot, an aeroplane greatly superior in performance and speed

24:30 and the whole lot and in numbers incidentally we didn't have a lot of that sort of experience, that air to air experience in jets anyway. When Dick Creswell came home and we did, made a good account of ourselves I might say he claimed that we should open up a fighter combat instruction school to teach our fighter pilots,

25:00 fighter combat instructors to teach our fighter combat pilots those combats that we defined in the world and that's the sort of thing that is going on in the fighter squadrons as the moment when they do those sort of tactical stuff. For the rest it's, let me give you another example. You take 4 aeroplanes and they say, "You've got a target at such and such. You've got to go through

25:30 a particular route and you've got these sorts of things impeding you and these are your enemy and this sort of stuff." You've got to go down there, the highest man in the 4 at 50ft and flying at 50ft is not easy I can tell you but you get used to it and you come around there and you attack that target and your ordnance will be on the target plus or minus 5 seconds. Now that takes practice.

This is a ground target?

Yes, yes

26:00 and it's got to be. You've got to have those sort of accuracies. Perhaps this is not the time but I will come to a specific operation later or perhaps I can talk about it now.

Sure.

We had occasion to target a Chinese Communist Headquarters in Pyongyang when we were operating from way down South Korea

26:30 and the operation was to comprise 77 Squadron going in with 16 aircraft, 16 Mustangs and the USAF [United States Air Force] coming over with B29 bombers. Now they were supposed to come through if I remember rightly 20 seconds before we came in. Our

27:00 and they would bomb the target and give us a pretty clear go at this headquarters and over Pyongyang there was flak like you wouldn't believe. 8 aeroplane doing bombing and 8 doing rockets and bombing and 8 doing rockets and napalm. Bombers went in first. As they were going in they were are flying through

27:30 hundreds and hundreds of bombs being dropped by B29s who are 20 seconds late and you know, this when I say plus or minus 5 seconds this is what I'm talking about. I'll give you another example later on. Absolutely incredible the necessity for timing. So we went in, the bombers went in they did a good job

of rocketing and the bombers going in at

28:00 about a 60 degree angle and a little bit more difficult a target for the ground flak people. We went in with our napalm and that's about a 15 degree angle and you are really setting yourself up for, my leader actually got shot down there Gordon Harvey.

What altitude?

Oh probably I remember at this stage he would have got clobbered

28:30 probably at as we were releasing at 200ft. We came back in and I saw that he was on fire and I went over and gave him the fire signal and he said, "Yeah, he knew that" and he put down on a little island north of the city and was taken POW. Vic Creswell took 4 of us back the next morning to have a look where he might be. All we found was a hell of a lot of flak. I tell you this was well defended.

29:00 **So in the training where you are using camera shots or photographs to determine where you make a hit is that right?**

No you use actual practice bombs and you use live ammunition. You shoot at, in air to ground gunnery for example you shoot at an 8 x 10 target. You might, it depends sometimes

29:30 it might be an old vehicle put in a particular spot and the recording of accuracy is done by segments. The people with segments go boom and then they can plunder it immediately or determine if there is a 4 foot error, 5 foot error or 25 foot error or whatever and of course with guns the, each aircraft has

30:00 ammunition which is painted a different colour, dipped in a different colour paint and it comes off on the target cloth as you go through so you can count how many shots you got on out of how many you shot.

Are these the claims that you referred to? Is this what you called claims?

No. Claims generally referred to,

30:30 they are not claims as such because they are actually measured. You know what they are. You don't have to claim that you got close because it is measured according to the calculations just where your ordnance went. Claims refer to shooting down enemy aircraft.

31:00 **You mentioned that earlier in your training that you go back and do your briefing and do claims. That was what I was..**

Oh I'm sorry. My apologies. I see where you are coming from. You are talking here about enemy aeroplanes because you have 4 against 4 or sometimes greater numbers. In one exercise in Germany we had 1,500 aircraft involved and there was much more than 8 in the air at one time.

31:30 So you come back and the leader goes through how he thought it went and the wingman will talk about this and his deputy leader will talk about this and the others will counter it and each will make their claims and then the whole thing is assessed on SIM camera. The SIM films are taken and it is run and it is assessed "Yes you did. This is definitely a kill or a damage..." or whatever because the little pipper that you use on a gyro gun sight

32:00 that goes according to how much you move it and that sort of stuff is shown with it's diamonds directly on that film. So you are coming in and the film is there on the screen and it is held there nicely on it's tail and then held on the cockpit for 2 seconds or whatever. Yeah sure that's a kill. Claim okay.

32:30 That's the sort of thing that I had in mind.

That's really interesting detail. That's great to get that sort of detail about it. You said before you fly in 2 and the leader can cover the Wingman's tail and so forth. In what way were they covering the tail? Do you mean being able to gun or do you mean being able to?

33:00 Okay. I'm sorry. Yeah okay. In terms of covering the tail against enemy attack you always in fighters wherever you can you come in from stern where you can't be seen or you come out of the sun where you virtually can't be seen if you can arrange it that way. In basic and I say every leader will fly with a Wingman every basic section is of 4. What's known as a finger 4

33:30 and there's the leader, there's his wingman, there's his deputy leader and there's his wingman. Now here is the enemy aircraft coming in here and this man can cover through here, that man can cover through there and so on. You can actually cover all areas of your tail area against

34:00 enemy attack. If you can't you get shot down.

But when you've got the enemy coming from behind does that mean one is slightly more forward than the other?

Yes. No. Yes of your own aircraft you mean? That can't describe it properly. That is the sort of the wing situation. If you are searching you can go out wider

34:30 so you can cover further back because you can only see like that and back there. All of that behind you

is vulnerable. That man over there can see over there so you fly that formation according to your tactical requirement at the time. If you are searching doing a combat air patrol or something like that

35:00 it is fairly wide and the other man is over there with his man fairly wide so you can get full cover, full visual cover and when the flight starts or when you get into a closer situation you get into a combat situation. Does that make sense?

That makes great sense. What about the speed of the Mustangs?

It was,

35:30 it was a fast aeroplane. It wasn't as fast as the Tempest. It was faster than the Spitfire. It was generally, in maximum dive speed was generally regarded at 485 miles per hour. It's level or was that? 485, 485 knots was it's

36:00 maximum dive speed. It's straight and level speed as a clean aeroplane, clean in the moment was something like over 400 miles an hour and but the way we operated we always had rocket pods on them. They were always fairly dirty because you are out there and you are firing stuff. You are out in a pretty

36:30 fairly rugged situation. Say in Korea you are coming through in a cab rank, refilling, refuelling, rearming. You are covered in dust. It makes a difference to your speed but particularly when you have 8 rocket pads underneath there. They are things about, the back of them about that long and then further up there and they sit down like that so they all impede your speed so I reckon.

37:00 In many cases you leave your bomb racks on and they are one each side and they've got little racks on them for other practice bombs or 500 pounds bombs so the 400 mile an hour plus is a bit meaningless when you look at a combat situation. But except and we were not here, except if you are using aeroplanes as

37:30 purely as air to air intercept fighters. We were using them as ground attack fighters and they were very, very good ground attack fighters. Later I will tell the story of what we did with them in Korea.

Okay. I'll just, one other thing is just to get an idea and description of the sort of weapons

38:00 **that you did carry and how you were operated them.**

So shall we talk about the Korean situation where we operated them seriously.

We will come back and get into Korea and go through that with it because it is very interesting.

Okay. Well the Mustang was capable of carrying 2 1,000 pound bombs

38:30 plus rockets plus guns of course. Let's start with the guns for a start. There were 6 0.5 inch guns that's what 13 mm in today's terms guns in aeroplanes. They carried 2 outboard guns on each wing carried something like 400 rounds and I'm

39:00 trying to stir the memory cells here and the 2 inboard carried something like 17 or something like that. So that's guns and they are a pretty potent weapon and they are harmonised according to your requirements. They are harmonised so that in the case of if you are shooting at aeroplanes for example or specific targets on the ground they might be harmonised at

39:30 400 yards so that theoretically each and every gun has a cone of fire. Not all bullets go exactly the same but all those cones are now harmonised to be at say 300 yards so you have an overall cone of fire the slugs are coming through and if you are common at the range you will blow the aeroplane up. If you do it at 400 yards they are now starting to spread out and if you do it at 600 yards

40:00 the dispersal, the concentration is pretty low. So that's guns.

Where were the guns located?

In the wings. In the wings. 1, 2, 3. 1, 2, 3. A couple of 1,000 pound bombs. We used 500 pound bombs in Korea so we carried a couple of 500 pound bombs and a heap of rockets

40:30 and those bombs could be mostly they were a fairly general purpose sort of bomb that would plain blow things up. There were others we would use that were a slightly lesser weight and were anti-personnel guns, bombs. We hardly ever used those but they would have a rod on the sticking down on the nose, this is the bomb here so the thing would explode just above the

41:00 ground and have a shrapnel type effect and damage laterally on the ground rather than just blowing things up. We used 2 types of rockets. 1 was the British 3 inch rocket which had a 60 pound head and we would, I'm pretty sure there was 8 of those because we didn't double tier them. We would carry out of those

41:30 in a mission to bomb or we would carry the same number of American rockets which were, sorry the British 60 pound heads had a 3 inch motor. The American ones had a 5 inch motor and a 5 inch head so

they had a 5 x 5, 25 pound head. We also carried special anti-tank rockets which were the American type.

42:00 5 inch motor.

Tape 4

- 00:30 It's coming back to the role. It was essentially peacekeeping. Peacekeeping and whatever way we were able and I don't think I could even quantify this to encourage and help the Japanese people to their recovery.
- 01:00 In our relationships with local dignitaries and so forth I'm sure we played a role. Not me necessarily but our officers, our leaders and so on and all of us in our own way but it was essentially squadron training to keep up our fighter capacity and all those things that I've
- 01:30 mentioned. There were some incidents. A dear old friend of mine who's since died and Bay Adams who's since died in one of these exercises collided over the Yellow Sea and Blue, no Bay bailed out okay but
- 02:00 Blue got out and the plane was spinning into the side in which you get out. You hop out on the left hand side and he was pinned to the side of the aeroplane and it took ages and ages to get off this damn thing and freeing himself from the aeroplane and they weren't all that high and engage his parachute. These sorts of things happened. These sorts of things happened.
- 02:30 I'll tell you about another sort of collision a little later. I suppose another impression of Japan we flew on one occasion to conduct a fly pass over Tokyo for some important occasion that I can't bring to mind and it was my first cross country if you like in a Mustang in Japan and as we were flying along I suddenly saw the ground coming closer and closer and closer and
- 03:00 closer until I realised we were approaching Mount Fuji and it's not like a normal mountain. It comes up like that you know and then starts to come up. It's a beautiful mountain. Absolutely beautiful mountain but all this earlier stuff for dozens and dozens of miles you don't sort of immediately see as part of the mountain but it is. That's just an impression.
- 03:30 One that I remember. I remember going to Hiroshima for the first time and you know that was a pretty sullen experience. It was still flattened. I stood under the, what was it called? That, the dome over which the bomb exploded and looked around and it was pretty horrifying, pretty horrifying
- 04:00 and there's a little bridge nearby where concrete had melted but not so much melted where it had been protected by a human being that had vapourised and you could see the outline because it was just that small difference between the heat of the concrete there and there. There's sort of things were very, very sad.
- 04:30 For the rest it was good fun, good learning stuff for me. Good learning stuff and by the time the Korean war broke out I had a grand total of about 90 hours in Mustangs. It's not long.

Had you flown the Mustang from Williamtown to Japan?

No, no. I went to Japan in a thing called a Lancastrian, which was a converted World War II Lancaster bomber.

- 05:00 A British aeroplane, 4 engine bomber which was used to great affect. G for George was a Lancaster and they converted that so that you had a whole heap of passengers in the bomb bay. We flew up in this damn thing. Most uncomfortable, most cold and called into the Philippines on the way and then onto Japan but I'd flown all that way

- 05:30 really what was the equivalent of a bomb bay of a Lancaster.

And where were you based in Japan? Where was the squadron based?

At a place called Iwakuni, which was not terribly far from Hiroshima. The Squadron had previously been based at Bofu and then moved down to Iwakuni and that was a nice spot to be.

- 06:00 You know there were lots of shrines and it was pretty much on the water and just general, a couple of us. I managed to acquire an old jeep. I bought it off an American actually and 2 or 3 of the other guys we would sometimes load up and head up into the hills and just have a nice day off away from the squadron. That was good stuff.

So you had

- 06:30 **over all this period you had never actually been in combat? What was it like being in Japan in a peacekeeping flying, it sounds like doing exercises like you were in combat but it not being war?**

Well I think not really much difference from doing it at Williamtown for example because I mean there was the peacekeeping role but we were working to

07:00 maintain the individual and Squadron proficiency at all of those things that you do in war time. So it was just SOP, standard operation procedure in a way as I saw it at the time I think.

So when you got the news about Korea that's suddenly going to be the real thing.

Okay, shall we move in that direction?

Yeah I think so.

07:30 Okay I'll just throw this on the floor because this is very, very important. I think I mentioned earlier that General Macarthur and General Stratemyer wanted 77 Squadron. 77 Squadron was approved. We waited around for days wondering what was happening and we also, those of us who hadn't. I don't think we had anyone there who had flown upper air fighting before but

08:00 there was a sense of wonderness. A sense of expectation as to what we might encounter. We didn't know very much about the North Korean air capacity. We didn't know much about stuff there at all actually. We had a fellow there called Dubbo Rankin, Squadron Leader Dubbo Rankin who was in Korea

08:30 as an UN Observer and he had passed a bit of word back that there was a bit of shenanigans going on and it was a bit of a worry but we, generally we hadn't heard much about that in the crew room. We were just Squadron pilots and get on with our business. So there was a sense of wonderment of what was likely to happen and so we just waited and then the first

09:00 missions were called on the 2nd of July. They were escorts. I was not on those. I first flew, I think I flew my first mission on 3rd July. It was a B26 escort. They were American twin engine bombers and nothing of any great consequence happened there except there was some flak,

09:30 flak up to 37 mm and if that hits you you've got trouble but it was not terribly accurate and when you got back to base. We were operating from Iwakuni then. Over to Korea and back to Iwakuni and my leader did a sort of a wrong thing. I was inexperienced I must admit. It was the first time I'd carried long range

10:00 drop tanks and it makes a bit of a difference to your handling when you come in at a slow speed for landing and he came in to land and he landed on the right hand with the wind slowly drifting across to the other side which was going to catch me as his wingman. He should have landed on the left hand side and for some reason just at about touchdown he gave it a very, very solid burst of power and it meant he was drifting over to me at the time that

10:30 I was rounding out for touchdown and it grabbed me and chucked me on my back. In recovering from that I just bent that wing right up like that and the aeroplane was a complete right off. That was my first operational mission so and I won't say the guy's name because he might be still alive.

11:00 **Did you say that was the wind coming off his plane that flipped you?**

Yes the thing was if you are behind an aeroplane with a propeller and a similar sort of thing applies with a jet. There are 2 things happening. You are rounding out. You are causing a lot

11:30 more aircraft turbulence behind your aeroplane and with your prop going at any sort of power you are causing a spiral turbulence and if you hop in behind an aeroplane tight like that you will jump and you will jump all around and you've got to go down a bit to avoid that. Now when he was landing he had all of this happening, a fairly high angle of

12:00 attack and the breeze is just slowly drifting across to the other side of the runway. So it was being brought over to me here and to be honest, look with more experience I believe I would have foreseen that. I would have known what he was doing and assessed the whole thing and I think I probably did a little bit at the time but not enough.

So did it catch you by surprise?

Yes it did, it did.

12:30 And I, in order to recover from this I'm using full right stick for example, full right rudder on to stop the thing from rolling this way and using rudder to help and all this sort of thing.

Did it lift you so much that you cleared the wing or it didn't, that's when the wing broke?

The wing broke.

13:00 I don't know when it was like this. I didn't know at the time. I believe that the wing, I believe that I got beyond the vertical and in the final recovery it broke on the way back because I was virtually on the deck at that stage. That's one of many.

Oh good. I love these stories. You said there was something like a week

13:30 **before you went on the first operation?**

It wasn't quite that. I'm sorry to interrupt. It wasn't quite that much by the time the approval came through from Australia. I think the approval actually came through on the 29th and the weather prevented us from getting airborne until 2nd of July. The 29th or 30th.

So did you, you know, did you get some sort of very intensive briefing

14:00 **before you went in for that first operation?**

Oh yes, yes. So far as we knew and most of our intelligence came from the Americans and we knew they had Yak 9s [Yakovlev, Soviet aircraft manufacturer] and we knew what the performance of the Yak 9 was and we knew what their ack ack, what their ground fire was. I don't know that

14:30 we knew about their 88 mm radar predictors and proximity fuse stuff which is pretty dicky but yeah, we had briefings to the best of our understanding at that time and we had briefings to the best of our understanding from the pilots that were being attacked when we were escorting the bombers in those early days.

What about the terrain and the country and the positioning of the enemy?

15:00 Very, very rugged terrain and then later when we really settled into our ground attack work as the enemy was moving across Korea we were carrying as many as 32 maps in the cockpit. A general map of 1:500 000

15:30 to generally navigate by and pinpoint yourself. Not pinpoint but set yourself. I think there were five 1:250 000 to get it more pinpointed when you were called in to a particular area and then the rest were 1:50 000 real target maps and you have this thing full of maps and you have to work out how to use the right one to get you over to that mosquito, that controlling aeroplane to attack that target.

16:00 It's quite hard.

So where were the maps, on the floor?

You just had them in little canvas things that were made up and beside the seat in the cockpit. It's horrifying isn't it?

So what, you were looking at the map and driving with one hand. What did you say to get over to the mosquito?

Yes the little aircraft

16:30 like Cessnas and Harvards acted as what were known as mosquitos. They were aeroplanes that spotted enemy activity and would call you in and mark it with smoke. They had little smoke rockets and they would go down and mark it and say, "Okay it is from that marker it is 430:100."

17:00 In other words it is 430 by 100 yards so that you knew where to aim to get that target from that. Often they were spot on so they were the mosquitos and I think later in the war they became something else but I just can't recall what.

So you were coming out of ground attack? What

17:30 **had you learnt about how to deal with that ground attack?**

Shall we talk about stuff coming up from the ground?

Yeah. That's what I'm getting at.

Okay. Well the very first thing once we got established. You see in the beginning the Koreans, the North Koreans came right down and created what was known

18:00 as the Pusan Perimeter and 77 Squadron and I am digressing a little from your question but just to give you an outline.

That's fine. Whatever it takes.

We were operating from Japan and 77 Squadron's operations there because we were the only true ground attack because the Americans had converted all their planes to jets. The shooting stars and stuff like that. They didn't have the range that we had and I don't think they could carry the ordnance that we had so our operations during that early part was

18:30 assessed as being absolutely critical at holding the whole peninsula. The Pusan perimeter until the Allied forces landed and once we then. I'll come to this again later. Once we had moved and started to operate from Korea as opposed to Japan we then, the enemy had had time to really consolidate and this is the sort of stuff you faced coming up from the ground.

19:00 I'll say tens of thousands but that's mild. Tens of thousand of little men down there with guns shooting at you. We had one Mustang come back with 47 holes. I got shot down with one hole on another occasion in my fuelling system so that they're all little buggers,

- 19:30 sorry camera, all these little fellows are shooting at you. They are mm in the main. In other words about the equivalent of our 303s. You've got 12 mm or 0.5 inch, the equivalent of what we had in our Mustangs and 13 mm Machine guns shooting at you and they have a reasonable range. They will get to, I can't remember how high
- 20:00 but they go reasonably well. You have 23mm which is inch roughly and that makes a pretty fair mess of you if you get clobbered by them and they will go pretty high. 27 mm and they come up and they make a puff. They used to say during the war that you could almost walk on the flak well in the air it was a bit like that. The whole just became covered with white puffs of bullets exploding and they
- 20:30 would come to about from memory about 4 or 5,000 ft something like that but the big one. The big one was the 88mm radar predicted proximity fuse. They could, you would be flying along and their radar picks you up and they assess your speed, your height and
- 21:00 and that sort of stuff and then they predict where you are going to be and then they fire off this big 88 mm and it comes up and is supposed to intercept you and then it goes off at the height selected. They are able to nominate the height at which it goes off and it's so damn powerful that if it's within a hundred foot of you it's likely to blow you out of the air.
- 21:30 Now what we did and you get pretty smart after a while we learned through intelligence how long it takes for their radar to predict. We could work out how long it would take their great big killer to get what height we were at, say it was 12,000 ft or whatever and we could then say, "Okay from the time that they start to predict
- 22:00 until the thing gets to our height it's going to take so many second so a few seconds before that we turn off and boom, we fly along this way and then come back to your original course so, and quite often you would actually feel these things. You would fly through the turbulence they created when they exploded in a cloud and I hope the next one's not closer
- 22:30 so that was the sort of stuff. And also the guys on the ground were very determined about their job. There was many a time when I would be attacking flak positions on the ground and they just wouldn't stop. You couldn't get their heads down. Often I would be seeking to get their heads down to proceed with a particular attack but they just kept shooting.
- 23:00 **Did you have apart from experiencing it did you have intelligence on where the positions of these different kinds of enemy fire were coming from?**
- Not a lot, no. It was often picked up as you went along from the experiences. There were times when obviously in places like Pyongyang for example where they were able to tell us
- 23:30 where they were placed around the city. So for example on an attack on the Chinese Communist headquarters that I was talking about we knew pretty well around the city where they had their stuff but that changes from day to day. They move stuff around. They're all on trailers or trucks or whatever they were. So and then on my third, can I go onto this?
- 24:00 On my 3rd mission we had made an attack on some target or other. There were 3 of us, Ken McLeod, Bill Cottee and myself and we were called in by a Mosquito to attack some tanks that were trying to get over a bridge in order to attack one of our forward positions that wasn't known about in Japan. That was a very long sentence did you understand it?
- 24:30 **No can you repeat that sorry.**
- There were Russian tanks T34s about to cross a bridge in an attempt to attack an American forward unit that was behind enemy lines which we didn't know about in Japan, so the 3 of us worked this thing over. We did some damage to the bridge and I don't know that we made any significant impact on the tanks. That's another story.
- 25:00 But we were running pretty short of fuel at this stage of the game and the Mosquito said, "Why don't you come back to base with us and we will refuel you and send you off in the morning." So we did that. We came back, landed at a place called Taejon which was often used later in the war by us and others but we didn't know about it at the time and as we taxied in there were lots of GIs [US General Infantrymen] there along the runway
- 25:30 and as we got in they were muttering to themselves saying, "They're the ones, they're the ones," because we had no colours and what they were referring to was an attack the previous day by Lou Spence who was commanding officer on a convoy of trucks and a whole heap of stuff. He was called in by a mosquito and he referred it right back to 5th Headquarters in Japan and they said,
- 26:00 "That is enemy," so he went for it and they were Americans and South Koreans and that was the first strike of the war for us. I tell you it was, the people who were involved were very upset. It happens I suppose but anyway when we came in Taejon these people, some of these people had been involved in that attack and they picked the aeroplanes. So we stayed over night and we were actually posted missing, posted missing in action.

26:30 No one knew about this place you see. My Mum and Dad got a telegram which was delivered by the local padre and the post office man and all this sort of stuff so we were missing in action for a night and came back the next morning.

So you effectively bombed the Americans and the South Koreans?

I wasn't in that but Lou Spence with 8 aeroplanes had done that. He had been directed to do this. He

27:00 tried his very best to express his doubts and it was the 5th Air Force Headquarters itself who made the final confirmation. They had tracked it all the way down the road and it was enemy but it just didn't work out that way. Terrible.

Did you find out anymore about that situation later on? Just like how the Americans, how the mistake could have been made?

No I didn't,

27:30 no and I'm sure the CO [Commanding Officer] and others would have checked that down because the Americans were as upset as we were about having caused the squadron to do it.

Sorry, just tell who was Lou Spence.

Lou Spence was the commanding officer of 77 Squadron at that time. BCOF, and then the very early part of...Lou was killed in Korea

28:00 incidentally, not too much later doing an attack of napalm and he was a great leader, great commander who left a wife and 2 daughters if I remember rightly and his wife now lives in Melbourne and she is on the Korean Mission with us in 2001 or 2002, just a little while back. She was one of the nursing sisters who had been in Korea and her

28:30 next husband just last Friday. What day is it today? Probably last Friday she went to America to catch up with him and had no sooner landed or within an hour of landing she was told her husband had died of a heart attack.

29:00 She came back with John, did the funeral and now has gone back to the States but her first husband was Lou Spence, the CO.

So how was it you weren't one of those planes?

I just wasn't in that particular, I mean in that particular mission. I could have been flying in another 4 somewhere doing an attack somewhere else. They didn't have the whole squadron everytime on one

29:30 operation. So it was pretty upsetting for the guys I must say, for everybody.

Would there have been an enquiry?

Oh yes, very much so. But I don't know what the outcome was. We just got on with the war. Yep, so and then people started to go in and get killed.

30:00 Oh another, I had another incident very soon after that. Are you still going?

Yeah, yeah.

Very soon after that I came to Taejon they used to have stuff called PSP, pierce steel planking for the runway and you would land on this thing and it would clatter and jump and all this sort of stuff and we came back from a pretty hefty mission in Taejon and Bay Adams was leading this one, the old Bay

30:30 and he called me to, "Brake hard, brake hard." Whatever I was red 3 or something and I started to brake and he kept on saying it and I thought maybe there was something at the end of the runway I didn't know and so I braked even harder and the poor old Mustang went up on its nose and I'd forgotten to make my guns safe

31:00 and they just fired into the ground and tore it up pierce steel braking. Very young and very inexperienced.

Did it do anything to the plane, any damage?

Oh we had to, fortunately the Americans were able to rustle up a spare propeller and change it overnight. I never normally admit those sort of things but you've got such an engaging...

31:30 **Just one other thing though on the 3 days you were missing in action?**

It was only one night.

But weren't your parents told you were missing in action for 3 days though?

I think just before I got the word that I was not. That I was okay.

Just why was that again? Just why?

Why were we delayed? I don't know, it must have just been the communication between

- 32:00 Korea and, no sorry between Japan and Australia. I seem to remember that they said they hadn't got them. I've got copies of them there actually so I can check the dates because my Mum left a bit of stuff. Knowing that I lost everything I owned in the fires in 1983 she put together stuff that she had sent me after the fire and it included
- 32:30 those telegrams. I suppose one of the early very exciting new operations to me was paratroops type operation. We did this on 2 days in succession.
- 33:00 I think the place was called Musan and our job was to escort these paratroop aircraft, protect them and to suppress any flak that might be a danger to them so it was a dual role. They had C46 Commandoes. They had C47 Dakotas, they had C119 Packers
- 33:30 they had all sorts of aeroplanes all coming over with something like 3,000 troops so we escorted. Came on ahead, found some flak that was keeping us a bit busy, came down and suppressed that and I don't think any of us got hit in that and then came up and watched this operation. The sky is full of paratroopers. 3,000 people
- 34:00 virtually almost altogether. No quite because they have to come in and try and catch up and try and get somewhere in the middle but amazing and then we came back and did the same thing the next day. You know you see this sort of thing on films with all these people drifting down in parachutes.

Can you tell me where that was?

That was a place called Musan and that was from memory

- 34:30 somewhere I'd have to check the map. It was somewhere out of Seoul, somewhere out east of Seoul if I remember rightly. I might be wrong there. I could be wrong. At that stage we were operating from Japan still and they were long trips because the North Koreans were being forced north and north and north so our trips were getting longer and longer until we moved to
- 35:00 Korea and left Japan. So that will be next. And that's down on the south east part of Korea and we operated from there for quite a while. Probably about a month if I remember rightly and then we moved because we were moving the enemy further and faster and faster north we moved to a place called Hamhung
- 35:30 which is right up on the north east area sort of spitting distance from Vladivostok sort of thing. It's right up there. It was not all that pleasant because it was mighty cold. It had been bombed and rocketed and all that sort of stuff and our living quarters were not all that good and as I say it was really cold. You would come out in the morning and the plane was covered with ice and it always had to be got off by the ground staff and they couldn't
- 36:00 do anything without gloves on. Anyway we operated from there and we were helping the Americans out of the Chosin Reservoir out to the west and the commos, the enemy I should say sprang a surprise on us. They snuck something like 200,000 troops across the border and surrounded us all.
- 36:30 It was interesting stuff I can tell you so it was a big evacuation was necessary by all of the United Nations forces including us of course but we were busy. While we were preparing to get out of this place we were busy helping the Americans get their gear and their troops through and the aeroplanes were just flying through Hamhung all day and everyday.
- 37:00 Just to get people out and they had, the Chinese had in fact. How many, the 18th or 20 Divisions something like that they had in fact surrounded the airfield and on occasions were shooting close enough for the bullets to go through the hangars where we had our aeroplanes and it was the day before , the day before that that I was
- 37:30 tasked to test a Mustang which had had an engine change and I took it up and I mean they were so close that we were actually attacking them in the circuit area. The circuit area being where we would come in to land you know and so we were rocketing and strafing and napalming these blighters in the circuit area and I'm up above them and I didn't know
- 38:00 it at the time but I got clobbered by 1 slug which was probably a 13 mm I should think and took my cooling system out and the first thing that happened to me was I got a red warning light, I got an engine virtual seizure, temperatures went off the clock and smoke was coming out. Well normally if you get just a red warning light, fire warning light that you can't put out you were supposed to land the plane because that means that's it's going to blow up
- 38:30 sometime so my instinct was to hop out of the aeroplane and then I thought of all these people down below rocketing and strafing and I didn't fancy my chances getting to the ground alive so I stayed with the aeroplane and got it, glided it back to base and dropped it short of the airfield and took a few little trees and things on the way and then the fire trucks were ready to cover me if it fired. That was pretty exciting.
- 39:00 I must say there were plenty of times when I guess I was scared but didn't know it. I used to, I

developed a habit and you know I flew a lot of missions there and I developed a habit of sort of looking over my shoulder and thinking how are you going now? How are you reacting? This sort of thing and with too, I'm coming in and everything up here was fine and I found

39:30 on the way down and my legs were going like this and I couldn't stop the buggers. I was just incredible. I thought, "Boy I'm scared," and I guess I was because I just couldn't stop them jumping around on their own. Amazing.

Were you, sorry...

Tape 5

00:30 We evacuated Hamhung as I was saying before and flew the Squadron down to Pusan down on the southeast coast it's basically the main entry point of Korea I suppose down the south area and

01:00 actually the airmen did an incredible job to get everything organised to move the whole Squadron down and we at the same time did operational missions on the way down. We flew from Hamhung and did some strikes on the way to Pusan. About the time we were arriving an American F51 managed to prang itself into a POW compound and killed about 49 North Koreans or Chinese. I don't know what they were.

01:30 So that was a pretty interesting start as well. On 2 April we went to Iwakuni again to convert to the Meteor twin jet fighters. These had been ordered by the Australian government. They were reputed as we understood it to be the equivalent, to be a match for the Mig 15 which was coming into force in greater numbers

02:00 in North Korea and creating havoc with the B29 bombers. The Sabres were more than adequately dealing with them but they had a hell of a lot of them and it was suspected that they were being flown by the Russians as well as Chinese and perhaps North Koreans so we converted to the Meteors but it took quite a long time. It didn't have any sort of navigation

02:30 aid and General Robertson decreed and I agree with him that it was necessary to have in this case a radio compass to place in places that we wanted to go because you know you are flying at height and didn't have anything like the range of the Mustang and in jet fighting fuel and time was a very critical thing. Up until the 20th of

03:00 July that we moved across to Kimpo having converted to the Meteors and learned really that they weren't quite as good as we had been led to believe. The American general flew it but it was pretty limited in terms of its critical Mach and the critical Mach is the percentage of the local speed of sound at which it will go no faster. It jumbles and jumps and won't go any faster.

03:30 So that was about 0.83. He said that the rear visibility was pretty poor and it was and at any height above about 20,000 ft it was not the best performer in the world. It was good below 20 but you know it was going to be at 30 and 35 and up there with the Migs. So anyway we got cracking and we set up our first

04:00 **So sorry, the training was all done back at Iwakuni?**

At Iwakuni yeah so we were ready to roll. The first mission was a mission of 12 along what was called Mig Valley along the Yawu River which separated Korea from China and one hadn't done any air to air combat before

04:30 one wondered how it was all going to go when we mixed it up with the Migs. There wasn't trepidation. There was wonderment I guess in a sense of expectation in wondering how it was all going to go. Well we patrolled the Yalu at about 13,000 ft providing top cover for the Sabres for goodness sake and on the first mission we watched the Migs

05:00 on the far side of the Yalu down at Antung take off and climb to get a fair sort of height advantage on us, they looked at us and then went back home. We, the rules of the game were that we could not go over the Yalu so they had complete freedom to climb to get whatever height advantage they could muster and that's the way it went.

05:30 I think it might have been the next one we were doing the same thing. We were patrolling at about 33,000 ft, one lot at 30 and one at 29 and another around about 25 and the Migs came up and in great numbers. I think there were about 40 or something like that in the first encounter and they got a height advantage and came in and blew us out. We broke

06:00 but we had no manoeuvrability at that height so we simply almost fell out of the sky. That's exaggerating it but we were no match. That's the way it went as far as operating at height was concerned.

So what would it have been, merely a matter of evasive action and?

Yeah we would break into their attacks and if you are being attacked, if you are being attacked from up here it comes in on a rear course of attack and you've got to break into

- 06:30 that attack to prevent the guy pulling enough deflection to be able to shoot you down. So I'm just trying to remember what and that's the way it went on with sweeps really. The Migs came over in great numbers
- 07:00 and we learned later that they were specifically targeting the Meteors because they knew they were inferior in performance and that was not too good for morale one way or the other. But they would come over in great numbers and we would engage in combat they with us and there would always be generally 4 people, 4 guys staying up top and they were obviously, and to us it seemed pretty obvious that they were Russians and that was confirmed
- 07:30 later on that there was an entire Russian group there. But they were wait until there was a straggler otherwise a person who was not formed up with the main fighter and not with his formation and to come down and the 4 of them work him over and we figured that they were Russkies and that they were pretty competent operators. It happened to me on one occasion. My wingman was shot up and forced out of the plane and I became a straggler. I was way out of the main fighter formation
- 08:00 on this occasion and these 4 guys came down and worked me over from about 33,000 foot right down to the deck and they were doing, they were employing tactics that we certainly weren't capable of doing. They were very, very competent. They would attack from a right rear quarter like that and once I got
- 08:30 my turn going in to reduce their capabilities for deflection there would be one coming in from here so he would have a deflection shot and I would break into him and there would be one from above and I would break into him and this went on all the time. I was pooped by the time I got to the deck I can tell you but I was, I needed to pull 6 G [Gravity Forces] all the time because it was 6G which we figured that their gun sights would no longer compute accurately.
- 09:00 That was about the way it was with our gyro gunsight as well. So that went on right down to the deck and of course, I was amongst the trees and they couldn't stay with me anyway but purely on the count of fuel they had to bug out and get some height. In jets you need height to get reasonable range from your fuel. So that was the Russkies and you know the way they operated.
- 09:30 But we then went to what we consider the most useful, the most successful of our operations with the Meteors until I left and that was escorting the B29s. We were briefed to stay with the B29s at all costs and not to be drawn off into individual fights with the Migs. The Migs were obviously dead
- 10:00 keen to hack the bombers because they were doing a lot of damage. Previously the escorting, the close escorting of the bombers had been by USAF American Sabres and F84s, the Thunderjets. They would maybe, there would be a total of 16 plus 8 or something like that. They would allow themselves to be drawn off into individual scraps with the Migs and there
- 10:30 would still be 20 or 30 waiting up top to come down and work their way into the B29s. The Americans lost a lot of bombers that way. On one occasion they lost 5 out of 8 and that's a lot of bombers to lose on one sortie. But we stayed with them and in the main we got them all back. On one occasion we were engaged in a
- 11:00 God awful scrape. There were 50 of them and 12 of us and some of them got through obviously and one of the B29s was shot up and landed back at our base at Kimpo. He came across to thank us for the work we were doing with these people and staying with them and we went over to have a look at his aeroplane. One 37mm shell had gone through the side, one of the rear doors, and I guess the whole, I suppose the size of that door there

- 11:30 and that's a 37mm for you. It was tremendous. So I believe we did a lot of good work there.

So can you talk us through one of those operations for example. Just a little more detail. That's a great overview, be it the sensation of what's going on as well as the tactics.

And I'll give you an example too of involvement.

- 12:00 The B29s would fly across from Okinawa. They would come in on a run of so many minutes heading for target. As I recall they would mostly come around from about the south east. We would be briefed to meet them at or about that run in, set ourselves up and we would escort them all the way in until they dropped their bombs and safely out the other
- 12:30 side. Generally well before they got to target the Migs were in place and coming in in great numbers. We would, occasionally they would come in from the front. One or two would come in from the front and that's pretty tricky stuff because you've got a closing speed of about 800 miles an hour or more you know. They would come in attacking from above, rear and we would break into them,
- 13:00 fire across their bows, let them see that we were firing and they would have to break off from that particular attack and we would immediately come back into our weaving protection of them. Probably it would vary if we had 12 aircraft, 4 would weave at a certain height and 4 at another height and 4 above. However it was worked out at the time and on one occasion we had 2 of them slip through. I had Wal

Revas

- 13:30 was my wingman and we had just broken off from deterring 2 or 4 that were coming in, turned back and there were 2 coming in from our left side, our port side. I swung around and Wal tried to get onto the tail of one of them but it was going far too fast. I swung around and he was going, it wasn't a matter of closing, he was going like that, terribly much faster than I was but I managed to get some
- 14:00 deflection and shot him in the port, I think it was roughly in the port wingtip and he just revved so much fuel it wasn't funny. It filled the sky and a B29 crew confirmed that that was destroyed. Both Wal and I saw one blow up but it couldn't be claimed as a kill because the cameras were freezing up at height and it had to be certain and camerad.
- 14:30 Later records from the Russian 64th, 67th Division, 67th Fighter Group confirmed that that one was a kill so I haven't particularly claimed that one or anything but I know it was correct. So that was one engagement for example but they always came in seldom less than
- 15:00 about 30 and at times there were 50 or 60 of the blighters and a dozen of us. It gets pretty exciting, pretty hectic. So that went on and then

So what gets you through that when you are so severely outnumbered? It is a matter of skill? Is it that or...?

Yes basically a matter of making damn sure that they can't

- 15:30 get a deflection on you and with the B29s they would come in at about 25 000 feet. The Meteor was just beginning to get into its good manoeuvrability range lower than 25. It was pretty hopeless up top at 30, 35 000 feet. So it was a matter of just of continually turning into them and moving back again and really it was all over in a matter of 2 or 3 minutes.
- 16:00 It all happens pretty quickly except for those 4 blighters that took me down to the deck. So I think they were very successful but it was decreed that because we were so outnumbered and outperformed that that was not the role for us. I believe with better training it was
- 16:30 the role for us. With better training, the sort of training that was introduced later with the fighter combat instructor courses back in Australia we would have got a lot more Migs. We matched them. We matched them. We got as many of them as they got of us but we would have got more I think. They claimed the Russians, this particular fighter group claimed that they had knocked off the entire 77 Squadron and in fact they got five. Five of us altogether.
- 17:00 So it was at about that time that we were taken off and put on strip alert or standby at Kimpo and then at another base just north of Kimpo ready to intercept anything coming in and was generally just a matter of intercepting friendlies coming back and that sort of thing. I'd had a long time at that
- 17:30 stage. I was happy enough to just say, "Well that's the end of second mission." I think I'd spent longer there than just about anyone else anyway. I was a bit tireder than I knew at the time. A bit combat tired I suppose so then I came home to Australia. There were lots of things happening. Coming back from one mission, two guys Ken Blight and a fellow named Robinson,
- 18:00 all these things seemed to happen to me somehow, collided. I was over on the side on starboard 4. They were somewhere in the sort of middle area and they collided. Ken managed to control his aeroplane for a while. Robbo simply went into a dive. I broke off and followed him down calling all the way trying to get some
- 18:30 sort of contact with him but he entered cloud almost vertical, just about near the deck and then crashed and then on the way back I was by myself and just happened to be on the spot at the time when Ken bailed out out his aeroplane and I was able to pinpoint him, radio the choppers and have him picked up. We were still in enemy territory at that stage. So there are all these things happening. All these happened.
- 19:00 So then I came back and, let me just have a quick look at this and.

So you want to move onto coming home. Is it all right if I ask you some questions?

Oh please.

Because it's such a fascinating time.

I might say that after then Wing Commander Susans took over the squadron and he arranged that it be taken off

- 19:30 that strip standby and onto a ground attack role and in that role it performed extraordinarily well. Further problems. The Meteor carried a central tank. A long tank attached to the fuselage and you needed it to get any sort of range and that became very vulnerable so there were a few lost to the fact that the thing carried a central tank. I lost some very fine friends that way so, and that to me was the end of it. But please.

20:00 **Well I would like to ask, you were awarded the AM [American Air Medal] and DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] I believe during your time with the Mustangs at the end of that?**

Yes it was the Mustang phase.

What led to those citations?

Well the first one was an American Air Medal and that was awarded pretty much at the outset for 10 missions that were flown

20:30 early in the war and as time went by the Americans would add stars to that according to further tens and so on but we didn't worry about that. It was basically awarded for, I can't remember the wording but it was dangerously low altitude, clobbering enemy installations and that sort of stuff. All the work that goes with ground attack work. The DFC was really

21:00 awarded for the long term. For the entire 9 months that I flew Mustangs, 94 missions or whatever it was. I think they quote 94 but I had 4 more than that but that was for similar sort of things but leadership was mentioned and getting on with the job I suppose.

Courage under enemy fire.

That sort of thing, yeah, yeah.

21:30 I don't know about the courage thing but you don't worry too much about it at the time particularly when you are out in it so I was always very pleased about that. When I was a young tad in the air force I always used to think that the ultimate would be a flight lieutenant with a DFC. I did a bit better than that.

22:00 **So what rank were you during your time in Korea?**

A flying officer. I got promoted back again to flying officer from that P3 thing. I forget when it was. Probably not too long after we started operating in the war so I remained a flying officer until I was promoted in Malta, later when we did the Malta mission.

22:30 **How much of those operations... What did that mean in terms of where you flew in the formation?**

Oh okay. Well at the outset you fly as a wingman and then you graduate if you like by virtue of experience and capabilities as a leader which means you are the leader of the support element of 2 in a formation. I noticed

23:00 somebody very kindly extracted my record of my missions from 77 Squadron records after the fire when I lost everything and I note in the Mustang phase when Dick Creswell was there I flew so many times with Dick and I'm glad I did because it was an education. It seemed that I was flying as his wingman and then graduated

23:30 to number 3 and I flew with him as number 3 for quite a bit and then leading sections myself. So it's a progressive thing and it depends on experience and a whole heap of things like navigation and a bit of no use and capability in the attack stuff. That sort of thing and how to look after the troops that you've got in the air with you. Incidentally it's quite,

24:00 obviously quite different from a team in a bomber or in a transport. You are a team. When you've got a dozen people up there all patrolling and you are controlling all of them and it's quite an art in regarding them all as part of you if you like and in having even though you are

24:30 involved having an ongoing knowledge of where they are and what they are doing and how to analyse them. It's amazing but you are belting around the sky at great speeds and you can hardly see because you've blacked out and all this sort of stuff. So that sort of thing was my career experience.

A couple more questions if I may because it is obviously

25:00 **such an important time. Where shall I start? You mentioned the fact that you suspected or you basically knew that there were Russkies in the Migs at times. Were you able to differentiate the Russian pilots from the Chinese or Koreans? Did you get a sense of the way they flew?**

Yeah we thought we could. Certainly those that used to stay up top and pick out stragglers were certainly superior to the others.

25:30 and they were also the ones and this is an interesting side. They would have, yes you could tell and here's a good example. On some occasions you would have 30 Migs coming down. We are 12 Meteors and we are patrolling and you could see them, they would fly past and you can imagine them saying, "There's those Meteors. They're limited to about 0.83

26:00 so get so and so to go down," and you'd watch and they'd all break left or they'd all break right and then they would send down a number to make an attack to get us out of there, to show them what we would do and because they had such great height and speed advantage there was little we could do to prevent that if you like.

- 26:30 So that could have been a matter of being either the Chinese or Russian pilots. I think, we didn't know at the time. We did know that on some occasions when a Mig pilot would bail out he would cover his face in the parachute when a Meteor flew by and that was a pretty strong indication to us that he was not,
- 27:00 didn't have oriental eyes so that was another indication but as time went by I think it became pretty evident that the Russians were very heavily involved there and Ron Guthrie who was shot down on one of those sweeps and spent time as a POW said he had Russians coming in at Antung to brief him
- 27:30 in what was going on and for him to tell them about the Meteors and how they were going and this sort of stuff and, "How about this squadron?" So there was an entire group of Russian, what they call a group. Probably a wing by our standards, that was a Russian group so they were all right.

You mentioned earlier on with the Mustangs' strafing sort of operations

- 28:00 **and ground attack, how difficult was it to differentiate what might be a North Korean convoy or a civilian movement of some sort? Refugees or...? Was there cases where...?**

If there was any doubt, they were safe but I suppose one of my most vivid memories of the Korean conflict

- 28:30 in the beginning was of tens of thousands of refugees streaming down in unending lines from North to South and amongst those there would be refugees or dressed as refugees pushing go carts and every one of those go carts was filled with ammunition. We have a, there's a
- 29:00 picture somewhere, a movie somewhere taken by the cineguns of 4 guys and there were about 11 of these things lined up ostensibly refugees with their carts and they just came in one after the other and they blew up and blew up and blew up. That's one example of what determining what's right and what's wrong. Generally if you were doing a
- 29:30 armed reconnaissance for example you would be doing it in an area where you knew there would only be North Koreans troops if there were troops and the intelligence as far as buildings was concerned was purely a matter for the intelligence people. They would know or they thought they knew what was
- 30:00 in them and generally they were dead right but there is no doubt that in all wars there were times when innocent civilians were probably killed and probably set up to be killed by the North. It's a difficult one. Very difficult.

Also curious to hear you mention napalm. You think Vietnam, but it was also being used in Korea.

- 30:30 It's a nasty one but I suppose no more nasty than daisy cutters, but it's a very effective weapon. You see we had great problem with tanks. I might seem to be digressing here but I'm not. T34 tanks were very, very sturdy almost very, almost impregnable sort of tank
- 31:00 for the sorts of stuff we had. If you used, if you got a British type rocket off you could do some damage. You could do almost no damage with machine guns and I suspect had we had a 30mm cannon like we had on Meteors, sorry on Sabres it would have been still reasonably ineffective. The American
- 31:30 anti-tank rocket was a shapecharged but you had to be absolutely spot on accurate and rocket accuracy in those days certainly, if you got it within 5 yards of the tank you were doing extraordinarily well and a 10 yard average over say 8 rocket on a range where all the conditions were right was acceptable so the tanks were a real problem but if you
- 32:00 clobbered them with napalm they cooked people inside and put them out of action. Whether permanently or not I don't know but at least temporarily. So napalm was a very effective. I didn't like napalm. For some reason it didn't seem quite right but it did an effective job in many areas where there was buildings or tanks or vehicles.
- 32:30 And the I was doing an armed recce one day. There was 4 of us and we came across a gaggle of about, from memory about 200 troops. They had obviously been resting because all their gear was all there piled up in the middle of a paddock and they were all there and they were all North so we knocked them all off using all of those things. Using rockets, napalm and guns so they
- 33:00 didn't do that out in the open. All their stuff to one side. It's not pleasant and when you, to me it was always distressing to be destroying homes for example that had to be destroyed
- 33:30 because they were harbouring and they were storing and all that sort of stuff but they belonged to people. It's a terrible business, terrible business. But ...

So it's more in those scraps where it's one on one, that you are trained to do. What you joined for?.

Yes, yes but

- 34:00 we hadn't done it in jets before and you see even in Japan in the occupation force the Mustang was there essentially for ground attack work, essentially. We had the capacity to intercept and fight that way but it was essentially for ground attack work so the squadron was probably the best squadron that has ever been
- 34:30 for ground attack work because at that stage we were lacking jet. Well nobody had done jet stuff before and it is quite different. I mean there are basics that are similar to pistons but it's a very, very different operation and the problem was of course there were so many of them and they performed so much better. Their aeroplanes performed so much better. We had in the main I think they
- 35:00 had a speed advantage of about 100 miles an hour. That's a lot. That's a hell of a lot. They had a critical Mach advantage, in other words the speed at which you can't go any faster before you are out of control, we were at 0.83 and they would stand up about the 0.96 or 0.97 or thereabouts and like the Australian Sabre if they
- 35:30 wanted to go to 50,000 ft and point downhill they could get through the speed of sound, they could sonic as I understand it with the Sabre but you can't do it straight and level. So yeah, it was a great learning experience and as I said earlier had we had such a thing as a FCI course,
- 36:00 Fighter Combat Instructors course going in Australia before that came about then the fighter combat instructors could have taught the pilots to do a sight better than they did.

You mentioned earlier that when you converted earlier to the Meteors that they weren't all they were cracked up to be but along the way were there improvements?

No you couldn't. You couldn't improve because

- 36:30 there was nothing you could do with the engines and there was nothing you could do with the airframe. The airframe was the limitation in terms of manoeuvrability and the Mach and the engine was the limitation in how fast it would make the thing go at any rate. And yet it was a good climber. You know it would climb well. Max Scanlon a British guy came out and he had flown
- 37:00 Meteors for so long it wasn't even funny. He ran a comparison trial with an American Sabre and essentially he was able to match it in term of his long term ability to play with the performance of the Meteor to get it to height and so on. Once it was at height he was out of it because the Sabre can go beyond the critical.
- 37:30 I ran a comparison between the Meteor and the F84 Thunderjet and we were pretty much on a par and the Thunderjet was a relatively old aeroplane and we were pretty much on a par in terms of getting to height, air climb and maximum speed, critical speed. I beat him easily on speed
- 38:00 because he popped mine and he popped his and immediately he couldn't stop, he couldn't slow down as well as I could in the Meteor but that was the only area we had the advantage over him and he was, it was a nice aeroplane but second rate at that stage to the Meteor.

You were working some pretty, weather wise, some pretty extreme conditions. You were talking about the cold, the winters. How cold was it up there in the planes?

- 38:30 **What was it like? Was there heating?**

Oh yeah you had heating so it doesn't really matter much what the conditions are like on the ground. As you climb the air cools at a given rate, pretty much at a given rate about 1.9 centigrade per thousand feet or thereabouts. It gets to be pretty cold up there regardless of whether it is hot or cold

- 39:00 on the ground so you've got to be most pressurised and heated and pressurisation is essential of course and pretty high pressurisation. It's not like a civilian commercial aircraft flying at 30,000 ft or 40,000 ft and pressurised down to 1,000 for the comfort of and if something does leak it leaks relatively slowly
- 39:30 and the pressurisation takes over. In a fighter you are up at say 35,000 ft and if you blow your canopy at 35,000 ft so the differential. Normally at 35,000 you would have a cockpit pressure of about 25, that sort of ratio that you are looking at so and once you do
- 40:00 once you lose the pressurisation at 35 you just shove the nose down and go like hell. You know you've really got to get down and out of that cold and dangerous and the pressure rightly, I think with the Meteor we did not have pressure breathing. I'm sure we didn't have pressure breathing which means that breathing at that height you can not get oxygen into your blood stream.
- 40:30 The lungs cannot do their job whereas in the Sabre for example, immediately you lost complete pressure like that it went into pressure breathing and you are breathing in reverse. Instead of, the air is being forced into your lungs and you have to physically force it out and then it is forced back in and you breathe that way because it is coming in under pressure so that all the bits and pieces can do the job and get the oxygen
- 41:00 in your lungs. So there's a bit of a difference there and it's interesting I think the first time you have a go at pressure breathing it's different. It's very different. You know you've got to expand your chest to, or of course your chest comes up to exp...and the lungs draw the air in and then it just goes out.

41:30 This other way it forces it in and to get the bloody stuff out again but I don't think it happened to me all that many times.

Tape 6

00:30 **So if we can hear a bit of life back....**

It varied greatly according to the season I suppose and the fortunes of the war. When we first got across to, remember I said we had gone to Pohang and I think we were only there about a month that was the

01:00 general conditions were never terribly good because they were all just temporary, all just transient. I can't remember the weather for the particular places other than Hamhung. But Pohang for example I think it was the Australians who rigged up showers for example, outdoor showers and we had rows and rows of thunderboxes. Have you heard of a thunderbox? Yeah. Okay.

01:30 Rows and rows and thunderboxes and you'd do the whole thing outside and occasionally you would hear 'ping' and a bullet would come richoting past you while you were out doing your business. That sort of business. From Pohang on one occasion we were being shot at on the ground and Gordon Harvey who later became a, the guy that I was with when he was shot down. Gordon and one other and myself

02:00 decided we would reach up the hill ostensibly to see if we could find some pheasants and bring back for some tucker but also to track down these guys that were shooting at us. We sort of got there and decided discretion was the better part of valour so we gave that away. So you were pretty much in the thick of it. At Taegu

02:30 for example, where we used to stay in the summertime with the Mustangs it was really hot and it was really dusty and we'd go out and do our missions and come back to refuel and rearm and take air and we would get in a whole line of Mustangs and go forward and forward and forward and then they would fill you and whack rockets on and put some bombs on and load up your ammo and then the pair of you would

03:00 whoever it happened to be would go across and do another mission and it's dusty and it's hot but we weren't living there so that wasn't a problem. That's how you operate anyway. Hamhung was terrible. Hamhung was just so cold and you couldn't do anything about it. I really do believe that I warmed myself up so much one night that I sweated and the

03:30 sweat froze down my back. I reckon at the time I wouldn't vouch for the veracity of that but it was cold. It was just terrible operations and although it was an evacuation under extreme conditions I don't think anyone really regretted getting the hell out of there because there was nothing that was whole. It had all been banged up before you know and when we talk about cold we are talking daytime temperatures of

04:00 minus 17 and that's pretty difficult to operate in and lower than that at times but that would be pretty average. When we went to Kimpo with our Meteors that was fine. There was a, I can't remember. Yeah there was, I'm pretty sure it was Kimpo I wouldn't want to be quoted on it

04:30 but I think it was at Kimpo that we had an old aeroplane fuselage as a mess and got that into shape and made it habitable and that sort of stuff and living was a problem in the cold. I love the heat so the heat didn't bother me but it was a problem in the cold and we were all in tents and do you want a hand?

05:00 On one occasion I forget the base but anyway it was very, very cold and we used to have those burners inside the huts which are called. I don't know they are tubby sorts of things and on one evening one of these things

05:30 got out of control and burnt the tent. The 2 guys that were in there were in sleeping bags and couldn't get out of them. They tried to undo them in the conventional way not knowing that all you had to do was and they would open and they both died. So I suppose living conditions. Food was always American tucker and it was always pretty good. You went over for your sunny side up eggs and

06:00 all that sort of stuff. Christmas dinners were laid on. I don't know if they came over from Japan or how the Americans did them but every Christmas I was always airborne fighting. I never did get a Christmas dinner in my time there so the conditions varied but they were always wartime conditions but Kimpo wasn't too bad. Iwakuni of course was

06:30 which was our home base from BCOF was great, that was tremendous. All your regular air force accommodation and all that sort of stuff but we weren't there all that long except during the conversion time of course and we had about 3 months I think on that so that was a good break. As for leave I don't think there was much leave taken. I took some leave in between my tours. Mostly

07:00 the guys would do a tour of ops and then go home. Maybe an occasional day or weekend if the opportunity arose back in Japan. Sometimes there would be an aircraft deferring back for servicing and

you would be there for a day or two waiting to bring it back or you might be given permission to stay for a day or two but mostly in the early part of the war

07:30 a tour was 50 missions but it grew to the point where one tour was like 60 or 70 or something like that. Mine were a bit longer than that I must say but some guys did an incredible amount. A guy named Ken Murray flew 333 missions in Korea. Incredible amount.

08:00 You just couldn't keep him out of the air.

So you were given a choice at the end of the tour, you had the option of staying on?

Yeah. Yeah. I guess if it was deemed wise to do that. I certainly applied and went home on a bit of leave and came back. My second tour which was sort of the end of Mustang phase and

08:30 my second tour consisted of both Mustangs and Meteors.

So you actually got back to West Aussie did you?

No, no or did I? No, I didn't. I managed to get on the Sunderland and went across to Hong Kong. I had about a week off. When I went back to West Aussie was the end of the second tour. A fellow named Max Garraway,

09:00 a great friend of mine came back with me and he was going back to a second tour and he lost his life pretty soon after we got back. I think it was one of the central tank problems but he didn't last long into his second tour.

So you had a week in Hong Kong. Did having that break from all of that make it any more difficult going back?

No. Had that been the case I would never have

09:30 applied I think. I was as keen as mustard to do a bit more. I don't know if that is wise or not I don't know. I think that's fair enough. I wanted to experience the jet warfare as well and do a bit more. I was fairly passionate, even though I was quite long I was

10:00 fairly passionate about the cause because I really do believe. It was a time when communism like the Russkies and the Chinese and other bases like North Korea were really creating and my view at the time was that if we didn't hold South Korea, not exactly a Domino Theory but a sort of a Domino Theory is what I had in mind.

10:30 I guess I was just keen to contribute as much as I could. That's about it. I just felt that if South, and I still believe that if South Korea had gone the rest of the region would have been in significant jeopardy.

Just going back a little bit you were based in Iwakuni for a while and saw a bit of Japan,

11:00 **what were the reactions there to the Australian presence and to BCOF in particular and the other way around, what your sort of attitude was to the Japanese at that time?**

I guess I didn't meet too many Japanese at the sort of level where reason more diplomatic type thinking

11:30 might apply. Those that I met seemed to be, we seemed to be in very much in favour of them. I think it was hard to tell. If you are being occupied and I suppose particularly if you are having dealings with the occupying power in a positive way whether you are working

12:00 for them or whatever you are unlikely to point the bone. As far as our people were concerned I think it was probably pretty hard to, and I preface this by saying that many had not had dealings with orientals before and there are ways of going about dealing with them

12:30 of various kinds and with the war background in mind I'm not too sure that the Japanese were terribly highly regarded. I would say that there are lots of people, lots of our people who treated them with respect and the friendship that human beings deserve but

13:00 in the main I think the Japs were pretty... You see we had been pretty well indoctrinated to the Japanese atrocities, many of which were just so much confirmed later it was almost unbelievable and it's pretty hard to get past that sort of thinking I suppose.

Yeah, we've spoken to a few people who were with BCOF and various, very few

13:30 **with the air force but they seem to... I guess the ones on the ground they seem to say, "There were the women and there were the men. The men we didn't bother with, but the women, we couldn't believe it was the same race," sort of thing. I guess there are other experiences that maybe...**

Yes that's pretty accurate. I guess that's pretty accurate but if you feel as if you can't warm to the men it's pretty hard to warm to the race.

14:00 You know the women act in the way that they do because they do that anyway to their men and it was

interesting to hear you say that because I think it's obviously true.

It was interesting to hear you say earlier there was that near miss you had when you decided you would turn back, I think you got a slug in the

14:30 **water cooler, and take the risk of flying back and you got back and you said you didn't really feel fear at the time and you got back and your legs were shaking uncontrollably.**

Sorry to interrupt but I think I did feel fear. I think I did on the way back because when you have a fire warning light and it won't go out then as I said you are supposed to jump out because you don't know what's happening and you are likely to blow up.

15:00 In this case I had a fire warning light, I had a seized engine, I had smoke coming out of the tail and the whole lot so as far as I was concerned the chances of blowing up were pretty good and I figured if that happened it might even blow me out of the cockpit without even damaging the parachute but I guess I was scared but I looked at myself over my shoulder and I thought I kept that under control

15:30 until I understood what was happening. That leg bit happened only because it was coming in to land into that sort of stage where it gets pretty critical with an aeroplane like that and you use your legs a good deal more than you do up top. The blighters they wouldn't stop shaking.

So after a sort of hair-raising episode like that, how do you sort of manage to get back down to earth and

16:00 **de-stress to use a contemporary term?**

I was always pretty fond of beer. There's all the blokes, there's always the mess. There's always a bit of thinking time. I never really found that a problem. In subsequent flying I had some very hairy experiences, in

16:30 Malta for example and I never found it a problem afterwards. When I was converting to Sabres I had something happen to me that never happened to anyone in Sabres before so it wasn't a real problem.

Was there a ready supply of beer in Korea?

We were generally pretty well fixed because we could get it over on the cater aircraft from the

17:00 transport unit that used to come in to do evacuations and bring in supplies and take out supplies and so forth. Yeah, we were generally okay in beer.

Would it be common though for guys to sort of write themselves off or...?

No I don't think so. You can't afford to if you are going to fly the next day.

17:30 I must admit that in Sabres the ground crew could generally tell if you had been on the bender the night before because of the amount of oxygen that you use during the flight. No, you would get in the cockpit and put it on high and really belt it into you. But no, the nights were often

18:00 merry because you made them merry and generally you went to bed pretty early particularly if you were flying the next day. It is an unwise thing to fly with too much alcohol in your blood as it is to drive of course. No, I suppose one thing that I regret not having done was

18:30 keeping a diary. I had my log books and they are generally a pretty accurate sort of diarised account of what's happened. You don't write all that much in them. In fact I never believed you were allowed to but you could but you could tell from the mission log that you made but of course, I lost them all in the fires but

19:00 really I didn't at the end of each day settle down and just do a little think about it and jot it down you know. I've got a fairly full record that the missions as individuals I don't have a hell of a lot on. I have on some, a few.

19:30 **This is all great stuff. Is there anything else? It might be time for us to move on perhaps to the end of your time in Korea. Is there anything else of that time that you think might be worth recording for the archive?**

I don't think so. I don't think so.

20:00 There probably are plenty of things but I just can't readily bring them to mind.

If it comes back to us later.

Well from Korea I was posted to 25 Squadron in Perth to be the adjutant and squadron pilot and that lasted for, that was flying Vampires. Vampires are single seat,

20:30 single engined jets with twin booms. That only lasted very few months when I was very pleased to have a posting to Malta to join 78 Wing in Malta and that was one of the most exciting tours that you could really experience. It was a marvellous tour. The Brits were pretty hard pressed at the time and they

needed help with the

- 21:00 peacekeeping in the Middle East. There were problems with the [Suez] Canal zone at that stage of the game and they blew up a bit later as you probably know with Nasser and so the Commonwealth Heads of Government got together and decided that they would send some fighters to the Mediterranean and 78 Wing went to Malta and New Zealand 14 Squadron also flying Vampires went to Cyprus
- 21:30 and we were the sort of fighter force of the Mediterranean between us all but the 6th Fleet was in there from time to time with their seemingly hundreds and hundreds of aircraft on board and that sort of stuff. So that's how we got there. We leased 19 aircraft from the Brits and we were originally based at Alfar on the eastern coast. Right on the shore of
- 22:00 Malta and Malta is a very small place. It's about I'm not sure but just think in terms of a country that is 17 miles long and about 5 wide. It's something like that and we operated with the navy for quite a while. I won't say too much about that because none of it's good. Terrible conditions, absolutely terrible conditions. The food,
- 22:30 the accommodation, the conditions were British navy and it was just not our caper so we operated from there until we got our own base at a place called Kitcarli [?] roughly in the centre of the island. Our first deployment as an exercise in getting around the Mediterranean and navigating and getting distance up in these little Vampires. They were
- 23:00 9 Vampires with a fairly small engine. A Durlect engine and so the first one was to Iraq and we flew down 12 of us with some ground crew support in a Hastings if I remember rightly and as we always did when we were heading for Cyprus we called into El Alam on the way to refuel. That was the limit of our range anyway for fuel anyway
- 23:30 then we would hop across to Cyprus and then we went from there to a place called Hamunya. Not too far off what's Iraq's capital?
- Baghdad.**
- Baghdad. We couldn't get into Baghdad because there were riots on there at the time but we did some interesting flying around the place. We flew over some of the places that were featured in the news recently. Azur,
- 24:00 Kirkuk and that sort of stuff and the Euphrates and Tigris were very good nav aids so it was a very worthwhile visit and the first thing that we noticed when we landed at Tapanya. It was a RAF base at that stage that we could smell the Australian gum trees and they had been imported to there and they had lots and lots of eucalypt. Really did. It was bloody marvellous.
- 24:30 **So what was the purpose of that?**
- It was just an exercise in moving the squadron and there is a lot to moving a squadron I might say in operations but it was an exercise in getting us there. We did some work in Cyprus with the Kiwis. We got to meet them and know them and we
- 25:00 got to know all the people running the base at Cyprus and it was a good introduction to the Mediterranean and a good introduction to the most extreme range flying. It was a good introduction to jet streams for example which we had never experienced in Australia and we hadn't really experienced them in Korea because we were not
- 25:30 really heading in jet stream directions. Jet streams are generally west or east and they get along at 100 miles an hour so you can use them and flying from El Alam which is just the same as Benghazi on the African coast. You could get the height and use your jet streams to ensure a good trip through to Cyprus so that was
- 26:00 new to us. All those sorts of things and particularly when you are doing it as a Squadron of 12 aircraft. It's a big learning experience and our armament type practice was done in rocketry and gunnery in Libya for example. We did some air to air off
- 26:30 the coast of Malta up Gozo way and so it went on. We did army cooperation with the army in very, you know the areas we were working over were true desert. Nothing growing at all so there were cooperation exercises out there with the army and they also were very, very useful. Not easy.
- 27:00 We did, we took part in exercises with the French at a place called Leserter [?] on the North African coast, west a bit. We had things called defence exercises of Malta, DXMs where Malta would be attacked by the 6th Fleet with its Panthers and
- 27:30 God knows how many aeroplanes. The Kiwis would come from Cyprus, the navy on Malta would help and we would be attacked by the 6th Fleet and French and Italian aircraft coming over from that part of the world and these would go for 7 or 8 days and these were a true exercise of defence of your homeland or in this case Malta. Like it was during the war.
- 28:00 Poor old Malta was in a terrible state then. So we would be scrambled, we would be on standby, we were taking off and scrapping with these Americans as they came in and it went on and on and on. I

mean the whole question of supporting this sort of operation is necessary training, necessary exercise for the whole wing. So that sort of thing went on.

- 28:30 There were a lot of interesting exercises. We went to, we used to do strikes in the Canal zone because that was a sensitive spot and we needed to know what was there, where we could get operational help and how to go about attacking anything that needed to be attacked in the Canal, ground or air, so we would do that sort of exercise from Cyprus.
- 29:00 We then moved across as I said to Kitcarli roughly in the centre of the island and at the time that the squadron, that the wing moved across to the UK to take part in the Royal Review Flypast Coronation. The Royal Review Flypast and as I said that was a very, very interesting exercise. We, incidentally before getting onto that we used to go down to Cyprus
- 29:30 from time to time to do armament practice camp and we would spend a week just doing armament work. Gunnery, bombing, city work and that sort of stuff and that improved our capacity no end. In fact to the point where there was an annual event called the MC Mason Trophy which was for air to air firing on banners and Bill Horsman, Bay Adams represented
- 30:00 78 Wing. I was their third man and backup man and won this trophy against allcomers. The Yanks, Brits, French, Italians the whole lot and that was a pretty good effort. So we went across to England to a place called Horshington Faith near Norwich and did this Royal Review Flypast
- 30:30 and I was in Cyprus at the time but the wing moved over doing an advanced instrument flight course. I was about to become an instrument rating examiner so I finished that and then brought my Meteor back and flew over to England with a British dignitary. Different route. I went all along the North African coast and to Gibraltar and stayed there overnight and up to Dijon and then over to Horshington
- 31:00 and that in itself was an interesting exercise.

Do you want to tell us a bit more about that?

Yeah. A little, a little because the Meteor was a little bit special in the sense that you needed a special attachment to fuel the central tank and that held about 175 gallons. I'd worked this whole thing out all the way through. There were, I can't remember the exact places but

- 31:30 there were Iraq, I think there were 4 stops on the way to England and I had to play around with it. On one of them the central tank couldn't be filled. I knew that was going to happen so I had to play onto the next with a full central tank use up my mains and arrive then with almost no fuel because for the next trip I needed a full central tank and when I got to the next one they didn't have any
- 32:00 battery carts to start the engine and I had to rack my brains and work out which one of those engines had the main generator on it. I sat my passenger in the back seat and said, "Cross your fingers and hold your breath," so I selected the starboard and I thought I was pretty right and I actually got the thing going and I revved it and revved it to make sure I had enough power to get the other engine going. I don't think
- 32:30 anyone in our wing had ever started a Meteor on internals before. So we got there and Gibraltar was interesting because coming in, the Gibraltar runway goes right out to sea and as you are coming in you have Gibraltar on your left. Come in and do your circuit, go down towards the end of the runway, break left to come to it down wind and suddenly you've got no runway.
- 33:00 All you've got is the sea to look at because you are low to level with it and then you come around to base and it becomes abundantly clear. It's just different and it's interesting that night the people there took me down to the bowels of Gibraltar and we drove around to storages and living quarters and stuff in the rock. Just try to imagine doing all that stuff.
- 33:30 Anyway the Royal Review Flypast. The aircraft flew past the Queen in their various groups. There were 12 in our group and sometimes more at intervals if I remember correctly of 20 seconds. Enough time for her to be briefed on who it was, what that particular formation was. The interesting thing was
- 34:00 the first aircraft to go through was a Sycamore helicopter at 25 knots or 114 miles an hour or something. The last to go through were a Swift and a Hunter at near enough to 600 knots or 1,100 something. So let me just show you if I may.

You may, but just watch your microphone.

My apologies. The leading two, the Queen went over the city of

- 34:30 London under a control zone so all air traffic had to be alerted not to be anywhere near this when the practice was going on or the actual was going on and the aircraft came in from all those directions. 641 of them fed in through.

If you could just hold that up. If you just hold that at chest height

- 35:00 **we should be able to get that.**

And it fed in through a gate. The Queen is down here. It fed in through this gate and if you are arrived there, if you arrived there 10 seconds late or early you had to break out because everybody else is coming after you at a great rate of knots and you can just imagine the complexity of that. everybody feeding into that gate. All coming

35:30 down, all catching up as they come through and then the break away.

It's not going to work. If you could just explain.

The breakaway, we are up there where I think I've got a yellow dot.

I can see that.

That's where we came in from. Incredible operation.

So how, are you just receiving signals saying, "Go."

36:00 **Are you concerned about having to have eyes in the back of your head in that situation?**

As well, as well but if you were 10 seconds late at the gate then you had to bug out of the whole pass because you were going to get run over or you were going to run over somebody and we had some instances there where people were not aware. On one occasion there was a little Tiger Moth. We are 12 aeroplanes like this at about 1,100 ft. This Tiger Moth is just slowly coming up

36:30 into our path. We went past because he was so slow and then he was in the path of the next people coming along. He didn't have a clue and on another occasion a Hastings, a big transport came beetling along head on to the whole gaggle. Not a clue that it was going to happen I guess and very smartly broke out of it. On another occasion we

37:00 on that run in we came into some pretty heavy cloud so Brian Eaton took us off a little. 12 aeroplanes in 3 groups of 4 separated in the cloud although I'm sure it would have been okay so he took us out a little and some Meteors, I think they must have been coming behind us and 2 of us came over the top of us at about 50 ft separation. Roughly 50ft separation and

37:30 that would have been a most, God almighty prang. In the main it went extraordinarily well. It was arranged that things had to be, there were lights lit at various spots for you to check your timing and it was all a very, very complex and well oiled affair. It was good. I think there were

38:00 a total, I forget how many practices, leader practices but certainly as an entire 640 aeroplane we did it 8 times. It was great. We went from there then to Germany where we took part in this mock atomic war. There were about 1,500 aeroplanes involved. There were about 8 countries involved and we lived in a forest at a place

38:30 called Vahn not too far out of Cologne and everything was camouflaged. Our tents, our aeroplanes had been painted up to be camouflaged. We had the whole thing under a pine forest with a pretty rough sort of runway to operate from and so because we were not NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] we were part of the enemy force and we were tasked quite often to

39:00 attack the American bases at Pittsburg [?] and Lindfield and that was tremendous. We gave them hell and we'd come in and attack their bases and sometimes sort of stay around a bit and give them time to get airborne and get stuck in and have a decent sort of hooley but in the main we would come in and attack and got... If they were ready, if they had warning, some sort of radar warning that we were coming

39:30 and we would come in low then they would be airborne and ready to intercept and get stuck into a fight over the airfield. Their commanding general at one stage said, I think he said to Brian Eaton, "When you boys come over it's like the Richthofen circus up there." It was quite an exercise. If I recall there were only 2 aeroplanes that was lost and only one pilot killed in what was really a very

40:00 operational sort of exercise.

It must have been fairly dangerous. I mean it's mock but its-

Oh yes. If you get even 24 aircraft all milling around all trying to get on each other's tail and that sort of stuff above an airfield it's, you've got to keep your eyes well and truly open and your wits. And then I suppose

40:30 there were 8 countries involved there.

So who won the atomic war?

I think the defenders probably did. They probably won although 78 Wing gave a very good account of itself and just one little aside there Dick Aborn who died some time back. He and I were out on a mission one day and we decided that on the way home we would,

41:00 because he is a very keen motor racing fellow we would fly around Nuremberg ring and break the current record created by the cars around Nuremberg Ring. He was keen. The only other thing I suppose I should mention was that I was the wing test pilot. I was the wing individual aerobatic pilot

41:30 and I formed and led the wing aerobatic team which was the RAAF's first postwar aerobatic team. It was the RAAF's first aerobatic team. With the test bit for a start. The Vampire has got twin booms and it's a very difficult aeroplane.

Tape 7

00:30 Just prior to the Royal Review Flypast I was fortunate to get a seat in the ball to watch the coronation procession and the Queen went by and all the carriages went by and it was pomp and ceremony at its very best but in an open carriage was Queen Salote of Tonga and she is a fair size. I would say in the old money about 20 stone

01:00 and she is waving to the crowd and they are all loving it. It is raining but she is not about to put the top up or anything and the crowd is just adoring this woman and sitting alongside her was a little fellow. I would say he weighed half as much as she did and sitting up he was about half as high and it was the Sultan of Unt Tun [?], I think, of Malaysia, or Malaya as it was then, and Noel Coward, whom I'm sure you've heard of,

01:30 came into the commentary box for the ABC and somebody said, "Who's the little fellow with Queen Salote?" and Coward says, "That's her lunch." I thought that was delightful. What was I starting to talk about before? The test thing. Oh yeah. The Vampire has twin booms and that poses a number of problems. Firstly if you have a problem and want to bail out you've really got to be in a position

02:00 upside down and tuned so when you let go of the pole having ejected it will force you out and when you are in big trouble you haven't always got the capacity to do that so jumping out in the normal course of events you are likely to come back and decapitate yourself on the main, tail plane that holds the 2 booms together. That was one problem. If you tried to put a

02:30 Vampire down into the water, if you are trying to ditch the next thing that really happened is those booms come off and the engine and cockpit which are inherently together come off and sink to the bottom like that. It was like an egg. On Malta the entire island is covered with little paddocks surrounded by little brick walls. About that high and about that thick

03:00 and you can't put down a forced landing on Malta unless you happen to get it to one of the airfields. This didn't bother, I mean operating under those conditions did bother some of the guys and two in particular who didn't continue with the flying and I don't blame them. I understand them but I was the wing test pilot and we only had one significant failure and that was on one of my tests. I was about 33,000 ft

03:30 when a rear end bearing failed and you've got ½ ton or engine or more revving at, I don't know I guess in this case about 8 or 9,000 revs a minute and it just shook the aeroplane up so much that I couldn't even see. It was awful with the engine running to do anything. It was just breaking the aeroplane up. So I switched it all off and had to do a forced landing

04:00 and it was cold and it was high and everything sort of iced up inside the cockpit so I couldn't really see anything and I couldn't really scrap the stuff off so I got her down to about 10,000 ft. I wasn't going to open the canopy higher than that. For a start it was too cold and it just didn't seem to be on so I opened the canopy a bit and I could see out. It was warming up

04:30 a bit so I could scrap some of the stuff off the inside and see out the misty sort of stuff and put it down as it turned out on the home runway in what was really a perfect forced landing but that was, when I say that with all due modesty of course but that was the only major failure of an aeroplane in 2 ½ years of operation and it says a hell of a lot for the ground crew that were looking after them.

05:00 **So just to, the engine failed but you managed to get it back to the airstrip?**

Yeah glide it. The engine itself failed only in the sense that a rear bearing that the main turbine. The whole thing is operated on a turbine and you have a turbine at the back and compressors at the front all turning like this that rear end

05:30 turbine and that vibrated the aeroplane to the point where I seriously could not properly see. It was just incredible. I had to shut the engine down and in that case you simply set up a glide. Pock the nose down and set up a glide to get an airspeed that will keep you airborne, a gliding speed.

Over what kind of distance was that?

It wasn't terribly far.

06:00 I suppose no more than I suppose no more than 30-40 miles out something like that. But when you are gliding you can get a far distance. Some aeroplanes don't have a very good angle for gliding but the Vampire was good so it took a long time to get down I tell you.

So you slowly over 30 or 40 miles, slowly

06:30 **descending.**

Yeah, yes and when you come down you've got a couple of points you set up according to height so if you are there you're reasonably sure of making it to there and when you've done you get to here and you adjust accordingly as you go around.

And this vibration from the engine how...?

Well if a bearing goes on something is depending on the bearing

07:00 for it's smoothness and operation and the bearing goes then you've got a whole looseness in there and this thing is whizzing around at God knows how fast and it just. I don't know what I can use as an example to show you. I can't think of another example. And the so that was that.

07:30 The individual aerobatics I used to do, I performed for lots and lots of people in different countries. They were always quite low. They were pretty spectacular I understand for our farewell fly pass as the wing was leaving Malta we had a fly pass of wing aircraft and I was to do the solo aerobatic display immediately after

08:00 they left. The Governor came along and to do the sort of aerobatics I did I needed the least fuel possible, the weight as less as possible for the sort of speeds and heights that I was used to doing these things at. Any greater height and then you need greater speeds to do things, any greater fuel weight I mean and the Governor. I always had a little bit in hand but not a hell of a lot

08:30 and the Governor spoke on and on and I was eventually called in. I did my display and just as the aeroplane was touching down it ran out of fuel. It was as close as that. I let it run off the runway and then I was towed in by a tractor once again.

Now just a sec. The Governor?

The Governor of Malta.

And what so

09:00 **you were flying around waiting.**

I was just out of sight waiting to come in and as I said the aerobatic team that was a good one. I set that up with 3 very, very good pilots and we performed for the King of Egypt and we performed for Lord and Lady Louis Mountbatten and performed in several countries. Cyprus and all over the place with this thing.

09:30 It was a way of spreading the RAAF and the Australian image I suppose all over the place because there was no other aerobatic team in the Mediterranean area. I think the nearest team would be in France so we were hit and we sort of flew the flag a bit which I think was worth while and that's really I suppose about all I

10:00 need to say about Malta. That was quick wasn't it. Interesting.

There could be but perhaps it would be best to keep going in your chronological order and then we might do this another...

Incidentally. I don't know if this is interesting or not we did a,

10:30 the wing did a formation over Grand Harbour Valletta and I had the task of being up there in a Meteor, marshalling it into place and getting them set with the right backgrounds with the photographer in the back. A fellow named Jerry Sebastian. It was hard work. The Meteor only has little panels in the canopy that opens up and he had his camera and I'd say, "Now Jerry, now Jerry"

11:00 and he produced, in fact I would go so far as to say, we produced a photograph that has been in almost every aviation magazine in the world and continues to be shown. I've got a copy of there and I'll you shortly. It's just a magnificent photograph and we actually got it. There's a picture of us when we came back both completely wrung out. We probably lost about 4 pounds each in sweat. Anyway that was Malta.

11:30 From Malta came home. I'll just run through very quickly. I did a flying instructor's course at East Sale and then went to fly as an instructor at the RAAF College at Point Cook. The first man I sent solo in a Tiger Moth was Ray Furnell who later became the chief commander which was, he and I are still very good friends. He was a good pilot obviously.

12:00 So I instructed there in Tiger Moths. During my 2 years of instruction at Point Cook at the College I did an advance administration course at Rathmines NSW. Marvellous place really. The commanding officer had a seaplane that he flew around in and I also did the 2 phases of the Fighter Combat Instructors Course.

12:30 Weapons training at East Sale and Tactics at Williamstown and that had been something of a life long dream to do something of a course of that nature and ours was pretty much the top course in the world and it was good. It meant that I didn't have as much instructing to do. In December 1956 I went to 25

- Squadron in Perth where I was the senior flight commander and combat pilot instructor and
- 13:00 for the second year the pilot and amongst other things I prepared graduates from the RAAF Staff College and from the basic what do they call it? SFS Flying School conversion at Williamtown to go onto fighters and that was very interesting. I was able in the main to give them as much, to cover all the sorts of flying that they
- 13:30 would do at Williamtown.
- For flying what kind of planes?**
- Sabres and Mirage Fighter stuff. They used to, they, when they were holding people for posting they would send the fighter blokes to me because I had this fighter combat instructor capability and I was very familiar with giving them right up to speed before they went over.
- 14:00 **So you were training people on Wirraways and Tiger Moths?**
- No, no, not at that stage.
- No but at Point Cook and then you went to Sabres and...**
- We went from there to Vampires.
- I'm just curious about the extreme difference and jumping from you know the sort old timers to the latest technology. Can you say something about**
- 14:30 **that, what it was like?**
- Well all I can say about it is I didn't see it as a problem because I had already flown and fought in Meteors for example so I was familiar with jet operations and higher speed stuff than Tiger Moths and Wirraways. I had done a lot of Mustang work so no, it was in fact it would never have occurred to me that
- 15:00 there was a difference to be worried about because you immediately go from one situation to the other nearly without seeking beyond the need to do it properly for that particular aeroplane. If it could do 3,000 miles an hour the same would apply.
- Did you have a preference for training out of those planes?**
- Out of which?
- Well from**
- 15:30 **Tiger Moth and the Wirraway to the Sabre or the Vampire?**
- To the Vampire? No. I got a lot of satisfaction out of Tiger Moths. They might be little 70 knot things with 2 wings and that kind of stuff because I was able to teach young cadets and training pilots stuff that I
- 16:00 had learned over the years. One of those things is that as time goes by you need to know what's happening to your aeroplane and that you are feeling what the aeroplane is doing whether it is on the rudders, the rudder trims on the wings or whatever. Ray Fernell later, he came down not so many years ago and said, "Les I want you to fly in a PC 9 with me." And
- 16:30 he told me, he said, "I've flown the Russian top fighters. I've flown the American top fighters but in all of the years since I've flown with you I have done exactly that." So it certainly rubbed off on him and it certainly applied with me always. You had to feel what the air was doing to every part of the aeroplane and that way you got the most of out of your bird. The other thing that I like about Tiger Moths I
- 17:00 can teach people what it feels like to fly. I would get them put their hands out. Out in the air and we would do some flying and we would tilt the aeroplane and get it to turn. We would get it to go up and over and feeling this all the way through and feeling the difference as it happens and then I would get
- 17:30 a guy to, you are always wearing gloves. I would say, "We are now going to have a look at a $\frac{1}{2}$ rove V2S," [?] which is the formula for flight. You know determining the lift on the wing. "We will get this thing going along at about 65 knots and put your hand out and hold it in equilibrium as though it is part of the wing," and he would do that and then I would say, "Now hold it there and don't let it move.
- 18:00 You can feel the lift on the top of the hand and you would have your airfoil and don't move from that area of attack." And then I would say, "Okay, haul the aeroplane up a bit and haul it up and haul it up until we get to the stall," and the aeroplane would start to shudder and start to stall and he could feel the air breaking up on his hand like his wing.
- 18:30 **Very sensory way to learn to fly isn't it?**
- Well it worked, it worked and many of the blokes who were in my fighter squadrons who had flown with me at Point Cook applied all that stuff. They remembered it and they knew exactly what was happening to the aeroplane but I love that.

19:00 Feel your hand stall. People didn't believe it but the kids knew. They were able to do it. They would get up and they would feel the air breaking up. As it was breaking up over the wings of the aeroplane it would break up over the top of your hand and it would drop away when it stalled.

Goodness. I must try that.

Good stuff. Okay. From there I was posted to 75 Squadron to fly Sabres at Williamtown

19:30 but never got there because I was diverted to Richmond to be the commanding officer of 22 Squadron who were flying Meteors and other aircraft. So I spent 12 months there with some very exciting things happening and again spent a further 2 years there converting the Squadron to support aircraft, a non flying role in other words

20:00 which became a part of the air force velocity. Citizen squadron actually supporting operational flying Squadrons. So I spent a couple of years doing that and that was all right. In my travels I went to England to do the RAF Staff College Course at Bracknell for 12 months. 96 students from a number of countries all being taught stuff of higher command, higher staff appointments and stuff like that.

20:30 **I think we need to know a little bit more about what you said about the citizen squadron. I've never heard of that.**

Haven't you?

No and so just some detail of what your role was.

Okay. The citizen airforce squadrons were formed, I'm not too sure whether it was post World War II

21:00 or not. My history's not good enough but they were formed following the RAF model I suppose to train citizens to be fighter pilots or whatever or engineers or people to support the aeroplanes, traffic controllers, medical people

21:30 so they could be called up in time of war and wouldn't need much training. And that's the way it went. They were citizens from the local cities, local capital or surroundings in that particular area. We reached the stage where

22:00 as pilots were being produced from the advanced flying training schools and the colleges the take up capacity of the conversion unit at Williamtown and other squadrons couldn't quite keep up so they were phased, they people were phased

22:30 through those citizen squadrons and were trained with the citizens who had become regular pilots or pilots at those CAF squadrons, Citizen Airforce Squadrons. Perth was the, PS was the 25 CAF Fighter Squadron it was called and my job there as the flight commander and test pilot as usual

23:00 and individual pilot and runner of air shows my job there was essentially to, as the senior flight commander was to train, to continue to train the citizen pilots and to train the people who were just coming through from graduation up to

23:30 a standard that they could be posted into squadrons or into conversion training for fighters and I did that. I converted them to the Vampires and I taught them all they needed to know about fighter flying prior to them going to the conversion unit at Williamtown and they were able to join in with

24:00 and fly in conjunction with the citizen pilots who loved it of course because they were flying with regular air force pilots and we achieved some pretty good results in terms of what we produced out of there. I then became the commanding officer and that entails the complete running of your squadron in all respects.

So citizens who volunteered, were they required to pass tests?

Oh yes, oh my very word

24:30 yes. They needed basic educational qualifications but they would go through their training in the same way as the regular people. Slightly different syllabuses, slightly different by necessity and they would go through where they were at a point of wings standard and they would get their wings.

25:00 **Were they studying part time or full time?**

No, no, part time, just at weekends. Weekends with an annual camp. Sometimes they could come in to work and spend a bit more time in the squadron so we are not talking about a short time gaining the wings here. There was stuff happening over some years but they are there working away and they have the whole field of stuff and if they needed to be called up in a hurry they would be of great

25:30 benefit, of great, great use. They are not doing that now. Their squadrons now support the regular squadrons. They are now transport, patrol or fighter or whatever.

They support them.

They support them on weekends and go down and do their work on air frames and engines and armament

26:00 and instruments and all that sort of stuff in servicing the aircraft if you like. That's the sort of support I mean. You see at Richmond I had I forget about 80 or 90, 80 or 90 regular people on the staff and I had a medical flight of citizen people. I think there were 12 of them and I put them to work building

26:30 or devising a fly away kit for emergency situations and they did that and it was adopted. That sort of useful stuff.

What's a fly away kit?

If you suddenly need to go to Tindal for example or somewhere in the Northern Territory to operate you've got to have stuff to take with you and the ground staff people, all the engineering staff and so on

27:00 they've had that in place for ages but there hadn't yet been a medical fly away kit. We are going there and we are taking so many people this is what we need, these sorts of medical things. This is how we will pack it, here it is, take it away in a Herc. Stuff like that. Too easy. So there we are.

27:30 **Okay so you went to England after that.**

Yeah to the RAF Staff College at Bracknell near Norwich and that was 12 months of study to prepare. There were 96 students from several countries and the object of the staff course is to prepare students for

28:00 higher staff duties and command and it's a fairly comprehensive course. Fairly comprehensive it really is. Quite a lot of very basic stuff and quite a lot of fairly advanced stuff. I wouldn't care to try and remember the various subjects that were covered but it was a top course.

What year was that?

1962, 42 years ago. But that was good.

What,

28:30 **I mean this was a course that you participated in to advance your qualifications. What were you expecting, how were you expecting your career to go?**

I was not, I wasn't looking, how do I explain this? I don't like the

29:00 people doing the research to know all this sort of stuff but I didn't have any great ambitions in that sense. I was having too good a time, marvellous time and I didn't marry until I was almost 41 so I was having a ball. That's essentially it I suppose and in some respects, I must be fair, I must be honest.

29:30 I believe I had a lot and I'm told legends and all this sort of stuff, I believe I had a lot of very fine qualities and capabilities but I suppose the one that I lacked the most and because I was having such a good time was the ability or the desire I suppose to see the broader picture, to see the really broad picture.

30:00 When I was commanding a fighter squadron my sights were on making that squadron the best fighter squadron in the outfit. I don't think we have covered Butterworth yet have we.

No we are getting there. There are all these other things. Sorry go on.

So that I think was and therefore, this is

30:30 Butterworth again. I think that's all I need to say on that to be honest. I don't think I should say now that I should have had a greater capacity to see the broader picture because I'm not too sure that I particularly would want to anyway the way that I was operating at that time. I was doing what I thought was a damn

31:00 good job and it seemed that wherever I went I was made the president of the mess committee which means that you are responsible for the entire officers mess, all of its running and all of its aspects as well as doing a job and I did that at 3 of our busiest bases; at Richmond, at Darwin and at Butterworth and that's a hell of a commitment.

Well let's move onto Butterworth.

31:30 **and the Malayan Emergency. So can you, well take us through the steps of you being posted to Butterworth.**

I then did other things for a couple of 3 years before going to Butterworth but when I went to Butterworth in 1965 I took over 77 squadron which was a squadron of Sabres.

32:00 It was my old squadron that I had been blooded in in Korea and I was very, very pleased at that stage. I think I was 39 and I was very pleased to get this appointment because generally people a bit younger get the command of a fighter squadron. As it turned out it was fine. The Confrontation [between

Indonesia and Malaysia – Konfrontasi] was going on and we did, I had. Apart from raw operational training the sort of stuff that I

- 32:30 talked about before that you get on with. Your armament, your tactics and all that sort of stuff we had 2 aircraft on permanent standby at the airstrip ready to get airborne within a minute and it takes about a minute to crank the aircraft up. That was the urgency of it. When it got to a point where, you would be down there on standby just reading or studying or whatever and then the word would
- 33:00 come through to come to, I think it was called 'an alert state' anyway you would climb into the cockpit, strap yourself in and that in itself is a fairly lengthy business because there is a lot of strapping to be done. And strap yourself in and then you have got everything organised, switches and that sort of stuff so when the word is given to scramble press a button and start working things to get airborne and immediately your motor fires up and gets
- 33:30 beyond idle into increasing revs, you roll out onto the runway and lift and take off and your wingman is following you around at the same time and takes off with you. And then you scramble on radar orders to intercept whatever seemed to be there and occasionally it was Indonesian stuff. Occasionally it was about to stray across the border and things like that but in my entire time there we had
- 34:00 2 aircraft on standby at the end of the runway. That was part of the Confrontation. We had occasion to operate from Singapore for the same reason. I had to go down on one occasion because of runway repair but things got a bit tight down there around the border areas as well and we operated to ensure that the Indonesians did not come across
- 34:30 the border down the Straits [of Malacca]. In December '65 I was tasked to take a flight of aircraft to Borneo. The Brits had trouble with their Hunters. They needed to take them back to the UK for servicing and that sort of stuff and we took over from them in Borneo and operated from Labuan and if I remember rightly there were about,
- 35:00 I don't know 110 troops, yes there were about 90 to 100 troops to support the operation and that was an incredible place to fly in Borneo. We were flying from Labuan where 77 Squadron had left there for BCOF a way back and it had a runway of only 5,500 feet but normally the minimum is 6,000. You are normally looking for a
- 35:30 requirement of 8,000 so we were really operating in hot temperature to an absolute limit to get airborne and to land again. We were doing border patrols. We were being shot at from the ground but to no affect. The people on the ground on our side were advising us we were being shot at and the terrain
- 36:00 is just incredible. I mean Borneo jungle. We had a thing called treescape. It was hooked onto here so when you bailed out on the treetops on the way down which you almost invariably would you had this thing which you could hook it on to your, what was it? You could hook it onto something here and it's on your Mae West [life jacket] and then you just slowly let yourself down to the ground. It was 150 foot long and we discovered
- 36:30 much later that it was no near long enough to let us down from the high trees in Borneo. So and I mean the cloud would come in and come down over the mountaintops so to get through to where you were going to do your border patrols you had to go through little saddlebacks like that and I say to the guys, "Get back in line of stern and watch me
- 37:00 go first to make sure that when I get through I don't have to belt up through the clouds and you are going to have to break," so I would come down and the only way to do it was to come up to the saddleback, roll onto your back, pull through a little, get down below the level of the cloud and then roll. If you tried pushing through you were on negative G and it was just dangerous. Roll through, pull through. That was a different operation again and that was
- 37:30 good value to everybody. Not only as far as the airborne stuff was concerned but on the ground. It was hot. Hot and sticky.

So on the border patrols what were you finding or did you have ground attack?

No we were ensuring that there was a presence and that no aircraft would come in from what was it called down there?

- 38:00 I forget from the other side of Vietnam. It was a matter of keeping the Indonesians controlled if you like. We had troops on the ground, Brits and with any invasions we would, either by aircraft, have dealt with it or on the ground we would have dealt with it. Whatever is the situation.

38:30 So how long were you there for?

In Borneo? A month. 3 Squadron our sister squadron came over and took over for another month and then that was our requirement. I was in 77 Squadron for 2 years. It was a good posting. Very good posting and operational posting as well and you know Confrontation was pretty serious. They had very, very top aeroplanes but not very good servicing

- 39:00 and I for example, had their major fighter base in Sumatra targeted at one stage. My squadron did. Well

that's the way I set it up and that was agreed and I had it all arranged. It was going to be a high, low, high attack and we would just make it with fuel and would have written them off and interesting later in Jakarta I met some of those people who had been involved in that squadron

39:30 and their commander and we had very interesting discussions about what was going on at that time as he saw it and as I saw it. They were not confident. They knew what our capabilities were and they didn't have that capability even though they had very much faster aeroplanes.

What sort of planes did they have?

They had Mig 21s and some Mig 19s and down in the island itself in Java they had Mig 15s

40:00 but they just weren't able to service them, the 15s that is. They had the 21s working okay.

So did you have any dogfights with them?

No, oh no. It would have been interesting but had we done so they would have been serious, very serious and why not.

Tape 8

00:32 **Once again that we really have.**

Once again. Is it on now? I don't know if I can add much more because to me when I talk about squadron training, that's operational training whether it's in 77 Squadron or 75 or 22 or whatever. Our regular more

01:00 operational commitments were as I said strip standby which were on every day from dawn to dusk, dawn to dark. There were I'm trying to think what exercises we had with other nations. I'm going a little bit blank on that to be honest.

01:30 It was pretty full on as it was with the whole Confrontation thing and we did, here's one aspect here that I think it worth mentioning and I say it with a bit of difficulty I think because I believe it reflects on my capability.

02:00 I always remember of the 4 main armaments that we do, forgetting senior work which is air to air gunnery, air to ground gunnery, rocketry and dive bombing. In real situations there are other things as well with napalm and stuff and so we also carried air to air missiles, warheads on the Sabre. They were Sidewinders which

02:30 seek heat and knock off the aircraft that way but I always shone at gunnery in both types above rocketry and dive bombing. I was good at dive bombing and rocketry but in gunnery I would have to say I was exceptional and

03:00 I trained 77 Squadron up to, let me give you an example. In air to ground gunnery firing at a banner you are looking at a rag on the ground. I think we were flying on 15 feet by 15 feet. If you got, in the normal course of events say 3 Squadron next door if a squadron pilot got

03:30 40 plus it was a good score, quite a good score and if there was a wind and all that sort of stuff he mightn't make 40 plus The good pilots shot up around 50 plus, 55. I was shooting in the 90s and I briefed my blokes. I had one young guy who was shooting 25s and I took him aside and briefed him and he went up and he shot a 91.

04:00 and I brought the squadron up to squadron averages this all pilots and escorts of 73%. That's way, way above anything that has been achieved before. In our air to ground gunnery which is a very much more difficult operation because you've got a banner being towed along at about

04:30 200 knots and you are sort of coming around and firing into it until you get to a point where it only presents to about 25 x 6 and when you get down to that sort of angle you are only firing at 4 or 5 x 6 because of the angle. Exceptional scores in air gunnery were, I'm just trying to remember what the actual,

05:00 what were above average and exceptional. In the older days with Vamps exceptional was up about 25. With Sabres it was in the order of 30, 31, 32 something like that. I was shooting in the 70s. Regularly in the top 60s and 70s. I'm just illustrating that to show that gunnery was my forte if you like and I was able to bring

05:30 a lot of my Squadron pilots up way above where they would have come without a bit of instruction with me so...

You said you spent 20 minutes coaching one of the pilots and his rating improved out of sight. What did you say to him?

I talked about range. I talked about

- 06:00 to fly an aeroplane you have ailerons, elevators and rudders and to kick an aeroplane into place when you want to fire you have got to get yourself into the attacking mode as smoothly as possible and to get there you have to treat that aeroplane like a dog. Kick it. Kick it into place and score it. Get it pointing in the direction that you want it and then smooth it out
- 06:30 and then you look at what it is that causes the greatest errors in a particular type of armament and in gunnery, it's the rudders. It's the rudders that cause the greatest errors. In dive bombing it's not. There is height, angle of attack and speed and all those types of things that affect it. In gunnery the thing that, all the other things have an effect but the one with the most
- 07:00 effect is your rudders. I said, "You need all those things including your rudders to control the aeroplane but when things get interesting lock your rudders and don't let them move and do everything by pole. Just learn how to do all that stuff with your pole and hold it there, bring it in, and there were a number of things I mentioned but that was one of them. The other thing was that most people shoot
- 07:30 way out of range particularly at a banner in the air. You are aiming to shoot at 100 yards where the thing is harmonised and most people think they are in close and really they are shooting at 5 or 600 yards. You've got dispersion and all sorts of things and you can only possibly get 20 or 25% so if you get in close enough. I have to say that I would fly in from about 220
- 08:00 down to about 180 yards which is getting mighty close for them to break out but range was a problem. So I briefed him on that and one or two other things concerning his pip and his gyroscope and stuff and he got an incredible score. He came back and people couldn't believe it. Just because he was a good pilot, a good pilot and he was able to put into effect what I had told him. Not everyone could you know.

But how could you get distance, how

- 08:30 **could you misjudge distance like that to that degree?**

Very easily. You are in the air and pacing this thing at a great rate of knots. You are probably closing in on it at 250 miles an hour or something and it is coming up at you at an alarming rate and until you know how to determine the distance you, it's just difficult.

- 09:00 Extremely difficult. It's different on aeroplane because when you are attacking an aeroplane you set your gun sight with graticules to a given wingspan and you enclose your aircraft as you approach it within that wingspan by changing your range on the throttle. That makes these things
- 09:30 go in and out to keep on the airspan of the wingspan of the target so that it will tell you when you are 300 yards or 400 yards but with your air to air banner you don't have that sort of capacity. You've got to eyeball it and the only way you can really eyeball it if you want to do it technically is to look at the little pip in the centre of your
- 10:00 gyro gun sight radical and you relate that to the size of that to the size of your target and it is pretty difficult to do when you are going at those sorts of speeds. I'm sorry but that's...

That's fine.

What else did you want to know?

You explained it very beautifully.

I bet.

No very good explanation. Okay so just something about the Confrontation. You were flight commander

- 10:30 **or wing commander over there?**

Where in Butterworth?

Yeah.

I was wing commander officer. I was commanding the squadron.

So can you tell me what the procedure was with intelligence and security in regards to the confrontation and what was going on?

Well

- 11:00 some intelligence of course comes from the mission in the country itself. I provided quite a bit of intelligence when I was Air Attaché in Jakarta from the Indonesians in that capacity. No I can't. I mean, there are procedures there are things
- 11:30 under which I am still bound by a particular code so there will be obvious things of course. People on the ground who report things happening. People in the Embassy such as myself that produce stuff and

there will be things that you know about and have read about but I personally I am still bound in my Jakarta experience not to talk about.

12:00 I apologise, I'm sorry for that. Some of it is now out of date but I'm still, I've still got a contract. Always will unless I am talking to people who were there you know.

Yeah that's fine. Can I ask you another question? You don't have to answer. But I don't think this

12:30 **would be provocative. Just in terms of planning operations on a day to day basis out of Butterworth and your involvement in that planning and that would be as a consequence of a brief by intelligence?**

Yes. The intelligence, you see we were a part of a wing, a fighter wing which has 78 Wing Headquarters

13:00 in this case controlling two fighter headquarters; mine and 77 and 3 under another command. The intelligence, that wing has an intelligence officer who is in touch with various agencies who are providing and seeking intelligence. This might range from the Brits in Singapore to whoever else; army, navy you know all that sort of stuff

13:30 from stuff that comes from missions and elsewhere and the state of the... For example, let's take the base I had within my sights at Sumatra. The general state of that we had a pretty good idea about, we had a pretty good idea about their serviceability rates. We had a pretty good idea about their capacity of their pilots

14:00 and how many aircraft they had and that came from a number of sources and that came through the Wing Headquarters and the intelligence officer who if I remember rightly also had another role. He was the guy who disseminated back to us. What else. I don't know what else I can sort of add to that.

14:30 No. On a day to day basis of course those aeroplanes that were on standby were the ones that were going to do the job but they were not, they were not generally briefed on the broader intelligence picture.

15:00 They were briefed that there might be some activity. If they were scrambled they would be likely to encounter such and such as I recall. That's about it.

So you on a day to day basis you were debriefed in the morning?

Not necessarily.

Any time.

Not necessarily. Any time. We were mostly getting on with our training to meet

15:30 that requirement. Training the fighter pilots to do it. I would obviously be in touch with the Wing Headquarters and obviously with my other CO we would go into conferences and talk about how things were developing and what the threat may be and so on. Not only from across the way but from wherever else.

16:00 We were briefed pretty well what was happening in Borneo and so on.

Did you do night patrols?

No. No. We did some night flying but no night patrols. We weren't equipped for that. We didn't have, our only radar was a missile radar.

16:30 for homing in on a target aircraft for our air to air missiles and you can't do night stuff just eyeballing the sky. You have to have some other way of finding the aircraft and identifying them. No we were pretty much daytime stuff.

You mentioned before border protection across the

17:00 **straits in Indonesia approaching that border area. Did you just patrol the border area there or...?**

At times. At times. When it was thought that there was some activity yeah, yeah. I think at times there was some provocation and there would be odd occasions when you would in fact be there each on your own side

17:30 cruising up and down.

What, air force or navy?

Air force. There were times when, once I, my own case where we would have our 2 aircraft up there on patrol on own side and there would be a Mig 21 on patrol on the other side.

Invisible, is the line visible?

Waving at each other. Well the line's there. The line's there.

18:00 The lines visible down the straits and you know where it is. I'm not going to say anymore than that.

So that was a friendly situation or...?

No it wasn't a friendly situation. Not really. Not really. It was a testing thing on their part. It didn't have to be on our case

18:30 because we pretty well knew what they were up to. But no it wasn't friendly. We always had our missiles ready to fire. They were a lovely missile the Sidewinder. They were pretty expensive things and the squadron was allowed about one a year and we would go up and in

19:00 in order to do it you would have 4 aeroplanes all involved in this thing and you would have one that fires a rocket which has got a little baffle on the front to slow it down just a tad. You know it is belting along at a hell of a rate and you have another guy who is just there keeping tabs on things. It might be their FCI making sure that all the checks like me who's going to fire the thing,

19:30 that all the checks are done properly and all the other guys in the formation are hearing that and know what they are and are going through it mentally and sort of a way themselves. What else did we have? We had that guy doing that, a rocket fellow, me with the missile and the 4th man had a role of some sort and you would fire the rocket and some few seconds later

20:00 whizz the missile off and watch it snaking along the target and then whoof and all pull up to make sure you don't fly through the debris. It's an interesting missile. It's called a sidewinder because it homes in on heat and it slightly overcorrects and it comes in like that and then..

On the rocket?

On the rocket yeah and in the case of an aeroplane of course it would fly up the jet pipe because that is the hottest part.

20:30 **So did you get to launch the Sidewinder?**

Oh yes but not, oh yes, I launched one. I was the boss I had to. I was tempted, I was tempted to let one of the junior fellows do it and I thought, "Oh to hell with it. Rank has got to have some privileges" and I don't think they would have expected otherwise to be honest. I don't think they would have expected me to

21:00 delegate that. They were happy to come along and be part of it and once again briefed thoroughly beforehand. Got the whole score on what we were going to do and how we were going to do it.

So that was just a demonstration situation not a combat situation?

Not a combat situation no.

So you never launched one in combat?

Not in combat no. The only thing we did in combat was fire cannons.

21:30 20mm cannons in the case of the Meteor. The Sabre had, it's interesting. The Mustang had 6.5 machine guns which revolved at 650 something revs per minute. The Vampire and the Meteors each had four 20mm cannons which is a fairly potent

22:00 sort of, pretty potent hitting power each firing at about the same rate if I remember rightly but they are that much bigger and do that much more damage. The Sabre had only 2 cannons, 30mm each firing at about 1,300 to 1,400 rounds per minute and those 2 would quadruple the hitting power of 6.5s

22:30 or much more than that in fact. Just the difference. That's a bit by the way I guess.

Did you ever have more than the 2 planes up?

Oh yes. 2 is just your basic element. You would go up for air to air tactics and you would have 4. For, I'm just trying to think of the sort of exercises

23:00 where you would take 8. Sometimes you would take 8 up.

I actually meant in Malaysia.

Oh yes my word. Your normal squadron training, operational training included those sorts of things where you might have 8 on a very low level mission for example and doing various things when you got to the other end. Four is what you call

23:30 a flight and 2 is the basic formation if you like for fighter work. Well it used to be in those days. I imagine it still is, I don't know.

Okay do you want to tell us what happened next when you wound up there and came back to Australia. Unless there is anything else

24:00 **of significance about Malaysia that.**

One very important thing is in June 1966 the second half of my Sabre tour I got married. Yeah. Came down and got married and my wife came up and joined me for 6 months.

24:30 With that there came a delightful young lady named Anne who was 8 going on 9 who very soon became my adopted daughter and then about 2 years later in '67 my second daughter was born.

So you had been corresponding with

25:00 **your fiancée for long?**

Well when I did the south course in England there were people there who knew her. She had been married to a friend of mine, a fighter pilot friend named Terry Whittington and they had had a tour in the UK so the people at the south course knew them and we sort of got a bit in touch that way in the fact that she knew I was there and I had met her once or something like that

25:30 so when I came back we met a few times and it sort of went on a bit. 62, 63, 65 and it went on for about 3 years. Yeah, so and then eventually we decided that we would tie the knot and that's what happened so she, she and Anne came up to Butterworth and spent 6 months there.

26:00 And then we came back and it seemed like no time flat we were heading for Darwin and we hadn't been there long before we were heading for Indonesia for the Air Attaché job. So Kath had something like 11 or 12 dwellings in 6 years. It was terrible. It really was. Moving around like crazy. Let me see if there is anything else. I think that we are sort of staying with the air bit aren't we?

Air?

RAAF?

Yeah.

26:30 **Well we want to get onto your Attaché job in Indonesia. But hang on what was Darwin?**

Well Darwin I went along there as the, in '68 that's right, in 1968 as what was known as the Air Staff Officer. That was the sort of Deputy to the Base Commander and

27:00 my job there was basically advice and assistance generally to him. I had various other, President of the Mess Committee once again which was fairly demanding but I was also flying, we had a small Dakota flight there and a Dakota Captain and crew which used to fly that for various missions around the place and some of the outback stuff and transporting stuff here and there

27:30 and I flew with them from time to time but for the rest that was pretty much staff work and generally keeping an eye on air fuel matters. It was a civilian airfield as well of course so I was pretty busy one way or another. Pretty much staff sort of stuff and I think that deals with Darwin.

28:00 **Okay that's fine.**

Now for Jakarta. Jakarta was interesting in that I met up amongst other things I met up with some of the people who had been involved in the Confrontation and they by the time I got there they knew what my role had been in the

28:30 77 Squadron. They found it fascinating to speak about these things. We didn't go into it too deeply because I think they were briefed fairly carefully not to

These were Indonesians were they?

Yes, yes and in many cases the Indonesians were constrained in a security in a sort of way because of their lack of capability and

29:00 it was something that they didn't really want to emphasise. This we found in several other ways during our tour there. When I say our I mean Katherine and myself the Indonesians didn't want to become involved in stuff that they were not securely proficient at. They didn't want to, they wanted to keep it to themselves

29:30 to a much greater extent than perhaps Australians do. So my contacts with those former confrontase people were good, were good and we laughed and we joked and recognised shortcomings and capabilities and those sorts of things but without going into detail. You see

30:00 the Indonesians had something I figured Mig 15s about my guess, I can't remember now exactly it was a long time ago but my guess would be in the order of 30 to 40 Mig 15s. The things that the Russians were flying in Korea and they ran, they just plain ran out of parts and capacities to service these things

30:30 and presumably the Russians stopped providing them with them on a heavily discounted basis so they were packed away somewhere and we didn't know in Australia where they were. To the best of my knowledge we didn't know where they were but we did a, the Indonesians asked us to assess and comment on their

31:00 rocket capabilities. They had a particular rocket whose name I can't remember that they were developing and they asked us to send a team to have a look at that rocket and talk to them about it and perhaps advise them how it could be improved and so we were, a team came from Australia led by a research scientist from Woomera named Peter Twist and they took us out to a rocket range and sat us all

31:30 down in queues of elevated steps and fired off a heap of these rockets. It was pretty pathetic actually. I'm getting away from the point about the Migs but I just mentioned that. The first one got to about 100 feet and rolled over and crashed to the ground. I think they fired off 8 and 2 of them fired off sort of satisfactorily. The rest all just didn't get anywhere. They just pranged. It was pretty pathetic really.

32:00 How much of that was followed up later I don't know because that would have been purely Defence Australia and Defence Indonesia so we didn't become involved in that. But I didn't become involved in the gift of 12 Sabres to Indonesia and this is where the Migs come into it. I was a facilitator

32:30 and helper and a general attaché in setting this whole thing up with the Indonesians and a team came up to look at where these aircraft might be housed and we were taken over to a hangar and blow me down there were all these missing Mig 15s. All of them. We used to have one fly

33:00 over Jakarta from time to time and I would religiously report that. I couldn't see the number of it so I couldn't see the tail of it so I couldn't report that but I would report it and it was the only knowledge that we knew of their Mig capacity and all of a sudden. I wondered down in the next week or two and made a few notes and suddenly we knew where they were so things just happened sometimes.

Is that coincidence or were they,

33:30 **you know part of some unwritten thing about they were prepared to let you know where they were?**

I think they realised there was no point in concealing it any longer because that was where the Sabres were going to go and our people really wanted to know what the facilities would be so that they could guide them when the Sabres were flown up.

Had they been asked straight out where the Migs were?

34:00 I think so yeah. I made overtures at different times to the intelligence guy that looked after us in the Attaché Department but he wasn't going to say anything.

So tell me what is the role of, what is an attaché? What is an air attaché?

Air attaché? I'll just, I might have a note or two here just to get it right. It's fascinating stuff.

34:30 Attaché. Well firstly it was intelligence and I won't go too deeply into that because intelligence is intelligence but as I have made a few notes here for you my job was to advise the Ambassador on military air matters, all military air matters and where it was appropriate civil air matters and there was quite a bit involved in that.

35:00 Advise assistance to the ambassador on a wide range of military air and other matters which is sort of in the area we just spoke about. I coordinated the entire defence policy program with the Indonesians, so in a coordination sense I was looking after both army, navy and air

35:30 in terms of putting the whole thing together and in detail of course I was looking after air and that was a pretty big job. That was quite a big ongoing sort of arrangement. Representation. We averaged 5 nights a week at functions Kath and I and on some occasions she would go to one, I would go to another and we would meet up at a third. Seriously. It was just unending,

36:00 unending and not the sort of stuff you could avoid. It was all very, very important stuff. I've got contact and relations with government and military officials at all levels and there was a lot of that of course. The army looked after army stuff but when people came up to Australia on business, business people would come up from Australia and I would brief,

36:30 I would arrange meetings with their appropriate counterparts or government officials and I would brief them on how to conduct their meeting because most people didn't have an idea of how you conduct anything with Malaysians. People would come in like John Howard and grab an Indonesian hand and crush it. The Indonesians shake hands like this really

37:00 and it's just the way it is and you come in and crush a hand like that and it's a tremendous insult and if you don't know that you start the whole thing absolutely on the wrong foot. There are so many other aspects of meeting that you wouldn't know about if you didn't make it to first base. I mentioned this rocketry thing that went on but that was pretty much the sort of range of stuff that I looked after. It was pretty busy.

37:30 **So the defence co-operation that you were involved in or the co-ordination of, you must have been involved in the planning of that?**

Involved in the planning in the sense that for airforce requirements obviously I would be in a planning

sort of way with the air force people in determining

- 38:00 what they want. It had to be feasible and practical and I was able to help in that way. The army guys would do the same things with their counterparts and the navy would do the same with their counterparts, with his counterpart. The whole having been already, the whole requirement if you like already having been coordinated by Indonesian Defence by the higher authority there if you like and then they come to us and then we work out
- 38:30 how that may be put into place and then put to the Australian government through the Ambassador and it's taken from there. That's how the gift of the Sabres came about for example and that's how a lot of the training that took place between the Indonesian and Australian Army, how that came about. Through the efforts of the army attaché. That sort of thing.
- 39:00 I must say my Indonesian was pretty ordinary. I had a reasonably passive vocabulary. I could sit in on a meeting and pretty much understand what was going on but my active vocabulary couldn't handle it. When I was at the meeting they would all speak English which they were good at. I didn't have training. I had about 3 weeks at the language school in matters and
- 39:30 at the same thing I had to move the family and doing this and that. The army liaison officer he had a reasonable command of the language and that's valuable if you can speak to them in their own language, absolutely valuable.

So when were you Attaché? What year did you go over there?

'69 in the second half. From 1969 through '70 and '71. Just under 2 ½ years.

So what had happened since the Confrontation

40:00 that enabled this appointment to be able to happen?

Nominally, I guess nominally it was over for some time. It was still going on but nominally it was over for some time I think. You see I left Butterworths in 1966 and it was 3 ½ years later,

- 40:30 over 3 ½ years later that I went to Indonesia as Senior Attaché and I think there had always been right throughout the Confrontation, there had always been diplomatic relations between the 2 countries. Always and therefore there had always as far as I know, Jim Braney and Brackenridge that were there before me they had always been an Air Attaché at the Embassy or there had been Embassy in other words
- 41:00 because that was the conduit if you like for the diplomatic intercourse. That was one thing about Confrontation in Australia. The diplomatic relations were always in place which was good, which was very good. You see Confrontation is essentially against Malaysia not Australia
- 41:30 although of course we played our part on the Malaysian side, it was basically against the Malaysians.

Tape 9

- 00:31 I left Jakarta at the end of 1971 and went to Headquarters Support Command in Melbourne. My first role there was as the Staff Officer Organisation. Something which I really detested. I managed to play a lot of squash during that time but the miscellaneous business of almost anything that anybody in the headquarters wanted to pass on they passed through me and I had
- 01:00 some staff that were working on establishments for example. Establishments and strengths. Major new works and we would come up each year for the major new works required throughout the entire command passed out through a system which was finally approved and put through to head office. I had one fellow working on protocol.
- 01:30 Events, all that sort of stuff. I was also responsible for the RAAF Central Band and it's appointments. It was great, it was great. We got them into some wonderful places and I also had the registry to look after. I had something like 70 odd people and I forget how many million bloody files in this thing but there was a lot. I then moved from that appointment
- 02:00 to that as Senior Administrative Staff Officer which the former SOR role comes under anyway. So I was then responsible for the supervision and control of branch activities in 7 divisions and those divisions included organisation, legal, medical, accounting. What else did
- 02:30 I have there? Personnel, publications, women's RAAF and the Headquarters Unit. The Headquarters Unit was not a division but it was one of my responsibilities and that was pretty full on and that's when I retired in January 1976 I think it was. January 1976 I ended my air force career.

And you ended with what rank?

What rank?

03:00 It was an all, Group Captain. So there you are, that was the air force.

And had you still been managing to fly during those final years when you weren't with the squadron?

No, not during that one. In previous appointments at Support Command for example when I was Staff Commander Air Training I would convert to Winjeels and Macchi and the CT4 and aircraft like that

03:30 because it was very much in my daily work. That was the sort of stuff that I was looking after. Pilots, air electronic officer and mechanic and that sort of thing but the only flying I have done at recent times it as Point Cook in the museum aircraft that are in the aerobatic club. Pit Specials and occasionally they say come aboard a lesson and show us a few aerobatics and I come back and they said, "You haven't lost your touch," and I say, "I have lost my touch"

04:00 but I still love it.

So what do you think has been your, this is cliched sort of question, but your greatest achievements during the air force?

Oh my gosh.

It doesn't have to be just one.

No I think it has been probably my

04:30 fighter experience and what I have been able to pass on to other fighter pilots. I think that would have to be, in its various forms and various squadrons. I think I have been privileged to have commanded 3 fighter squadrons for example. Very few people have done that. Two of them were citizen squadrons and one of them was a Sabre squadron but they were 3 fighter squadrons and they had a very important role and I think I passed on a lot of very important operational knowledge during that time.

05:00 That's about it. There are other things of course but that's about all I think of at the moment.

Which planes did you enjoy flying the most?

I have been asked that many times and I find it difficult to select one. The Vampires are those

05:30 that I flew the most and which I did the most demonstration work and so on and I came to love the aeroplane. That's a strong contender. The Meteor I don't think comes into contention because it wasn't, it doesn't hold many good memories for me as a fighting aeroplane and it was a pretty much a must sort of

06:00 aeroplane to me. The Sabre would have to be a contender. That was a lovely aeroplane but I only flew it for a couple of years so the Vampire still stays ahead a bit. The Mustang, I'd have to go close to that because you see I led Australia's last piston engine combat mission.

06:30 I led the very last mission in Korea and then flew in the very first jet mission in Korea for Australia so the Mustang has a lot of very strong memories for me and most of them are interesting and many of them are very near dangerous but it was an aeroplane that could get you out of the muck pretty well. So I suppose I would have to say, I suppose I would have to say the Mustang. When I look at others;

07:00 Tiger Moths, Wirraways, CT4, Winjeel and other aircraft like that they are pretty ordinary. A bit civil sort of ordinary you know. So I think I would have to go for Mustang. Probably because I'm old and it's very old and...

Have you told us about the final mission in the Mustang?

07:30 **Did you? It might be worth, if you haven't already, recording that?**

No I didn't.

Could you recall that one for us?

The reason I led it was because we were going off to do a bombing mission and the weather was pretty bad and a fellow named Des Murphy who I think is still alive. Des was leading that and I was his deputy leader and the other 2 I can't remember off hand but Des became, his aircraft became U/S [Unserviceable]

08:00 and he turned back or I don't think he even got airborne so I became the leader on the last mission. I forget what it was we bombed. We found something through the cloud and that was the last Mustang mission for Australia. I didn't realise it at the time but I discovered it within a day or two which I feel quite chuffed about in many ways. There were quite a few firsts and quite a few lasts in a way in some of the

08:30 things and the interesting thing in a way too. I keep using the word interesting but it is interesting. Although I was one of the RAAF quite senior fighter pilots and pretty well recognised I never did a tour of, fighter tour at our fighter base at Williamtown. I was posted there but didn't get there. I went there

on a couple of occasions to do conversions and the

09:00 tactic phase of the fighter combat instructors course of the Vampires for example. Conversion to Sabres and odd things like that but never completed a tour at Williamstown and I don't know of anyone else who has been a long term fighter pilot who hasn't done a tour at Williamstown. A lot of mine has been overseas.

A minute ago I had a really good question but it's gone. Maybe it will come back to me, it was to do with your last mission.

09:30 **We will see if it comes back. So let's move on. You have discussed your retirement from the air force. As we were saying off camera, take us through what you did after you left the airforce but with particular focus on those things that we discussed. Let's not skip anything.**

I won't elaborate on anything. The first thing I did was join Tennis Australia. The Lawn Tennis Association of Australia as the Director of Junior Development

10:00 and I developed long term programs, international and national programs and coordinated the (UNCLEAR - approachedness) by the State Associations and the professional coaches to develop Australia's youth to top world standard and I believe we achieved that and they are still using pretty much a similar sort of programme these days. So that was Tennis Australia.

You would have seen some rising young stars in that time?

Oh yes.

10:30 Pat Cash was one of them for example. Jason Stoltenberg, the present Captain of the Davis Cup squad. Fitzy. There were quite a lot, quite a lot that came through my programs and quite a lot went on overseas tours that I arranged with the Americans and Europeans so I think that was fairly productive.

11:00 The next major thing I did was join the Australian and New Zealand Scientific Exploration Society, ANZSES as their Executive Director. That was started by Dr Phillip Law who is almost the father of Antarctica in many ways and a marvellous guy and so I took that on. At the time they

11:30 were running one major youth expedition a year. Generally 50, 55 or 60 young people into rugged or unexplored parts of Australia doing field work in several natural sciences. In my time there I raised that from one youth expedition to a mixed adult expedition to a women's expedition and we then moved

12:00 the operation, we expanded the operation to Central Australia and that sort of stuff. We produced a lot of good stuff for National and State authorities to preserve and enhance the environment and I think that was, we certainly developed young people. It was very good stuff. I went on some of them but mainly my job was back here,

12:30 arranging and organising and getting the show on the road.

You mentioned one off camera earlier. Maybe it would be good to hear that again about Mosman?

Oh yes. I had on an expedition called Devil's Thumb in when was it? January 1989. A botany group found on the top of one of the highest peaks west of Mosman

13:00 in Queensland an aircraft wreck. They didn't know what it was at the time. They soon called up the air force through me and we got a team in the air and they got a clearing and dropped in a chopper and found an aircraft a C47 Dakota that had belonged to 120 Squadron. A Dutch fighter Squadron in Merauke,

13:30 Merauke? Is that right? Merauke in Dutch New Guinea. It had come down I think on 6 September 1944 to bring some of their fighter pilots down on rest and recreation and it had 2 Australians aboard. One was an air force squadron leader and the other was an army lieutenant which I guess had been liaison people with the squadron

14:00 and they came down on and couldn't get into Cairns and started to go back to Merauke. The next day they came down again and Cairns advised them that the weather was no good but they would be able to get into Townsville. They don't know from the records whether they were setting out to go to Townsville or back to Merauke but in the event they climbed their way and banged into the top of this mountain and so what was it? All that time later

14:30 they were found almost 40 years later. So when I talk about into rugged and sometimes unexplored parts of Australia that hadn't been explored for all that time anyway. I can tell you a bit of stuff but it's probably appropriate for the camera or not.

So the remains of the crew were still there?

Yeah they were all, the next of kin were all tracked down and they were brought in from Holland or from the Netherlands

15:00 and strangely enough quite a few of them were in Australia. They had a big ceremony in Cairns of which

I've got photographs which show that people finally put their relatives to rest. It was, it was a very moving thing really, very moving. They sent me down a couple of bits and pieces and you know there is a little bit of an insert for a Dalton computer

15:30 that's all broken up and an old padlock that's all rusted and doesn't work anymore and little identification plates that they sent me down. I'll hang on to me. They will be a story one day. Very good. I actually conducted 28 expeditions and that involved something like 800 expeditioners and over 4,000 hours in the field.

16:00 It was a pretty decent sort of operation and I think from memory we worked in about in the shade of about 20 of the natural sciences. We are talking entomology and reptiles and botany and rare and endangered species and that sort of stuff. I enjoyed it.

Any other examples of those?, With ANZSES,

16:30 **any other expeditions that are worth mentioning?**

Well yes we did. There were some of the, some of the species that hadn't been found and were thought to be extinct for ages and ages were discovered by a lot of good detective work but for the rest it was just good solid science work in the field. Working away and

17:00 in the main there were not too many accidents because these people are working in very rugged conditions. It all worked pretty well.

And how did you come to get involved?

The position was advertised and at the time my youth development programmes were going to Sydney to be looked after by John Newcombe

17:30 because he had incredible sponsorship there and it was a more appropriate for it to be anyway so I was sort of moving out of that and this was just advertised so I went along and had a talk and they said, "Yep, you're in." So I was very pleased with that. Good stuff.

I note here that there was a period with real estate before.

Oh yeah. I went with LJ Hooker for just a very few months.

18:00 They wanted me to look after businesses and this was up in the Calisto area, up in that general area in the hills. We went along and I sold one and then I decided we had better do some research. I did some research that told me that once these businesses turned over in the main in that sort of area and it told me the number of real estate agents in that area and

18:30 the number who work on businesses as well as ordinary houses and one or two answers that I came up with I decided that it was absolutely absurd to try and join in and sell businesses in that area. Even if there were no other real estates in there because the turnover of businesses is just so small. So I moved out of that and as soon as I was able to, as soon as I was offered this job with ANZSES and I was just as pleased

19:00 because I really didn't like it all that much. It wasn't terribly inspiring.

So how long were you with ANZSES?

Close to 10 years. A few 10 year spells here and there. I sometimes wonder where it all fitted in but it was about 9 and something. 9 ½ years or something like that.

And what next? You retired again?

19:30 I don't know if I retired again.

There's a bit more to come I think.

Let me look. Then I went to, sorry I'm just trying to collect my thoughts here. Yeah then I started

20:00 working on the Kista Dan project. The idea was to try and recover the Kista Dan from her berth in Greece heavily converted from an Antarctic ship. The Kista Dan was probably the largest of the 4 that we had commissioned if I remember rightly and it had been all sorts of ships. It had been to the North Pole, it had done

20:30 charter work, private yacht and at this stage it had become a dive, undersea dive training ship And the idea was to buy her, bring her back to Australia, convert her to her original condition and set her up as an Antarctic Museum. We got, I worked on that

21:00 for a fair while and everything was in place except the money, except the money. I had deals, I had negotiated a price with the owners. I had worked out with some people in Melbourne the means and the cost of restoring her to her original condition. I had worked with Ports Victoria to survey the area where we would berth her which was

- 21:30 opposite the Science Museum, just a little way out from the Science Museum and they in fact were going to do a little bit of deepening for her. We were going to put a footbridge across the road and we were going to set it up as an Antarctic Museum and things looked pretty rosy on the money front but it just didn't turn out so we had to abandon that one and that was a great shame. A great shame. There is an Antarctic Museum of some sort
- 22:00 in Hobart I understand but this would have been a world recognised one. We had it really planned and you would understand that and from there I went to NASMA. Yeah, National Air and Space Museum. The idea was to create a National Air and Space Museum
- 22:30 embracing all 8 annuls, vast area and it would include the RAAF Museum and all of its elements, exhibitions and restorations and building and all that sort of stuff. It would cover space, communications, military, aviation history
- 23:00 and a couple of others that I just can't bring readily to mind and we had done a mountain of work on that thing. We really had and it was really top professional work. Bill Belton was heading the thing and I was his, his fundraiser and other things, planner and we had another guy with us who had been very, very much in with government people and had lots of
- 23:30 influence there with State government and it was, we were in fact ready to go. The Commonwealth had agreed to match the State contribution. The State was going to be such and such. I'd rustled up about I don't know I can't remember exactly 4 or 5 or 6 million dollars or something and we wanted about 35. The State had agreed to come and we were about to announce it on the Monday if I remember rightly and on the Friday Jeff Kennett pulled the plug and it was abandoned just like
- 24:00 that. And it was a terrible shame. It was going to be a world class museum. Top world class museum. So that was a disappointment but it was an interesting, it was a very educational exercise as far as I was concerned. What did I do from there? That was pretty major actually.

What was the, what reasoning were you given

- 24:30 **2 days before the announcement?**

It had been building up apparently. It was pretty much political. Bill Belton knows the story. I never did come to go through the whole thing but it was just dropped like that, dropped just like that and we were celebrating almost We were about to announce it to the world and the whole, the whole western corridor leading out to

- 25:00 Werribee and all that sort of thing were wrapped in the whole thing because it was going to enhance their whole area. But there you are.

And it hasn't been pursued with the current government?

No. No. The pursuit there has been to convince the current government, current Federal government not to sell Point Cook. It is part of our aviation heritage. Point Cook is the longest running operational airfield, non-stop operational airfield in the

- 25:30 world. It is part of our aviation heritage. All the earliest flights started from Point Cook. Aviation started at Point Cook plus much more. It represents our aviation heritage and the government wanted to sell it. Point Cook Operations Limited are interested people who have been working on this and working on it and the word has come through recently that there will be a long term lease
- 26:00 along the similar lines apparently as the Port Nepean thing you know down on the peninsula and everybody is rapt about that. It's been a long haul but from that I've been helping at the RAAF Association. The RAAF Association comprises people who are pretty old and many of whom want things done
- 26:30 without really contributing too much and it was just about going down the gurgler and we set out with a small team to set up an Air Forces Club which is now in operation to support the RAAF Association and eventually to take it over I guess as people die off and that's moving okay but it is a struggle. It will take a long haul to get it up to
- 27:00 where we figure the thing it should be. I'm not currently involved in that at the moment. I'm backing off a few things. At the moment I'm just taking on a course and I'm not getting any time to get out to the damn thing at all. From now on I get asked to do things. I get asked to write things for magazines and people to interview and all that sort of thing and it all takes time. It all takes research
- 27:30 and I've got other things to do.

So how are you occupying most of your time at the present?

For the last 3 or 4 days I've been working on this. Tracking it down. I'm doing a bit with the RAAF Association from time to time. My daughter has just built that house and there has been an

- 28:00 ongoing thing about that. The builder, is this going on tape?

Yes. You can stop there if you like.

I'll stop there I think.

Well there's one thing. There's the Korea mission. Maybe we should finish up with that.

How's the time?

No, no we said we needed to stop there.

I'll see if I can find that. Incidentally

28:30 Darren McNamara who is involved in our Association for the RAAF Heritage Awards. He won it in our section. I've got a copy of it if you care to have a look at it. The Korea mission was in April 2001 as I recall and it was, oh hell, sorry.

29:00 I had a few little notes on that. Here we go? You can stop that thing can't you.

Yeah.

A Korean mission was organised in April 2001 to celebrate the 50th anniversary, I don't know which part of the war it was. Presumably the start but it was

29:30 a bit later than that and there were about, there were a number of veterans involved in this. The RAAF selected 4 and I was fortunate to be one of them. Four of the fighter pilots, I'm sorry that included a gentleman who died recently who flew 350 something

30:00 missions in and out of Korea in support in the C47s, the Dakotas. An incredible performance. He was there for the entire war. The other 2 were Dick Pressel and another fellow called Dick Turner who flew something like 240 missions there. There was also Lou Spence's wife. You remember the CO of the fighter squadron and one of the nursing sisters

30:30 who spent a lot of time in Korea attending to the sick and wounded all over the place. Her name was Pam Lee, she became Pam Campbell. She married again. So that was the RAAF component basically. There was the, there were Presidents of the National Services League of the Australian Vets, the International Korean Vets and all that sort of stuff and various esteemed

31:00 gentlemen. Admirals, Generals and the Repatriation Commissioner who was also the Mission Director who was Mr Paul Stevens and what I wanted to do really was to run very briefly through those places that we visited but they were National Museums, National cemeteries both Korean and Australian,

31:30 United Nations. We visited battlefields where the Australians had fought. Some of the most significant battles. Kapyong and Maryang San and others and all in all it was a memorial thing. I suppose the thing that I remember most strongly about it. We went down to Pusan from Seoul and had various ceremonies there

32:00 at which some 80 nations attended I suppose. We had our little Australian bit and they were playing the National anthems of countries who participated and it was all very moving and wreaths were moved and pots here and blown over and all this sort of thing and it came to the Australian National Anthem and every Australian there sang it and it was just...

32:30 People I'm sure wondered that the Australians went along and sang their National Anthem. It got the old heart going you know. It was tremendous but all in all it was a wonderful experience and I came away. I wanted to go away on that mission to convince myself that what we had done was right and worthwhile and I came away with absolutely no

33:00 doubts. No doubts at all and when I talk to Korean friends from time to time who still can't make contact with their grandmother or their relatives and stuff like that because there is no contact, no communication. It is just impossible to have communication. It is as repressive as that and had it not been

33:30 for our efforts it would have been as repressive as that in the south and elsewhere as well. I am very strongly convinced that I have qualms, no doubts about what we did was right so yeah, that was interesting to go back because we flew over that terribly rugged terrain that we used to try and find our way around at ground level. We stood at the airport at

34:00 Pusan and tried to work out where the base could be and I'm damned if we could. Pusan is now surrounded around the entire bay with would be average I suppose 22 to 23 storey buildings. Flat buildings just side by side. When you come they are absolutely surrounding the entire bay. It's almost unbelievable

34:30 and we tried to identify terrain that we remembered from the take off and that sort of stuff but you couldn't. It's all changed and was that long ago. But all in all I feel quite proud to have taken part in that mission and it did do something for me.

Well that sounds like a fantastic place for us to wind up the interview.

35:00 **Is there anything else you would like to say briefly before we... We've only got a minute or so**

left on the tape.

No, look I suppose what I would like to say is to thank you both for your courtesy and just the way you've gone about it. I think it was wonderful and I'm very happy to be involved in this.

Well it's been a pleasure talking to you. Thanks a lot Les.

INTERVIEW ENDS