Australians at War Film Archive

John Clark (John) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 6th May 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/18

Tape 1

00:39 **Okay John as discussed, we'll just start with an overview of your life history**

Okay.

To date.

Starting as a young fellow?

Absolutely.

Yes I'll one of a family of seven. Four girls came first, then the three boys. I was the eldest boy

01:00 and we lived in this area back in just although I was born in Leichhardt but the family lived most of its life in Hurstville Grove which is not far away from here and that's where I grew up, went to school, high school. Was in the Boy Scouts and the Rovers you know I got that kind of background and that kind of outdoor pursuits in the Scouts I think led to

01:30 kind of, oh I suppose an idea of adventures and that kind of thing and when in those days of course the all my family went through the Depression and so there was an emphasis at home when the children were heading for employment the important thing was to get a safe job you know, a job with the government. So when I went to Canterbury Boys' High School where our prime minister

02:00 went of course, along with other well known people, but my the emphasis as I said well from home was to try and get a public service job as we called it in those days. So that's what happened to me I got a.... I won a scholarship and went into the New South Wales public service and fortunately for the way my career panned out where I went to work was at the Sydney Tech [Technical] College. Amongst

02:03 a lot of other people connected with education and so the work I was doing I was attached to the first vocational guidance office that they opened at the tech and that brought me into even more contact with a lot of educators so I carried on with my schooling at night-time and got what we called the Leaving Certificate in those days and by the time I'd finished that at night time,

03:00 the job I had at the tech was a job as a clerk, a junior clerk they called it in those days and fortunately for me some of the teachers I worked with at the tech were, one of them in particular was my English teacher at Canterbury High School and that was a big help to me because English was my best subject and it meant that you know, I had his support and

03:30 when the when I got my Leaving Certificate of course war had broken out, so like a lot of other fellows I thought, well I wasn't interested in the army you know, the stories from World War I of the infantry and all that kind of mayhem in the trenches, so the air force seemed to be a nicer kind of service life so I applied for air crew and that. I was selected

04:00 for air crew and as you know, you go you go to an initial training school first where at the end of that you get sorted out into pilots and navigators and wireless operator air gunners and obviously they must have thought I might make a pilot, but I was taken down to an air base in Melbourne called Laverton and I was put into the cockpit of a plane to see how I would reach the pedals, but

04:30 unfortunately I'm sort of long in the body and short in the legs, so I didn't qualify for pilot, so the next thing I was wireless operator air gunner, did six months wireless training in Ballarat then a month's training in gunnery which was at Evans Head in the north of New South Wales and then of course that happened in... I graduated, must have been the end of February I think in 1942 yes

05:00 and of course as Japan had entered the war in December '41 a lot of the graduates of the Empire Air Training Scheme courses were kept back in Australia whereas before most of them had been going to Europe and Canada and then England but quite a few of the graduates of the courses completed about that time were kept in Australia to man the new squadrons as it were that the government decided we

had to have, so I moved around a bit from a few stations until August

05:30 1942 when I went I was sent to 6th Squadron. 6th Squadron was a Lockheed Hudson squadron and it was based in Richmond, New South Wales but it had received instructions that the whole squadron was to move up to Papua New Guinea in order to, 'cause the allies as you know, the allies had broken the Japanese codes so they knew that the Japanese had designs on landing in

06:00 New Guinea and so our squadron was sent north to first of all, our first base was Horn Island, which is opposite Thursday Island, and we had flights operating from Port Moresby and Milne Bay because the allies had information that the Japs were going to land at Milne Bay and so our squadron had operations coming out of Moresby

06:30 and also out of Milne Bay and the operations or the crew that I was in of course, we were flying operations from Moresby and Milne Bay and when we were there and the Japanese landed at Milne Bay I think they landed at Milne Bay late in August and so that was a very, very busy time for us but I probably will come

07:00 back to that in more detail

Absolutely.

I completed my operations in PNG [Papua New Guinea] with 6th Squadron 'til about July '43 and then with the rest of the crew we were sort of, although I, the pilot and the other wireless air gunner 'cause a crew of a Hudson was a pilot, a navigator and two wireless operator air gunners and the pilot and the other wireless air gunner and myself we were sent to East

07:30 Sale, which was a bigger bomber, number one bomber OTU [Operational Training Unit] and we went on the instructional staff there. We were there for I suppose about fourteen, fifteen months and then as was happening the Americans started to supply the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] with the Liberator, the bomber, the heavy bombers and so the core of the crews that were made up for the Liberators came from experienced crews that had already done an operation like the pilots

08:00 and the wireless ops and the navigators so I picked up with my old pilot and my fellow WAG [wireless air gunner] as we say and we went to back to New Guinea to do a training course under the Americans on the Liberators and after we completed that course we went to Lake Byrne which is in the Darling Downs area of Queensland and formed

08:30 or reformed 23 Squadron. 23 Squadron had been a squadron I think of Vulture Vengeance dive bombers but they were, [General] MacArthur didn't like them so he pulled them out of service and so 23 Squadron became a Liberator bomber squadron. After a sort of orientation period then the whole squadron moved to a strip in the Northern Territory called Long Strip and we started operating then over what was then the Netherlands East Indies

09:00 over Java and the islands that run from Java back towards Timor and over Borneo and what they call the Halmaheras [islands] so we did quite a few operations there and then war finished of course. We'd gone to that area in about April 1945, that's right

09:30 and so we operated until August when VE VJ Day was declared but our squadron, these big planes which we used could be used as transports, we dropped all our gunners we had in the Liberator, there were eleven people in a Liberator. They had one, two, three, four straight air gunners operating the four turrets in the Liberator, two wireless

10:00 operators, two pilots and a flight engineer so the planes were stripped down to the basic air crew, flight engineer, one radio operator, two pilots and a navigator and then we carried on doing sort of transport work flying supplies up to the islands, bringing back POWs [prisoners of war] or ex-POWs and medical cases and so on and we kept on doing that until

10:30 well most of the troops and that had been brought back and I then got out of the air force, I think it was March 1946 and having qualified as I mentioned earlier with entry to the university at the tech under what was called the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, I enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts degree in Sydney

11:00 University but I got my job back at the tech so I was doing that university course part time and one year full time under the scheme, and carried on and did a Diploma of Education and then I was able to transfer to the teaching side of the tech and I became a lecturer in English in what they call the certificate courses at the tech and as a extra job, because by that time

11:30 my wife and I got married at the end of the war and of course with children coming along I took extra work and my extra work was marking correspondence lessons and through that, I was then appointed to, 'cause the tech had a very big correspondence college. We had something like forty thousand students doing technical courses through correspondence and through my

12:00 work as a part time marker of correspondence lessons the job of deputy head of the correspondence course became vacant and I was appointed to it and so my straight out teaching sort of moved a little bit, I became an editor of correspondence lessons as well as still doing some teaching, but let's see, I

was there for about

12:30 six years I think ,something like that when my boss, she got a Fulbright scholarship to the States and in that she also was had a visit to UNESCO [United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization] and UNESCO was very interested in making sort of some projects within correspondence education, or using correspondence education and so

13:00 they commissioned her to write a book about it and while she was doing that, a job came up in UNESCO for a specialist in correspondence education and she wrote to me and suggested I apply for it, which I did and I was, I got appointed to it you know, which was handy and the job was based in the Middle East, the UNESCO was starting off an in-service teacher training program for refugee teachers in the Palestine refugee

13:30 schools. The United Nations after the Arab Israeli war of 1948 when that was settled and of course a lot of the Palestinians under the force of the war they moved, a lot of them fled out of Palestine and some went to Egypt, some went to Lebanon, some went to Syria, some went to Jordan and those populations of

14:00 refugees of course were in camps and so the UN decided, "Well we've got to do something about their education." because the local governments wouldn't pick up the education for the refugees from Palestine, so an organisation was created called the UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees and they started to create their own schools, primary schools mainly, and

14:30 who did they get for teachers? They grabbed the, you might say the best educated Palestinians, but none of them or very few of them a few had been trained as teachers but most of them hadn't so UNESCO took up the contract of making a project of in-service teacher training to train all these untrained teachers in the refugee schools and so there was a team of international specialists created in the first place

15:00 and one of the positions was a specialist in correspondence education, because they felt that one way they had to do this training was through correspondence lessons so that's how I came to be in it. In this project we had five international specialists. One was headed this was headed by a Swiss, we had two Englishmen, myself an Australian, we had an American on program instruction and we

15:30 had a Palestinian who was the senior Arab educator you might say. So the project got underway and we designed courses, first of all a two year course for the primary school teachers and the course ran in using seminars after work hours for the teachers, after they'd finished their schooling like teaching, they were put into groups and they were

16:00 given sort of direct teaching by oral instruction and in the meantime we had a program of correspondence lessons. Now you might say well all you guys, your first language is English not Arabic, so what we did, and this is where my job came in, we approached the specialists in various specialisations in the local universities to write lessons for us.

16:30 For example, lessons in Arabic, lessons in mathematics which were written in Arabic, lessons in physics which were in Arabic of course and our Arab specialist was the one who checked that everything was right and then it was my job as the correspondence specialist to see to the production of them, and then they were distributed around to the various fields. We had teachers doing courses in Gaza, in the West Bank of Jordan and in Jordan proper and in Syria and in Lebanon so you can imagine that

17:00 it was quite a big project and each year when the school vacations were on we ran full time summer courses bringing all the teachers that were in our courses we brought them in to the summer courses in the same various countries and gave them two weeks of sort of intensive instruction on teacher training methods and after two years that first course we ran, we had to

17:30 do it naturally enough in groups because we couldn't take all the teachers at once, we had to do them in batches and I think after four years that would have meant two one, two, three courses in four years we'd trained the bulk of the primary refugee teachers and then we undertook what was called in those in the Middle East they were called preparatory level. Preparatory level was the equivalent to our first three years of secondary education

18:00 and they were still United Nations schools for the Palestinian pupils and teachers and so then we had to go into more detail, particularly in bringing their level of expertise in various subjects like mathematics, history, geography, English, we were always, for the Palestinians English was always their first foreign language because of the British mandate until 1948 and so the next job

18:30 was to start what we called the preparatory teachers' courses and so that (UNCLEAR). In the meantime because each of us as international specialists we had to train a local. That's the UNESCO system, you train a local to take over and the specialist would then go back home or do something else and I trained a specialist in the correspondence education methods to take over from me and

19:00 so when he was finished, like he'd finished his training and that in the meantime I'd taken four years leave without pay from the New South Wales Government to do this work and after the four years the government said to me, "Okay you've either got to resign from us or come back and pick up your job." Well at that stage we made it because the children had grown up well they were two of them were late,

we had three children, two of them were late teenagers and one was an adult so we said, "Well it's a family

19:30 decision, shall Dad stay in the UN or will Dad come home?" and they said, "Oh well, we want you to stay" because they had free visits, the kids, the young ones had free visits during schools to come and stay with us you see, so that was a great experience for them and in the meantime we used to get home leave every two years so we were always coming back and keeping in touch with their family and so on, so the decision was stay with the UN

20:00 and the UN offered me another job within the same organisation as almost the assistant director of the program as a matter of fact, so I stayed and finished my career with the UN and so when I retired in 1982, that's right 1982, and I'd only been home, my wife and I we took a half 'round the world trip home

20:30 took our time coming home from Vienna. By that time by the way we'd been evacuated to Vienna because of the civil war in Lebanon. Lebanon had been the headquarters base for our organisation and because of the civil war in Lebanon we were evacuated and that that was in 1975 the civil war broke out, and the first time we were evacuated to Jordan and we were there for two years and then things got better in Lebanon so we

21:00 went back and reopened headquarters in Lebanon again, and then of course in I think it was April '78, the Israelis invaded southern Lebanon so things got bad again so they said, "Okay, look we're going to move you people out again." the headquarters that is, not the field office. Field officers had to stay in their various countries so we were then moved to Vienna where by that time the UN had established a new a big international UN centre in Vienna and we went into that

21:30 centre but still operating our projects from Vienna in the Middle East. Strangely enough it was easier communication wise to work from Vienna than work from Lebanon because of the conditions in Lebanon. In fact for quite a few months the airport in Beirut was closed so you couldn't get out of Lebanon by plane so it was easier to do our work I did still a lot of field trips and did them from Vienna

22:00 so we were four years in Vienna from August '78 I think to when I retired in May 1982 and we were only home a couple of months, that's right, when I got a call from Vienna the headquarters in Vienna saying that you might remember there was an international force created to persuade the to come in and fill the gap they persuaded the Israelis to move out of Lebanon which they did

22:30 and the Israeli force the international force was created of Americans, French, British and Italians I think that's right and they said, "Look we want people to go back into you've got some experience to go back into Lebanon and start getting the schools going again, the refugee schools." So they asked me would I go back so I said, "Yes okay." I went back for three months in I did a briefing back

23:00 in Vienna and then I went back to Lebanon and that was interesting getting back into Lebanon without any aeroplanes. I had to fly to Syria and then a UN car took me back to Lebanon and there was a no man's land between where the Israelis had their lines and the Syrians had their lines 'cause the Syrians were in the middle so we had to pick our way over a mine a mined area and the road was a bit tricky. Anyway we got through alright

23:30 so I operated there for three months and in that time one of the nasty experiences I hadn't been long back in Lebanon in Beirut when we got word of a massacre in the refugee camps and you might remember this is what happened. The Israelis had stood aside and they let some of the Christian militias in Lebanon go into the Palestine refugee camps and they

24:00 sort of massacred a lot of women and children and people came, some of my Palestinian staff and said, "Look there are some refugee women crying at the entrance to our compound." and then we let them in and we found out the story and so the word got passed on to our chiefs and that's how in a way we were just lucky that there happened to be a French TV crew there at the same time and

24:30 one of our other specialists, an Englishman, he took them in into a back entrance into the camp and that's how the news was broken to the world of this massacre in the refugee camps because this French TV crew were fortunately were able to get in and take photos of a lot of this what was happening. Anyway at the end of three months my contract was up and I had to decide whether to… Joan wasn't able to come and

25:00 live with me at that time so I thought, "Oh that's enough, I'll come back home" and so

Fantastic.

And then there's been what twenty years of very busy retirement.

Yes, what do you what do you do to keep yourself busy?

Oh all kinds of things. Well we play tennis, we're members of our local very active flora and fauna association we go on to bush walks and have a meeting every month with them. We've become regular subscribers to

25:30 the theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, and the Ensemble Theatre Company, subscribers to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. We go to the symphony concerts and air crew reunion groups. You know once I've

come back home I've rejoined the air force association and so there's meetings there and reunions and

26:00 Anzac Day marches to go to and of course with the children having grown up in the meantime. Unfortunately our middle child, we had two girls and a boy, our middle child died of cancer about ten years ago. That was a very hard burden and but they're both living down in the ACT [Australian Capital Territory]. The eldest girl, she's got quite a successful career in, well she was in the each of the Commonwealth departments

26:30 and she finally decided she'd move to Canberra when so she moved to Canberra recently, oh not recently a few years ago and our son's been in Canberra for quite awhile. He's a computer programmer and he was working for the Commonwealth Government until the present Liberal Government got in 'cause they made a lot of public servants' jobs redundant so he actually joined a, well he's virtually working for himself but he's got a contract with the government doing the work he was doing as a paid employee

27:00 so that's how it goes and so that's how we do it we keep ourselves busy and

More of a social life

Huh?

Very, very busy. More of a social life than us two combined.

Yes that's right. As we say, some of us say, as we get to our you know, with our tennis we're all a group of, you might say geriatrics, we play every week. We won't be able to play tomorrow unfortunately because it's raining but well, I wouldn't be playing anyway but

27:30 you know we keep active that way and

Yeah that's fantastic

So we often say we I don't know how we had time to go to work it was.

Yes that's very true.

Now what do you want to go back over?

I do. I'd like to go right back to the beginning if we could and this will be much more question and answer stuff but I'd like to start if we could back at the Depression your you memories of the Depression and

Yeah.

And growing up

28:00 **through that.**

Yes that was I in a way 'cause I was still let's see 1935 I guess would be the '34, '35 might have been the depth of the Depression. My Dad was out of work most of the time. He was on the dole then digging ditches and he was naturally enough a pretty unhappy man. My four sisters

28:30 all older and of course being young people because they managed to go through, the Depression was easing, they managed to get jobs but my father didn't so there was a bit of friction in the home because they were the breadwinners and he wasn't you know he….

He found that hard.

Found it hard but fortunately all my sisters got jobs. Finally my Dad did get work again. He was an electrician. He got work

29:00 in his job fortunately, he had worked in the years I was in the air force so that was a big help and my younger two brothers and one of my sisters all joined the air force, there were four of us in the air force and as a matter of fact that's as a sideline that's how I met Joan because she was in the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force]. She was in the same training course as my sister

29:30 and through that introduction that's how we met but going back a bit earlier to the Depression years as I mentioned earlier this is why Mum would hammer into us you know, particularly the boys 'cause the boys were the ones who were supposed to have the careers you know you had to get a public service job if you could and fortunately my academic record wasn't too bad so I got managed to get a as I said a public service pass

30:00 but one of the big I suppose saving graces for me as a as a youngster was the Boy Scouts you know. I'd joined them during the Depression and that was a big help I think being in the Scouts.

What sort of things would they do back then?

In our meetings we met once one night every week and of course you learnt the usual skills you know tying knots and camp craft and safety measures of being in the outdoors you know and of course we did Scout camps and you learnt how to put up tents and how to cook and all that kind of thing. That was a big help yeah.

Was there any particular focus in terms of jobs that the Scouts would do because of the Depression that they wouldn't have done normally?

Can't think of anything Chris [interviewer], no.

31:00 I think you might say an all 'round education as it were. Well to use the cliché 'Education for life' I guess. Helping each other, helping the community, that was also involved in Scouting, helping the community and all the sort of as a through the various stages there were a number of what they call proficiency badges and they covered a wide range

31:30 of activities. One of the ones which was one of the hardest jobs which one of the hardest proficiency badges was what's called a pathfinder where you had go off with your own on your own or with a mate and do a trek through, not down any beaten tracks you know, cross country. I know the one I did with a was with a mate, we sort of crossed the Royal National Park from west to east not following

32:00 any tracks. We sort of what they call bush bashing that kind of thing you know. All those experiences I think helped to give you a you know, you might say a well rounded education apart outside of books and that and all I did all of that during mostly the Depression years and of course once I got a job with the with the government. I was waiting a few

32:30 months before I got a job and well I did to fill in I got a part time job with our local baker you know in the days when they used to the baker's cart was pulled by a horse you know we had a lot of little bakers not like the big companies now and so that was very useful too for a few weeks I did that. Helping the baker go 'round on his horse and cart and deliver the bread and then of course the opening came I was,

33:00 my name came up to get a job with the tech and that's what I did yeah. One of the interesting experiences in the early days of the tech was, and this in a way is related to the situation in Europe, we had a lot of Austrian Jews coming out and we were giving them vocational testing to try and fit them into jobs and that kind of thing and I remember as I mentioned I was

33:30 attached to the guidance office in the tech so it was a matter of not only helping to find work but mainly to put them into courses related to the jobs they were getting. That was the main job of the vocational guidance job of the tech so that was a bit of an eye opener to what was happening in Europe 'cause when I was a young fellow growing up you're not all that politically conscious, well I don't think our being young people were. I noticed when I went to work in the Middle East how politically conscious the young refugees

34:00 were, Palestinian refugees were very politically conscious but back here you weren't, you know I guess in a way there was no need. That's one thing Mum and Dad did, they looked after what party they were going to vote for and what was happening in Federal Government or the State Government.

So through that you got you got a an idea of what was actually happening in Europe and the rise of Hitler?

Yes yes we did

For example?

Yes we did. Mm.

Right.

And then of course

34:30 then from that you started to take a bit more notice of what was going on in the papers and on the radio and of course when war broke out we put our names down. It was a while before we got a call up because there was a rush for the air force. In the meantime we were able to do some study for the kind of things that if you want to go into air crew physics and maths were important of course. Some who were interested in the wireless side of it,

35:00 local post offices in those days of course, post offices used the Morse code quite a lot and so quite in quite a few towns the postmasters ran volunteer Morse code lessons. I know Joan went before she went in the WAAAF she comes from the country, near Wagga, country town near Wagga and she was doing Morse code with the local postmaster and two or three others were before they went into the services and

35:30 and anyway as I said I was doing a few of these lessons myself and then got the call up and so I went in yeah.

You mentioned before that there was a bit of tension at home because your sisters had to go out and be breadwinners.

Mm.

What was what were your impressions of that as a as a young fella?

Mum was the sort of mediator between arguments between my Dad

36:00 and the sisters and I think the boys being the younger ones I think our feeling was, "Well get out of it." you know go out and do something, play you know, we didn't like the sort of family rows as we used to call them. We didn't like the family rows so we used to go outside and play a game or something like that and it well I

36:30 I suppose it was not bad that people left home you know but it eased off once my Dad was able to get work, I'm trying to, I can't remember now when he first got a job towards the end of the Depression but he got work back in his own trade and that certainly eased the situation.

Did you hear much about World War I at all?

Oh yes you did hear a bit and my Dad wasn't

37:00 in, an interesting situation. I suppose an illustration of his pride, although he wasn't the only one, but he and his brothe,r my uncle, who was an a bachelor all his life, they were in the militia in the I suppose you'd call it the militia, reservists or whatever until the First World War broke out and actually they wanted to join and in the militia they've got commissions and they

37:30 thought they would go into the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] with their commissions but they said, "No you go back to private." So they both got I suppose they got a bit upset about that so they I don't know whether they were doing it beforehand but anyway they were working on the wharves and that was a protected occupation so when the AIF wouldn't accept them with commissions they decided they didn't want, because I suppose they

38:00 felt a bit slighted because they'd been training as soldiers as it were, doing training soldiers and got commission and yet they weren't allowed to keep their commission so they stayed working on the wharves and because they were in a protected industry they didn't get called up and as you know conscription was defeated twice so they weren't forced to go in, so what I learnt about World War I was more or less second-hand, but my Dad

38:30 had a very good mate of his who went to the war and I think I think he was one of the VCs [Victoria Cross] as a matter of fact. I'm trying to think of his name but I know it was interesting because as I was going I can't remember if this was just after the war I when I came back or just before, I can't really place the date of this but I know one of my sisters and I we felt we'd like

39:00 to bring these two back together, my Dad and this old mate that they hadn't seen each other for years. It must have been after, well in relation to World War II I can't remember it doesn't matter, but the thing is we went and we made a search and we found out where he was and so we made, he lived way over near, oh out towards Windsor way, so we found out where he was and we went over and visited him and I think we arranged a meeting between the two of them

39:30 but I don't know that it was very successful because naturally enough the ex-digger, he had different memories to my Dad and I suppose their only common memories would have been their boyhood memories you see and so it didn't develop into anything unfortunately, but you know that was something we tried to do with this particular mate and so we learnt a bit about because of that connection we did learn about World War I and of course

40:00 I suppose a lot of chaps growing up you're interested in battles and fights and so on, so I think I read a fair bit and of course I was always interested, I think I was a reader, that's why English was one of my best subjects, and history went along with it so I think I read a fair bit about World War I when I was in my late teens and growing up, yeah.

Great. Okay we'll just hold it there because we'll have to change tapes.

Yes.

Tape 2

00:32 And as I mentioned a lot of 'em, my friends and myself, the air force was the choice rather than the army because of the experiences you read, one read of the diggers in the trenches in World War I you see, you thought because I don't consider myself aggressive by nature, so I didn't see myself as rushing out with a

01:00 bayonet at the end of a gun and you know attacking somebody so I thought you know, at least with the air force you can do it at a distance, I suppose it's just a (UNCLEAR), oh I don't know what you might think about it but anyway that's how I felt about it that I would rather do my fighting at a distance.

And did you consider yourself a British subject at that time or Australian?

I'm trying to think about that because you know this question has come up

01:30 and I must be honest I suppose and I didn't think a lot about the British side of it you know. Australian was important and of course by that time of course one knew a lot more about the fiasco of Gallipoli and

it was one of Churchill's less brilliant schemes and so I s'pose

02:00 even though he was the right man in Britain for World War II that things like that you know, I suppose these are things you don't constantly work out, but it helps you develop an attitude you see and our attitude at that stage was I suppose we were thinking, "Well you know Australia's involved well we've got to do our job for Aussie."

02:30 and by the time Japan came in of course we were already in the air force, already in the services but at the same time when you think about so many of the, or just about ninety per cent of the air force graduates until Japan came in were all heading off to England to help England you see and as you know the highest single casualty rate of all the Australian services was the RAAF people in

03:00 Bomber Command and that was much by far the highest casualty rate of anybody and of course the by the time I was in the air force those casualty rates hadn't started to go up like they did later on because the Bomber Command was only just getting under way with its big raids in Europe so I would think that our main feeling or my main feeling was that

03:30 I was doing it for home and country you might say, yeah.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Do you remember where you were when you first heard that war was declared?

No. I don't really. I don't. I don't really. 1939. September 1939 it would have been. Certainly I was working.

And you were aware of Europe and what was happening/

04:00 Yeah oh yes, everybody was sort of keeping up with the news in those days.

Did you think it was coming?

Oh yes I think so. Yes. Yes. I think we felt it was inevitable yeah, particularly of course you know going back to the some of the stories from the Austrians we were interviewing at the tech and that you knew that things weren't too good over there yes. So you knew that

04:30 and yet even though the stories that were coming of course nobody knew about the concentration camps at that stage. That only sort of came out later you know but everybody you know, the general feeling was that the way Hitler was going on you know the pressure he brought on Czechoslovakia then of course the Poles and that kind of thing it was "Oh well." you know "This is no good. This guy's got to be stopped." kind of thing and that was the general feeling about and

05:00 and of course history shows us that there was no there was no shortage of volunteers for the AIF or the army or the air force, the navy and as I say with the air force they didn't cope they couldn't cope with all the volunteers that why we our my entry I think it must have been about three or four months after I applied before I got in.

I I've read that there

05:30 **was quite a lot more romance attached to joining the air force than the army?**

Yes I think so. Yes yes. Particularly of course already we were getting the stories of the RAF [Royal Air Force] and Battle of Britain was what '40 or '41? '40 wasn't it? 1940. Battle of Britain?

Think so.

Yes, so we already had those stories and interestingly enough when I

06:00 was in 6 Squadron we got to Milne Bay of course the two Australian fighter squadrons that were with us were 75 and 76 and of course the famous Bluey Truscott was the CO [commanding officer] of one of them [76 Squadron], one of the fighter squadrons there so....

And you looked forward to.... did you get a chance to meet him?

I didn't speak to him but we were all thrown in together. We were all operating from the one strip in those days and I think I've got a photo somewhere or other. I was in with a group of the fighter pilots and

06:30 also we had one of these nice little things that which I've got recorded in my diary just to remind me. A very good mate of mine at Canterbury High School, a chap named Bob Crawford, 'course we went our different ways after we left Canterbury High. I don't know what Bob did for awhile but lo and behold one of the first people I met down at Milne Bay was Bob Crawford. He was a fighter pilot with 75 Squad and I still see him regularly now. He was a survivor as I

07:00 was and we meet together, we're with an air crew reunion group that meets over at Bardwell Park and so we see each other regularly and as I say we go back to 1936, '37 when we left Canterbury High so

it's a long time of an association.

Yes.

Yes, that's right.

Yes. I've I understand you have a very good recollection of the training that you received

07:30 Yes.

And it'd be really lovely to hear a detailed account of what you went through.

The initial training in the air force was, a lot of it was drill work drill work, air force regulations and things like that. General…. I'm trying to think of the subjects. More or less I think, more or less just preparing you, there might have been

08:00 there was a bit of Morse code was there? I can't think. There might have been a bit of Morse code at the initial training school because at that stage nobody knew whether you were going to be a pilot or a navigator or wireless operator. But of course being only a month's training initial training it was pretty short but my main memory is about being outfitted and being told of the various

08:30 regulations and doing a lot of gym work. Getting people fit I think 'cause there was a big I suppose a big big range of differences between the range of fitness of people like myself and chaps like we were in the Scouts we were playing soccer we were as I said, we were doing camping and surfing and all that kind of thing so we were pretty fit and then when at the end of the course you were graded. We must have done some maths lessons I think

09:00 as well. Physics lessons. So we must have been graded and as I said I think I might have been a pilot if my legs were a bit longer but anyway I was quite happy to go to wireless school. Now wireless school's pretty intensive because six months. You had to bring up your speed of sending and receiving Morse code so there were regular Morse lessons. There was the theory of wireless did a lot of theory of wireless but that involved physics

09:30 and then there were practical lessons. Pulling wireless sets apart and that kind of thing because although we weren't going to be trained as wireless mechanics at least we had to know enough to be able to fix up a fault or make a make a sort of a sort of a quick repair up in the air if something happened to your set and of course the inevitable physics physical exercises and gym work and then

10:00 towards the end of the course we did they had some I think not DC-3s I think the smaller plane the DC-2s flying class rooms. Fitted out with a number of sets and so you would go up in the air to operate a wireless set under air conditions you know with the bouncing of the aircraft and that kind of thing. Makes a big difference trying to operate a Morse key with the aircraft going up and down in the air so and of course

10:30 the speed that you were expected to achieve in sending and receiving Morse code was less for an air crew member than for a ground operator because of the conditions, different conditions, and of course with the Morse code there were a lot of when you're applying the Morse code to the air force there were a lot of to give you an example which we had to use in one of our experiences in Bombay you had to learn say the

11:00 code the particular code for bringing an aircraft back to its base on the on the radio where say the navigator got lost or you got lost and there was a situation where in the air various air force bases you would have a like a direction finding set up and so you could call up

11:30 the direction finding station and tell them that you wanted to come in on the radio on the wireless beam and there were certain codes that you had to use. I remember the three letters were QDM. My wife would remember the Morse letters for QDM but you would key that out and the direction finding base would you know would have your beam while you were tapping

12:00 out those letters they would they would have your message beam and they would work out the distance or direction you were and then they would they would reverse that so that you could tell the pilot what compass bearing to fly to get back to base you see. They would work out what where you were but they had to reverse it to tell you what direction to fly so we had one particular instance it it's I've written up in my diary where we had to do that. Anyway

12:30 getting back to the training, so six months was as I said was pretty full with all those things. Physics, mathematics, Morse code, receiving, sending and then flying class rooms and in the meantime physical exercises and so on so when you passed out of that you had you graduated if you achieved a certain speed, I forget now what it was, but you had to achieve a certain speed of sending Morse and receiving Morse and

13:00 then you passed out. Well some of the chaps of course didn't get, I was on the sixteenth Empire Air Training course which when you think they got up to forty something it was fairly early in the piece so some of the chaps didn't achieve those speeds and that was the key element of your wireless training course so they stayed and they sort of, I assume they graduated on the next course so some chaps like they were a bit like

13:30 missing an exam at school. You had to repeat a year as it were, you know. Fortunately I got out at the right time with the rest of my sixteen course colleagues and then we went to a month's gunnery training up at Evans Head and what you would do there you would have ground training like how to, the machine guns we used were I think the Vickers machine guns, that's right, they were the British guns and also

14:00 the Browning .3. When we went on the Liberators it was a Browning .5 which was a much better gun, a bigger gun, so you had to learn how to strip those guns on the ground and also did some range firing on the ground, and then of course you did a lot of firing from the air. We had, the planes we used to use up at Evans Head were old British planes that actually they used at the beginning of World War II but they were just sitting ducks you know, they

14:30 were shot down out of the sky by the German a plane called a Fairey Battle and so the RAAF got quite a few of those from Britain and they were two-seaters so that we'd have a pilot flying us and then you'd have another gunner with you and you'd share the second cockpit in order to... another plane would be flying and pulling a drogue along and that was your target you know and you had to fire at

15:00 the drogue allowing for the usual difference in speeds and that kind of thing and allow for the bullets dropping. As you fire a bullet you know it's going to drop because of the force of gravity so and all those things so it was only a month's training. I don't know that we were very good shooters by the time we finished but anyway that was the end of training and now at the beginning when I first when I graduated the OTUs which of course

15:30 were the next element of training between finishing your regulated training and going onto a squadron the particularly the bodies over in the people in England realised that they needed something else between training and operating and that was what they called operational training units, OTUs, and they were only just starting. In fact when I came off course in

16:00 it must have been February 1942 the OTUs were only just beginning here and so I missed out and when I went to 6 Squadron I hadn't been through an OTU whereas some of the by that time they'd got themselves in the organised in the RAAF and No. 1 OTU was at Bairnsdale at first and that and that's where crews were formed, pilots and navigators and wireless operators were all brought together on Hudsons or

16:30 later on it was Beauforts, but as I said I that didn't happen to me. I'd moved from a couple of two or three ground stations doing wireless operating work on a ground station wireless unit until I joined No. 1 Air Observer School which was at Cootamundra. Why they sent us there was because they decided that some of the some of the training stations, particularly the ones with

17:00 where we had Ansons, the Avro Anson, and there was a sub scare was on the coast you know, both eastern coast and western coast and so the RAAF decided that some of these training squadrons, the staff at these training squadrons could be made into an active squadron up, well a part-time active squadron put it that way because they still had the main job of training in Cootamundra for example training navigators or air observers as they were called in

17:30 those days and I've looked up my log book and I did three, there were strangely enough I don't know whether it was through secrecy or what but I did three trips which were actually anti sub patrols but they were not listed in my book as an anti sub patrol but I know that's what they were.

You knew that at the time?

I knew that at the time yes 'cause after all we didn't take trainees, we went over the coast and we were looking for submarines. We were told to look for submarines. So we knew what they were you see. I don't know what we'd have I can't remember I assume that we must have been

18:00 armed with either bombs or depth charges you know if we saw a sub but anyway in the short month that I was at Cootamundra in addition to being a sort of a safety a safety person in case the trainees got lost or lost themselves, you know, we'd go up with a number of trainee navigators and they had to they had to direct the pilot on a certain course, particularly at night time. I don't remember that I did any

18:30 day trips with them but I suppose they didn't need a wireless operator to help them out of trouble in the day time. They could see where they were going but at night time. I know in my book, my log book, I've got a number of night training trips and they take along a wireless operator in case as I said the trainees got themselves lost or the pilot got lost.

Did that happen very often?

No. No. I think actually the pilot knew the area so well I think I think he didn't

19:00 he reckoned he could I know flying around you could pick the various towns out you know country towns you can see them by the lights and I think the pilot probably did them so often on so many trips with different courses of navigator trainees he knew even if the navigator didn't know, I think the pilot knew where he was so I don't remember having to bring anybody home you know. It was just a safety measure to be there but of course it was

19:30 different if we went on the staff ops [operations] over the coast because then if there was, if we had had

to report something the wireless operator was needed to do that. In any case I think the Anson had a small gun turret too to operate but then obviously well I know from what happened later I know that when 6 Squadron was being prepared to go north, they were, 6 Squadron was actually relieving another squadron called 32 Squadron which

20:00 had already been up operating there and they needed to be brought back to refit and so on. So to bring 6 Squadron up to strength, while they were at Richmond it didn't matter if say one wireless operator was off sick and that's what happened. There were a couple of wireless operators away sick and so when the squadron was ready to move north they said, "Oh no we can't have these gaps." so that's how I was a friend and I were both wireless operators at Cootamundra and we were both recalled

20:30 we were both posted to 6 Squadron to fill gaps in two crews so I filled the gap in this crew and we had, Bill Wheeler was the pilot, Col Death strange enough name, Col Death. I'll tell you something about that that's interesting. Col Death was the other wireless operator and Percy Green was the navigator and that was our crew in 6 Squadron and it was quite an adventure to see. The whole squadron took off on this particular day in August. It's in the log book. It must be about the

21:00 20th or 21st of August. All fifteen aircraft took off, formed up and flew north. We stopped at Charters Towers I think first, to refuel then our next stop what was at Garbutt in Townsville and two of our flights and there was five aircraft in each flight so two of the flights stayed at Townsville for a week. One flight went on the very next day and this really was a bit of a shock to us you know.

21:30 It really brought the war back to us quickly because this first flight, it went into operations the very next day and the day after that we got word that we'd already lost a crew, you know it was quick as that. We thought, "Gee whiz. Things are getting grim now." you know you realise that you're really in the war. So we'd lost our first crew within two days of getting into operation.

Were they fellows that you knew?

Oh yes well I because I was fairly new I didn't know them very

22:00 well. I knew who they were and I'd met I'd met the WAG because they were NCOs like I was at the time. I'd met them in the mess at Richmond and because as I said we were all sergeants and I'd met them in Townsville before they flew on the next day and then and nobody knew what happened. They just disappeared off an operation and didn't know. We never got a message back from them whether they were attacked by the Japanese or what, but of course one of the biggest

22:30 dangers flying in there was the weather, tropical weather and it was big, anyway after a week our two flights flew onto Horn Island and then while one flight we actually… I've got a I forgot this (UNCLEAR) with the diary it's handy you reminded me as we were taxiing to our revetment bay at Horn Island the pilot he clipped a tree with his wing

23:00 so we couldn't fly off the next day anyway so but another other aircraft then went on to Milne Bay because things were hotting up. They knew that the Japanese were going to land there soon so that was pretty risky then. Now I've lost the thread of what you asked me.

It's alright. We've got lots of time.

Yeah.

I've read through the Empire Training Scheme that that they would turn over pilots pretty quickly sometimes and that the getting off the ground was really not the problem

Yes.

It was actually coming in to

23:30 **land.**

Yes I think landing was, from what I hear you know, and it was interesting too about just coming back to this crew we lost. I was talking to one of my co-WAGs only recently on the phone. Landing as you say was difficult and this pilot of this particular crew that was lost now obviously I don't think he'd gone through OTU because there were an interesting formation at 6 Squadron. 6 Squadron was, we had new

24:00 crews that hadn't been into operations and we had some of the people, the senior crews were crews that had escaped from Singapore and Malaysia because you know we had Hudson squadrons in the RAAF and Malaysia No. 1 Squadron and No. 8 Squadron and some of those crews managed to survive and get out of Singapore and Malaysia and some of them were able to fly aircraft back into Australia and they were given a few months' rest and they were as I said the senior crews of 6 Squadron

24:30 which was good for the squadron because they were very experienced people but this particular pilot that we lost, everybody would I remember watching this when we landed at Garbutt he was one of the last of the flight to come in and everybody was watching they'd say, "How many?" his name was Wal Phillipson. "How many, how many jumps do you reckon Wal'll do before he gets the plane down?" you know he was he was hopeless at landing a plane but so much so that the CO who

25:00 was a very experienced Lockheed Hudson pilot, the CO well I was told by my co-WAG that while at

Richmond before we went north, the CO was taking him up several times to try and improve his landing skills but mind you that wouldn't have had anything to do with him being lost. He wouldn't have been trying to land then but it's true that pilots if they didn't come up to scratch they would be what you call

25:30 scrubbed. I don't know what happened to them. They left the squad. I can jump ahead a bit and give you an example. We when we trained on Liberators it was obviously a big shift for a pilot say who'd been flying twin-engine plane to go onto a four engine plane and we had it was interesting this, we had a…. the Liberator was made by a company I think called Consolidated Aircraft.

26:00 Anyway the Americans, I don't know whether it was arranged through the American command here in Australia. To help the conversion of Australians to the Liberator they brought out a specialist pilot. He was probably a test pilot from Consolidated Company and when our squadron was forming up at Layburn he checked out all our pilots, our captains

26:30 on the Liberator and he scrubbed one of them. Now he would have been somebody who'd already done perhaps a tour on twin-engine planes and he was scrubbed. In a way it was an advantage to us because we picked up one of the radio operators, the second radio operator, and the navigator from that crew because we had what we call a sprog. Are you familiar with the tech

27:00 the term sprog?

No.

It was an air force term for somebody who was green you know, a new chum, and the navigator we'd picked up when we formed our Liberator crew as I mentioned the pilot and I had been together on Hudsons and so had the other wireless operator. The three of us had been together and some of our other our navigator, sorry our bomb aimer was an experienced man too, but our navigator was straight off course, very green, and we had to do an exercise at night and he lost us and we

27:30 came home on the radio. You see I was operating the radio and we came home on the radio so the next day our pilot, because he was an experienced man and he knew how important a navigator was he scrubbed him from the crew you see, and we were lucky that the pilot of the crew or the pilot that had been scrubbed his crew were then spares so we got his navigator and he was an experienced navigator so we were lucky. We got a very good navigator and it so happened that my co-WAG, and he'd been with me on Hudsons, he got tuberculosis

28:00 and so he didn't go on, he didn't finish his the tour on Liberators and so I picked up the second radio operator from that other crew see. So it worked out. In a way that's what happened to me in 6 Squadron. I filled in somebody's place you see. Yeah. So going back to your questions. Did I cover you about landings? Pilots and landings?

The question I was getting to was whether you actually saw any of that

28:30 **at training. You saw any pilots having trouble getting back down to the ground or….?**

No I might have if I'd have done an OTU course

Right.

But as I said when I was off on wireless of course it was not with the pilots,

Yeah sure.

the gunnery were not with the pilots. Those who went to OTU probably had that experience. They'd have seen or been with people who failed the course as a pilot you see but the way I happened to go without OTU training and it didn't happen except for this case that I mentioned.

Reflecting back on it, do you think that the people who had the OTU training

29:00 **were advantaged?**

Oh yes. Definitely so. For two reasons. Apart from the sort of extra training and of course usually the instructors at OTUs were all experienced people who'd been on a tour of operations. Like when ourselves went back to OTU as staff of course we'd already got a tour of operations under our belt so that you had that experience and also of course the bonding of the crew was important you see

29:30 and some people just didn't get on and it's interesting I've been reading a very good book. It's come out recently about the RAAF (UNCLEAR) command. It was called Chased by the Sun and they mention there and it's happened in OTU and I suppose it's happened in OTU here whereas while you had a crew put together. They just sort of picked each other up as it were you know "Oh you come and join it." and so on. Some of them didn't bond and so

30:00 the skipper, who'd be the pilot, they would drop one of the crew members you see 'cause they didn't fit in you know. Personalities or training flights where somebody didn't do his job properly. Well as I say like our navigator when we went first on Liberators. Our skipper who was like myself and had already done a tour he wasn't gonna take the risk of having a you know, a sprog navigator so he dropped him. Mm.

30:30 **The gunner and wireless operator positions on a on a flight were sort of interchangeable?**

Yes. In Hudsons. In the early, the people who were kept back in Australia because at that stage we only had Hudsons and Beauforts as our top line. We didn't have straight gunners. We had only wireless operator air gunners and in

31:00 the Hudson what we would do I would spend the time on the turret, say an hour on the turret, then I'd swap with the other wireless air gunner who'd spent that time on the wireless. while you may not have any messages to send you would always had to have a listening out, you had to listen and watch for any messages coming in so it wasn't a matter of just twiddling your thumbs. If you were on the wireless you had to sit with the earphones on and be attentive and because watching in the turret was very

31:30 demanding from the point of view of concentration. It was a different concentration to listening it was a concentration of watching you know, scanning the sky for we were in Milne they were looking say for, you know particularly for enemy shipping and enemy aircraft so you were constantly scanning the sky and that was a different kind of concentration to when you were on the set which was sitting down listening so that's why we kept interchanging. Say an hour on, an hour off, an hour on the wireless an hour on the turret

32:00 and so forth. When we got onto Liberators of course we had four gun turrets so we picked up straight gunners and some of the chaps didn't like, they were trained as wireless air gunners but they preferred the gunnery so some of them just volunteered as gunners and not as wireless operator air gunners but of course in the those who went over to England of course there were a lot of straight gunners required for Lancasters and

32:30 the Halifaxes and those things. Like the Liberators they had some just straight turrets and gunners and so in the Hudsons and Beauforts as I say, you didn't need a straight gunner.

Did you prefer one over the other?

Ah I think I probably preferred the wireless and that was more so when we got onto Liberators because the wireless operator, although we were still wireless

33:00 operator air gunners by classification, the only guns in the Liberator we had to operate as I said, there was the four turrets. There was a tail turret, a ball turret, but that was a belly turret the one that came out of the…. it was lowered out of the aircraft, under the middle of the fuselage and the top central turret and a nose turret. They were a very well armed aircraft, the Liberator, but there were two windows in the side and each window had a had a .5 [" implied]] machine gun mounted and so the radio operator who was not on

33:30 the radio he would go down and man one of the side guns. The other side gun when there was action on would be manned by the flight engineer, who normally would look after the…. there was a sort of starter motor as it were in the Liberator and he would be there to help the pilot in any other particular situation but so the flight engineer and the radio operator who was not on the set they would man the two side guns yeah so it was a very

34:00 well-armed plane the Liberator.

It's incredible actually.

A total of let's see, two, four, six, eight, ten .5 machine guns.

Is that because it was a bomber?

Yes. It was a bomber. Yeah. Four engine bomber. Big bomber.

So they were afraid that it obviously it was most likely to come under attack.

Oh yes yes and then just as a sideline the day that our squadron arrived in the Northern Territory

34:30 we had friends in the other Liberator squadrons. Our Squadron 23 was a member of 82 Wing. 82 Wing was the heavy bomber wing. First heavy bomber wing created for the RAAF in Australia and it comprised 23 Squadron, our squadron, 21 Squadron, 24 Squadron and the day we arrived or at the end of the day we arrived we got news that the other two squadrons had been they'd gone in formation to attack a Japanese cruiser which was escorted

35:00 by destroyers and two of the two of the Liberators were shot down, despite all their guns they were shot down and so that news came to us as we arrived in there, it was it was like the incident at Townsville when we arrived in our Hudsons and a day after we arrived or two days after we arrived somebody was lost you see. So even though it wasn't in our squadron they were sort of our neighbouring squadrons. They'd already lost two aircraft. Twenty two people. One survivor

35:30 off twenty two. I hope I hope he's on the list for interviewing, because he was really a survivor.

We'll have to grab his name at the end of this so at least we have it so we can check with head office to see

Yeah check with West Australia. He's in West Australia. I knew him 'cause he was just ahead of me in

the wireless training course so I knew him. Yeah.

You mentioned before that when you lost your first crew you got a real sense that the war was real and that it was on. Can you tell me what might have gone through your mind?

36:00 You know we were, imagine we were twenty year old or some even younger. Some older of course but except for those crews that had come back from Singapore, Malaysia, it was all new and it was an adventure you know. We were excited about it and to hear this news sort of pulled us up short a bit you know, but of course like all the young you know, when the youngsters these days you hear the stories about the high

36:30 rate of car accidents are in that particular age group you know and so, "It doesn't happen to me. It's going to happen to him but not to me." you know. So you don't feel well you feel there's a risk but you don't feel personally threatened as it were. You think, "Oh that oh no I'm right.." I suppose that's the sort of confidence of youth.

Yes it upped the challenge in a way.

Yes, yes, certainly yeah but you were there was a lot

37:00 of anticipation, not fear so much but anticipation of the new conditions that you really felt that you were you know you were doing the job that you enlisted for. You know you were actually finally we're going to get and do something that we're being paid for kind of thing you know. Not so much gung-ho but you felt that this is what this is what we're trained for and now we're going to have a chance to do it.

What kind of news had you

37:30 **been getting back at other forces out in the field?**

Not a lot strangely enough you know, there was a fair amount of censorship in Australia. I didn't realise how much because one of the worst things about the fact they didn't put a lot of good you know proper news in the papers was that rumours fly around you know. It's a great place for rumours.

So what sorts of rumours were you hearing?

Ah you know that oh now

38:00 well an example at Milne Bay. A rumour started that the Japs had broken through the Australian lines and even this went right to the top and they were talking about in fact there was one night where and I think it mainly was a rumour, oh in fact what I've read about it since I'm sure, I know it was a rumour, that there was one night there that the heads of the of the Milne Bay operation

38:30 decided that we would fly the aircraft out in case the Japanese got to the strip you see, so we happened to be there with our Hudson, our crew. We flew out to Moresby. We took some of the spare Kittyhawk pilots with us and the Kittyhawks flew out and we all went up to Moresby for that one night and then the message came the next day "Come back it's alright. The Japs didn't break through." Now how it started I think now this is I think it's got a bit of humour in it. One of the supply

39:00 ships at Milne Bay after the RAAF or the air force including the Americans they controlled the skies during the day which was good, unlike some of the say the campaign in Malaysia and Singapore, the Japs controlled the sky but in the day time, sorry at night time the Jap Navy controlled the area 'cause what after they'd landed

39:30 after the Japs had landed on Milne Bay their war ships sailed out and they went back up towards Rabaul. Each night then they would come back in they'd be arriving back and one of our jobs was to try and find them and I'll talk about that later. We found them on two occasions. Anyway they would come in and then they would shell the base you see and ultimately when the Australian Army and the air force finally sort of beat the Japanese

40:00 ground forces then the Japanese ships were coming in to take their survivors away but in the meantime they were coming in. Now one night when they came in a supply ship had come in for the forces in Milne Bay and it anchored at the wharf and the Japanese saw it and they sank it. Now they had a crew of Chinese. Now as the story goes, and I believe it's true, the Chinese of course,

40:30 Chinese crewmen, they were just all the labourers on the boat they panicked and they fled down the wharf you know gibbering and shouting in their language and of course some of them see hear this language they think it was Japanese and they were lucky these Chinese sailors weren't shot by the army and somebody woke up, somebody had enough sense to grab them all and put them in a in a room or a shed or something like that on the land and keep them there and you know, "Keep quiet you guys you know don't go running 'round yelling out."

41:00 you see. Now I don't know whether that started the rumour or not but anyway as I said we were given instructions to fly the aircraft out of Milne Bay out to Port Moresby but the Japanese never broke through. They were defeated before they broke through.

That's incredible.

Yeah. So that's an example of what rumours can do.

Absolutely. Get you into a lot of trouble. We'll pause there

Tape 3

00:32 **You'd gotten us started John on a few of the details of flying. I was wondering if you could explain for us the difference between the feel of the aeroplanes. The Hudsons and the Liberators as a wireless operator.**

Yes 'cause the when we went in the Hudson the Hudson well

01:00 actually was basically a civil airliner, a small civil airliner and it was converted to a medium bomber and reconnaissance aeroplane and it was apparently it was a little bit tricky to land it but once they landed, I know the pilots and like my pilot of course, the one we speak to mostly, they liked it as a plane to fly. It it's what they call I think,

01:30 because it was the old style of three point landing you know, a tail wheel, that was the tricky part, to land the plane with a three-point landing although I think a lot of them learnt to fly it in on two wheels and then let the back end of it sit down. Naturally enough being a smaller plane it didn't ride the

02:00 turbulence as well as the bigger planes. I can remember when we were flying in formation there were ten flights as I'd mentioned earlier. One flight from once we got (UNCLEAR) one flight had gone on the next day into action and then it was in a week the other two flights we flew off from Townsville to Horn Island and we were No. 5 plane in one flight. I'm not sure whether we were A or B Flight but we were the one being No. No. 5 plane we were out on the far edge of it

02:30 and flying over Cairns and of course there's some mountains just west of Cairns. Suddenly we were about nearly a thousand feet below the other aircraft because we'd hit a pocket and the plane dropped straight down you know, and there are the others flying along and we're way down here and now probably the Liberator, the bigger plane, would probably ride that better than the Hudson but of course,

03:00 the pilot would know a lot more details about that, but I do remember another occasion we had as I mentioned earlier, one of our jobs at Milne Bay was to try and find the Japanese warships that used to come in each night to shell the place so we'd be particularly looking for them at dusk when they'd be trying to sneak in and get there by the time night fell and we'd caught them and so we went in to bomb them and

03:30 the tropical weather was closing in so we only had a fleeting glimpse of them and they were firing like anything at us and we couldn't, there was too much cloud for us to get a good bombing opportunity, so we came and we flew back up into the clouds and in the clouds of course, being tropical weather, it was very rough and bumpy

04:00 and having to sort of dodge the ack-ack [anti aircraft fire] from the warships we sort of lost our bearings and it was difficult to go up, particularly knowing that the Japanese ships were going to come in and shell the air strip and the facilities at Milne Bay. We decided, or the pilot decided, we'd better go back on to Port Moresby. The navigator because of all the dodging around and that and the cloud we

04:30 couldn't work out just what our position was, so it was one occasion where again as I mentioned earlier we came back home on the radio bearings. We called up the direction finding station in port Moresby and came in and it was a rough ride because of the tropical weather you know, the plane bouncing around and that and so forth and so on, so it's a I suppose an example of

05:00 the difficult situation, particularly trying to work a wireless set when your aircraft is you know, dodging around and so forth yes, and on that same if I can digress a little bit, on that same night it was rather hairy. At one stage the pilot said, "Oh look." he said "We may have to bail out because the engine is dropping revs." so he told us, "Look get your parachute harnesses on."

05:30 and so I was, I forget who was operating the wireless, either myself or the other WAG, but we were both in the wireless compartment, which is just behind the pilot and the navigator and so putting our harness on unbeknownst to us at first that the generator which provided the power for the wireless set was on the floor beside us and in putting our harness on, one of us must have must have flicked the fuses

06:00 of the generator, we flicked the fuses off so when we sat down to work the set it was dead you see. Now you know you think, "Oh everything's going wrong." you know. "What's wrong?" and so anyway we looked around to try and work out the trouble and then we saw the fuses on the on the floor, so we put them back in and by calling up the direction finding station they knew we were in a bit of trouble so they arranged with the army, the

06:30 search light unit and what they did they shone a beam straight up in the air from the strip and so we saw that beam and the pilot managed to circle the beam and come down and land in sort of a half an hour or an hour of rather fraught situation. Yeah.

Did you have a particular drill or plan if the plane got in trouble. Did you did you know exactly

what

07:00 **to do in that situation?**

Yes, particularly if we came down and of course a lot of our flying was over the ocean 'cause we were doing a lot of sea reconnaissance looking for these Japanese ships and if you've got an idea of Milne Bay, where it sits at the far eastern end of Papua New Guinea and if you think of where New Britain is, which is sort of due north of Milne Bay, and then it's more or less a triangle say, go up one line up to New Britain and then across to Bougainville

07:30 and in that triangle area 'cause New Britain was a big Japanese base, Rabaul was a huge Japanese base and that's where all the trouble came from as far as we were concerned. The ships and the Japanese planes and so on so that area was divided up into tracks, we call them tracks, parallel tracks, where our aircraft would be given a track to search that area for Japanese shipping and so

08:00 most of the as I say, the flying, was over the water so we had a set drill particularly if we had to come down into the ocean which we did and later on we we'll talk about that detail, we had to crash-land in the ocean and the drill of course, the navigator naturally enough would come out of the, 'cause he was sitting right in the nose of the glass nose at the front and he had to (UNCLEAR) for

08:30 ditching he would come up and sit beside the pilot. He would sit beside the pilot to help the pilot control some of the controls you see because when Hudsons first started going into action they had two pilots. One pilot would actually be a navigator as well but then they dropped that pilot and put in a properly trained navigator and then the two wireless air gunners. Now in the Hudson, the

09:00 dinghy was actually packed into the door of the Hudson, which was down near the rear end of the plane, and the idea was that when the plane hit the water there was a little a kind of a spike projecting from the fuselage and the spike hitting the water would complete an electrical circuit and it would set off a kind of mini explosion I suppose, compressed air, and it would blow the dinghy out

09:30 of the door and be attached to the aircraft with a cord, but because there were some examples where that procedure failed, the drill was for one of the wireless air gunners to stay at the back. He wouldn't be strapped in unfortunately, he'd have to hang on to the fuselage bars and hang on tightly and be ready to let the dinghy go manually. Now unfortunately in the ditching that we had, we

10:00 hit, so I was the one down the back to do the letting go, but we hit so hard 'cause I could feel some waves in the water, we hit so hard I was thrown from the back of the aircraft to the front and my shoulder was badly damaged and I got my head cut and when we climbed out through, the navigator had to let the hatch go above the pilots, that's where we climbed out. We went out through there and stood on the wing and unfortunately the way we'd hit,

10:30 the cord had broken and when we got out on the wing, the dinghy was floating away on the breeze you see, so that was a bit hairy, so the other WAG, he hopped in the water and started to swim for it, he just got into it. I must say I never thought about sharks but when talking with the other crew, the pilot and the navigator, why they stayed sitting on the wing, they were thinking about sharks you see. So I hopped into the water and tried to swim. I couldn't swim with two arms but I sort of dog paddled with one arm and I just got to the dinghy.

11:00 The other WAG had climbed into it when natives with their lakatois or canoes as they were, they came and they picked us up and took us to their village. Yeah. So that's an example of your question, to answer your question about the drill we had for landing, for ditching in the water, yes.

In the emergency situation where you had to use it, was it just instinctive that you knew exactly what to do?

Yes, it was really. Yeah, yeah. It was yeah.

11:30 And nobody seemed to question or say, "What do I do now?" or, "Why do I do this?" There was only one funny thing I suppose, again this is probably instinctive. As I said I was thrown from the back of the aircraft to the front and I landed just near the wireless operator and he got up to get out of his seat but he still had his strap on, he hadn't let his seatbelt go, so he got up and he couldn't leave and I yelled out to him, "Undo your strap, undo your strap!" so out he went out the door. Yeah.

12:00 **If we can just talk about the time that the plane did crash into the water.**

Oh. Well there as I mentioned right at the beginning of the talk, tropical weather was our big enemy, almost as big an enemy as the Japs, because you in keep in mind too that all of New Guinea's got lots of high mountains and hills, so either side of Milne Bay the two peninsulas that form the bay there's quite high,

12:30 well we would call them mountains I think, not hills, and so we had to be conscious of that and we were the day we went outm we were on the most easterly track of those tracks I mentioned, search tracks, heading towards Bougainville. Now the weatherm as most of our weather, it moves from the west to the east. Now the planes that were doing the more westerly tracks they could see the weather coming in so they took a decision, they decided to return

13:00 to base so they got back into our strips at Milne Bay and we had two strips then and towards the end of our time there they had two strips, so they managed to get back into Milne Bay. By the time we were returning, the weather had moved beyond Milne Bay, covered Milne Bay, and moved and so we flew in, our pilot did a pretty good job, he got down close to the water where we knew we were in the bay, we got to the beginning of the bay

13:30 and we tried to fly up, keeping the northern headland, the northern shore on our right as it were 'cause our strip was on the northern side of the two, but the rain was so heavy you know, the tropical storm was really a downpour, we were down to about a hundred feet you know ,which is pretty low for an aeroplane, and we just couldn't get into the strip so he turned 'round and he flew out to the entrance to the bay and we still kept under the,

14:00 well low enough, we knew that we were still over the water of the bay not near the hills and we were getting low on fuel because it had been quite a long reconnaissance mission so we dropped our bombs at the beginning of the bay and then he came 'round and he said, "Okay we're going to ditch." and the wireless operator he kept the key down so that the radio station would be able to get a bearing on us and know where exactly we went down and a wheels up

14:30 landing of course in the water and that's how we went in, and there was a couple of interesting sequels to that. I've got some very good photos of it in my album because the very next day, we were as I said, we were taken by the natives to their village but because we'd had a message out and the people knew where we were, the Americans had a PT [patrol torpedo] boat base there and they were looking for us and what we'd done

15:00 you know, the dinghy's a very bright orangey-yellow colour so we hung that on a dead stick on the shore so they'd know where we were and so they came and they took us off. They didn't take us back to our base 'cause it was a fair way away. They took us across to their mother ship and the other three members of the crew they had a slap-up meal, but I was put into sick bay 'cause I'd had my shoulder all torn and my head and so I spent the night in sick bay and

15:30 the next day when we got back to base and they knew the engineer office had got the information where we'd crashed and they went out in a crash boat to try and see if they could recover the aircraft and it so happened that the natives came out again and the rescue people, they took photos of these people and then they showed us and we said, "Oh they're the natives that picked us up." so I've got photos of the natives who picked us up you see and they had tied a buoy to the aircraft. They knew where it was but they reckoned it was too far, it was too difficult.

16:00 They didn't have the gear to bring it up, and an interesting sequel about 19 I think it was 1992 that's right, both my skipper, who's still alive, living in Canberra, we're often in contact, he and I both read in our Wings magazine somebody writing in from New Guinea, a chap who runs a dive school up there you know, a tourist dive school, and said, "On one of our dives recently we dived on

16:30 the wreck of what we think is a Hudson bomber." and they gave the position and both my pilot and myself saw and we both wrote off and we said, "We think that's our bomber." and we told them the story you see, and then later on when they did another dive on it they took some underwater photos of the plane upside down as it tipped over with the weight of the motors, it pulled it over on its on its back and I've got slides of the plane what '92, that was '43 early

17:00 in '43 so nearly fifty years later of this plane. There it is on the bottom of the water yes, so that was quite interesting yes, and just another, if I can add another little incident to that story, I think it was last year or the year before, no the year before, 2001, Joan and I did one thing we'd been wanting to do for quite awhile, a trip along the Kimberley coast by ship, you know.

17:30 We'd been up by land to Kununarra and the Bungle Bungles and that area, but to get closer to the Kimberley coast we did this trip from Darwin around to Broome stopping all the way 'round and it took us over a week to do it, marvellous trip. Anyway the first mate or giving us instruction, the captain said, "Anybody you know feel free at any time to come and talk to us on the bridge you know, and

18:00 have a chat." and of course it was very informal. So one morning, Joan and I were always up early, we were wandering around the deck and I went into the bridge and the first mate was on duty and we got talking and that and he told me he'd been a skipper on some small ships around the New Guinea area so I said, "Oh yes, I flew there during the war." and he said, "Yeah." he said. "We did a little scuba dive and we dived on a plane." and we got the details and I said, "That was our plane." and he couldn't get over

18:30 the fact that he was talking to a member of the crew that put that plane in the water fifty odd years or whatever it was. Yes, it was quite interesting.

It's a small world at times. I'd like to go Milne Bay and talk to you about that.

Yes.

What was the situation at Milne Bay when you arrived?

When we arrived things were, well the Japs had landed when we got there, the Japs had already landed. Both the Kittyhawks

19:00 and the Hudsons, well the Hudsons had two jobs: A, they were helping the Kittyhawks to strafe the

Japanese positions. The Japanese landed on the northern coast of Milne Bay. Fortunately they made a mistake. They were landed too far away from where they really wanted to land. We know from Japanese intelligence on that, they wanted to land close to what was to be No. 3 air strip, it was called Turnbull air strip.

19:30 It had all been cleared but it hadn't been made into a strip and they wanted to be landing there and then they wouldn't be too far from the operating strip, which was called Gurney No. 1 strip. It was more to the, let's say more to the south of the Turnbull strip and so they didn't land there. They landed further up along the north coast so they had more jungle to fight through to get to the Australian bases so

20:00 naturally enough all their equipment, their barges of course, the allies knew what they'd done in Singapore, that is they'd sort of hopped, they went by barge, say they'd land on a particular beach and then they'd confront the allies in Malaysia and then they would, a lot of the Japanese were getting the barges and go further down the coast and get behind and so what the Kittyhawks and the Hudsons did very early in the piece, they strafed

20:30 all those barges and they sank them all so that the Japs couldn't do this manoeuvre that they'd done in Malaysia and in addition to doing tha,t then as I said other Hudsons of ours, we were doing the sea reconnaissance to try and find the Japanese warships and other shipping and but it was pretty rough going. Living conditions were pretty poor, particularly each night you'd be flying all day, come in at night time and

21:00 the Japanese'd come in and shell the place you see, so we'd be piling out of our tents into our trenches and the food was you know, pretty basic at that time, bully beef and biscuits largely, so they were sort of exciting days I must say that, very exciting days but rather hairy and I don't know how long we'd go, how many days we'd go without a shower or a wash and probably only 'til we got back to Port Moresby

21:30 you see, and even then of course Port Moresby, the Kokoda battle was going on and they were afraid that the Japanese would break through Kokoda and get into Moresby and we had air raids in Port Moresby at the same time and the worst was particularly the air raids at night, you'd be sleeping on your stretcher and with a mosquito net over you and you had to crawl through your mosquito net and forget about your shoes and rush out in bare feet into your trench

22:00 because of the rain and probably the trench would be half full with water any anyway. So they were some of the sort of conditions one put up with but I suppose young and that and it was all you sort of groaned about it or grizzled about it at the time the conditions but still it sort of went over your head a bit, but as I say this day I mentioned earlier, when they had this panic of the Japs having broken through the lines, which they didn't, and we took the Kittyhawk

22:30 pilots some of the spares, we took up flew them up to Port Moresby and came back the next day yes, but later on, thinking of a better picture later on when that same air strip by the way, No. 3 air strip, because it had been cleared, it was a marvellous defensive position and in a sense that's what helped, or two things helped to defeat the Japanese. The Japanese had landed two tanks and they were making progress

23:00 until I think they got something like fifteen inches of rain, tropical rain one night and the tanks got bogged and the AIF were able to sneak up on them and throw hand grenades or other ordnance into them and stop them, but also the Japanese did land some reinforcements from the warships that came at night and they got to the edge of this air strip, but because it was such a cleared area and the allies, the Australians mainly and some American

23:30 engineers were given machine guns and so on and they were all lined up in the coconut trees on the other side of the strip, so they had a clear field of fire and when the Japanese rushed to get across the strip they were all shot down and all killed and that was in a sense that, and the stopping of the tanks was a turning point and after that the AIF pushed the Japanese back and all the time, whenever we could, the Kittyhawks would be strafing them and finally

24:00 when the Japanese warships still came in, they came in and took the survivors off.

Excuse me for a second. Was there a sense at the time how important the Milne Bay...?

Oh yes yes. Very very much so, very much so. It was important and as I say the two, although Milne Bay was finished and over before Kokoda was, the two operations were going on about the same time and

24:30 we knew both actions were vital and there's a very good book written by two local men and it's the only book written about the battle of Milne Bay by two men, Baker and Knight, and they've got lots of stories both from air force as well as army, more from army because they were much more involved, but

25:00 it was interesting, one of the quotes they have for this was that when news of the victory of the Australians at Milne Bay got through, it was the first defeat the Japanese suffered on land. General Slim who was in charge of the British forces in Burma used it as an example to his troops of what can be done to defeat the Japanese so it was a small, a very small action, but an important action from its significance, yes.

25:30 **What did you see as the role of the air force in the Milne Bay?**

Well we had the two roles. Particularly you could say the fighter squadrons. Their job was to protect the base and when there was a Japanese air raid they'd go up and they had quite a bit of success against Japanese raiders. Our raid, we had two jobs at Milne Bay as I mentioned. One was strafe the Japanese positions

26:00 and mainly doing the sea reconnaissance, they were very important and on one of those occasions I think the date is the 26th of September, we'd been doing a sort of convoy patrol, like ships coming into supply Milne Bay naturally had to have air force protection over them because of the possibility of Japanese subs, so we'd been doing a job, a convoy job early one morning and we finished that and we

26:30 got back to base and we were expecting just to have a rest, then we got a call out that one of our other aircraft on one of these other tracks that I'd mentioned had sighted a Japanese ship, not a warship I think it turned out to be a radio ship, and they'd bombed it and they'd missed it so the CO ordered us and he said, "Look don't come back here if you don't sink it." so anyway off we went and fortunately our pilot was very good from the point of view of dive-bombing and we found, of course we had the position, we found it and we

27:00 dive-bombed it and we sank it. We dropped four bombs on it, two of them went right across the ship and one either side of it, so it was a marvellous piece of bombing on his part and that's the one Japanese ship on the flag on the aeroplane because of the sinking of that ship and one of the things that created a little bit of controversy 'cause we went back and then there were some Japanese sailors, crew hanging onto a mast

27:30 and we went down and strafed them and when word got back about this at the squadron some gent said, "Oh you shouldn't have done that." kind of thing but we knew from our briefing that we had Australian spotters on, it was near an island, a group of islands, and we knew we had a strand of spotters near, say if a group of Japanese had got on and found this spotter and he was only there by himself, perhaps helped by the natives, that would have been difficult, so we were told not to leave any survivors if it was in our power to do so, so that

28:00 was you know, a bit tricky but anyway that's as I say, that's the one flag. The other occasion was when we found one of these Japanese ships coming in one night and in fact we sighted them and we radioed base and more Hudsons came out and we did a dive-bombing attack on them and it was rather hairy because there was a lot of ack-ack coming up and we claimed a near miss on the stern of one of these ships

28:30 with our bombs and so that's why the half Japanese flag is there. That was that was the 26th of September I remember, well we sank the ship, it was the 26th of September. The dive-bombing attack on one of the Jap cruisers was I think about the 11th of September. Earlier in the piece, yeah.

Was the strafing carried out by the gunner?

Well two lots. The pilot

29:00 also controlled some forward firing guns. Now he would go in naturally enough nose first and fire his guns and as we come out of the turret we'd have a go as you came out, 'cause your plane'd be like that and so the turret could also fire as you were going out of the coming out of the dive.

Were you always thinking of the Australian lives you would be saving?

Yes. You had to keep that in mind, well the briefing of course tells you

29:30 in a way what you have to do too because of the spotters. Those spotters were very important people in the Australian effort 'cause they were usually like individual army people based on an island with a wireless set and fortunately the Japanese they turned the natives against them because of their bad treatment of them, so the natives were pro-allied or pro-Australian because the

30:00 stories get around of course and we knew and they knew that the Japanese had treated them badly, so they were very much helpful to our people and you'll find that of course supported by various stories around, and so as I said in the briefing, we'd be told if any of these islands near where we found this ship had any spotters on them it wouldn't be good to try and leave any Japanese get aboard

30:30 get ashore with them around. Yeah.

In the infantry you hear about a lot of hatred towards the Japanese.

Mm.

Was there ever that kind of that same feeling within the air force?

No, not the same, although we were we were told the stories. When we landed at Milne Bay we were told some of the stories of what the Japanese had done in the very early part of the battle.

31:00 Naturally enough there were a couple of local ships that had Australian army on board who were doing reconnaissance up the coast of Milne Bay and the night the Japanese landed, those two ships were making, 'cause they were given a recall, they were making their way back to base, but one of them ran

into the landing party of the Japanese and there was a fight you know, exchange of gun fire and some of the Australians on the boat were killed. Others were

31:30 captured and those ones that were captured were tied to trees and bayoneted and those stories of course get 'round and they did that with some natives too, they got natives and they did the same thing to natives. So we were told those stories yes, and I can remember, well I don't know that I saw this myself ,but it was a story that we were told. In the way that the natives, one of their

32:00 favourite meats was wild pig and if they killed a pig they would bring it in by its two front legs tied together over a long pole and the same with the back. Anyway one day at Milne Bay the natives had captured a Japanese and they brought him in the same way, with his legs tied and his arms tied yeah, but the No. 3 strip

32:30 they managed to get that ready in late December 1942 and that's when our squadron moved from, they first of all went to Horn Island as I mentioned and then they moved to Port Moresby which we called Ward strip and then we moved when Turnbull or No. 3 strip was ready at Milne Bay we moved, and that was our base for the rest of the time I was there. Turnbull was named after Squadron Leader Turnbull who was the

33:00 CO of 76 Squadron and he was killed in attacking the Japanese positions at Milne Bay. They don't know quite whether he got shot, like a bullet came up from the snipers, or whether he misjudged his dive and hit the trees. I suspect he misjudged his dive and hit the trees, so when Turnbull strip was opened up it was named after him and of course he'd been a very experienced pilot. He was in one of the RAAF squadrons in the Middle East, No.

33:30 3 Squadron I think, then came back home and that's when Bluey Truscott took over the control of that squadron. So we moved into Turnbull strip towards the end of December 1942 and as I said that was our base and it was in the middle of a huge coconut grove. Thetents were in, it was quite interesting to live under the coconut trees 'cause naturally enough a lot of the chaps, they lost no opportunity to make jungle juice from

34:00 the coconut juice and put raisins and sugar and let it ferment for a while and have a have a beer. Would you like to hear one or two squadron stories? Yes. Well we were lucky in one way 'cause in the early days of the squad at Bombay [?] there we weren't getting like regular supplies of beer and things like that, but one of our crew members was John Seppelt, a member

34:30 of the famous wine family, Seppelts Wine, so we regularly had aircraft, because New Guinea wasn't safe enough to establish permanent servicing bases when aircraft come due for what they call a two hundred and forty hourly, that's a major service, maintenance service on an aircraft, they were flown back to the mainland and so naturally they were flown back and then they would be brought back to the squadron and

35:00 so on this particular occasion, I remember we got word down to John Seppelt, "Look we want some grog [alcohol]come back." you see we had a new mess established, I was still a sergeant there so we were opening a new sergeants' mess at Milne Bay and so John Seppelt and the crew, they come back with their aircraft loaded with wine and brandy and what not you know, and so we had a great night and it so happened

35:30 in the middle of the opening party there was a raid put on by the Japanese at night time, so everybody had to get out and some of them of course were a bit under the weather and instead of jumping in the trenches they were walking out and shouting you know, waving their fists at the Japanese planes coming over the top of them. Somebody more sober would grab hold of them and push them into the trench so there have been the occasional funny times.

36:00 **Did you have a lot of recreation time at all?**

Some. Particularly once the Milne Bay battle itself was over we got into more of a routine and so there were enough crews to do the various jobs, so we started to have a regular routine of days off and I don't know who organised it, but it was very good organisation. What we had allocated

36:30 to our squadron was a lugger and so the days off, the crews that had their days off they would they had the choice of going out on a lugger and doing some fishing, visiting some of the native villages and getting say native fruit, oranges, bananas and paw paws and things like that you know, and it was a very nice break and I got some very good photos of days on the lugger going up the edge of Milne Bay and visiting these native villages and having a good,

37:00 you know a good time, but they were very lazy fishermen because what they would do to fish, they would get a couple of hand grenades from the army and hold them over the side and then pull the ring off and have an explosion and of course you'd get dead fish coming to the surface and you'd go down and pick up all the dead fish. So there were some breaks from monotony, or not the monotony so much

37:30 of the routine of flying and that, yeah.

During the actual battles and the busy times how often would you be flying?

Oh we did an awful lot of flying. We flew twice a day. We'd out at dawn, we'd be out on a mission like a

sort of reconnaissance mission, looking for the Jap ship, come back, refuel, normal time I think would be about seven or eight hours. We could check that later with the log book and then you come back home

38:00 midday and then you'd be off again particularly in the evening runs as I mentioned, trying to find these Japanese ships, of course it was a battle trying to find these Japanese ships and so in the evening so you'd be out all the afternoon and at dusk trying to look for more shipping. So the first month all of September was a very heavy flying month, a very heavy flying month. So much so that a lot of the aircraft got up to their, what I say, their two forty hourlies very quickly and that meant

38:30 it was a nice break and the crews were coming out, "Who's going to get the job to take an aircraft south?" you know a nice break. "Who's going to get it?" We were one of the junior crews so we came fairly late in the piece to take an aircraft south and that's when I changed crews because my pilot and my co-WAG, they'd had a bout of malaria cause the malaria control wasn't very good in the early days,

39:00 partly because of the situation and I suppose, I don't really quite know why stronger measures were not taken in the very early days to prevent malaria 'cause there should have been more emphasis on taking your, well it was Atebrin not quinine in those days, Atebrin. Certainly we all had mosquito nets and

39:30 that but particularly if you couldn't avoid being bitten, but Atebrin would have been a help, but anyway my pilot, my first pilot and my co-WAG both got an attack of malaria while we were in PNG and then they got well enough and when it was our turn to take an aircraft south we took it all the way down to Wagga to leave it for repairs and then both the pilot and the other WAG both got attacks of malaria again and they were hospitalised

40:00 so the navigator and I, we went back to the squadron and we became supernumeraries and we filled gaps in other crews if people had gone sick, which is inevitable, and that's when I joined up with Ray Kelly who was my pilot for the rest of my stay in Milne Bay and with whom I went south as an instructor in OTU and we went on to Liberators together and he was best man at our wedding and we're still in touch

40:30 'cause he lives in Canberra.

Tape 4

00:35 Okay? Yes well in the last veterans' newsletter [Vetaffairs] which came out only about two and a half, three weeks ago now, I mentioned that my co-WAG when I in my first 6 Squadron crew, his name was Colin Death and he pronounced it D-E-A-T-H, Death, not Deeth like a lot of people do, Colin Death. Anyway, when I joined the squadron of course

01:00 and the squadron as I mentioned was preparing to go north into PNG and I had a couple of days leave before we went and I went home to Mum, my Mum and I said "I'm flying with Death Mum". She said "Well look I know that." she said. "I know it's a dangerous job but you don't have to be dramatic about it." Anyway, further to that, in the veterans' newsletter of three weeks ago, on the back page there's a whole lot of letters from veterans saying "Does anybody know where so and so is? We'd like to contact him and so and so." So in this,

01:30 and this is what I wanted to show you, there was a note there. "Colin W Death would like to contact John Clark and Percy Green, whom he served with in 6 Squadron." and so on. And I hadn't seen him or even heard of him or knew where he was when he stayed down south and got malaria and he didn't come back to the squadron. He went somewhere else and I never knew where he went and I had no word or anything

02:00 from him so as soon as I saw that and he had a telephone number and it was a West Australian number because I knew he was a New South Welshman. So I got on the phone and rang him up and we had a long talk and that was sixty one years since I'd seen or heard of him. It's amazing isn't it?

It is.

Colin Death. Yes. So there was his letter and the other chap I knew Percy Green as I mentioned to you. Percy and I both returned to the squad as supernumeraries and went into different crews but we shared a tent together until he was posted

02:30 south before me and I've been in touch with his son in recent years 'cause Percy died some years ago and particularly because that that diary of mine which I've put there when it was published, there's some people I wanted to get copies of and Percy was one of them and I got in touch with his son and I sent him a copy of it, yes. But you know that was one of these sort of little coincidences that are sort of one of the happy things in one's life.

03:00 **How important was camaraderie in a flight crew?**

Oh very important, Isabel [interviewer], very important. And as I mentioned earlier that was one of the advantages of OUT, the OTU part of air force training, which I missed out on, because that's where you

formed your crew and you sort of bonded together then and that meant that by the time you went into action each person knew his job and knew what you know, you can

03:30 rely on each other, whereas if you're just thrown together straight into action it would be a bit more difficult you see, but that initial period where you're not in action but doing training and getting to know each other well then you know it was very important in crew harmony, yeah.

Was there ever a time when you didn't have confidence in your pilot?

No. I've been lucky. The first one, Bill Wheeler, was an excellent

04:00 pilot. A very good pilot. Very, he could land, we were talking to Chris [interviewer] earlier about bad landings but he was he was a very good pilot from landings and things like that and I met up with him again quite a lot because when I went to OTU after finishing my tour, he was on the staff there and I did a lot of staff flying with him and when TAA [Trans Australia Airlines] was formed

04:30 TAA had a lot of ex-air force pilots and Bill Wheeler was one of them. Now because of our actions here and the ones on that plane, the damage to the destroyer and the sinking of a Jap ship, he was awarded a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross], yes. So, but he died many years ago but Ray Kelly was probably not as brilliant a pilot as Bill Wheeler, but a very,

05:00 I might say a very reliable pilot, very reliable pilot, so much so that particularly when we went together again in Liberators, I know a lot of the young chaps we picked up, because we picked up four, I think I mentioned four gunners. All young fellas straight from course and they had a lot of admiration and respect for Ray's ability in flying and handling an aircraft. To give you an example. When we were on Liberators on one of our training flights what we call the ball turret. It's the turret in the middle of the fuselage but it's lowered by hydraulics out of the aircraft. It's a rather, I hate, well we were all supposed to have a try in it but you feel as though there's nothing around hanging on you see. You're only held by this

06:00 hydraulic pipe as it were you see, and you've got three hundred and sixty degrees. It's a marvellous weapon because you've got three hundred and sixty degrees flight. Anyway, on this particular aircraft we were doing training, it wasn't one that we used in combat fortunately. On this particular day, we called him the ball turret gunner, or the belly gunner. When he had to get out of that turret he would turn the turret so that the guns pointed

06:30 straight down and then he would come out of it you see. On this particular aircraft the turret wouldn't turn so that the guns would point down and he could get out, so what he had to do and what he agreed to do, the pilot gave him the choice. What he had to do was to stay in the turret in its semi-lowered position so that the guns

07:00 would point to the rear, be horizontal with the bottom of the aircraft, because if the guns were pointing down and stayed in that position he could get out but then the aircraft when it landed because it's so low to the ground it would hit them and there would be some damage caused to the aircraft, so he agreed, he had enough faith in the pilot to make a safe landing, a careful landing, he agreed to stay in the turret so that he could have the guns pointed

07:30 horizontally and not vertically and so that was an example I think of the faith in our pilot and all 'cause as I say, I knew Ray quite well, because I'd done this tour with Hudsons with him and been with him down in East Sale so that I had a lot of faith with him but it was nice to think that these new fellows who had joined the crew, they had similar faith. Enough faith to do that with him and he made a good careful landing and there was no trouble so that when we landed

08:00 and the aircraft, they could tilt it up and then the belly gunner could crawl out of the turret.

That is an amazing trust

Yes.

In somebody.

Yeah.

You were saying before you've mentioned that different personalities were suited to different jobs within the aircraft.

Mm.

I just wondered what kind of personality traits I guess made a good wireless operator gunner?

Well I suppose to make it to be so as you wouldn't get particularly bored….

08:30 I suppose what helped me was the fact that I was I was a good reader so I was used to sitting and reading you know, so on a wireless set you've got to sit and listen you know. In a in a way it's like reading I suppose, that you're not active. There are some people who can't sit for five minutes. You probably know such people. Who can't sit for five minutes, they've always got to be moving around or something, so same with sitting in a turret you see,

09:00 visually keeping an eye on what's going around you, scanning the skies, scanning the ocean so that to be that kind of personality I suppose was quite appropriate to the job of being a wireless operator or a gunner in that sense. Sitting quietly. Looking at the two of the hardest jobs oh well, flying of course is.... or of course those planes, all had

09:30 the automatic pilot when you.... but even so piloting was not you know, it was a fairly stressful job because of the responsibility but I would think one of the hardest jobs in our aircraft was the navigator's job. He has to keep in mind the wind changes and particularly over areas where if you're flying a lot over the sea, you don't have many landmarks you see, and if a wind came up and things

10:00 changed and you're not aware of it, well a good navigator would be aware of it because they watch the movement of the wind across the waves. They can tell from the streaks of white across the waves you know, what the wind may be doing and that kind of thing so and particularly at night time of course it's even more difficult. They've got to take sightings of the stars and so on, if they're not covered by clouds, so I would think the navigator's job is one of the hardest jobs

10:30 and particularly when we were on Liberators, we would be doing what we call harassing raids if we were not on a particular strike. A strike would be a particular object like a cruiser or something you're after to hit, but a lot of our work in Liberators, in our squadron, was what they called harassing raids and because the Liberator had quite a long range we might be away for thirteen, fourteen hours and most of it at night and what we would be doing,

11:00 we'd say go over a particular Japanese position, a township, and where there were Japanese forces located and we'd fly around at night time dropping the occasional bomb, we had a lot of bombs, small ones, to keep people you know in their trenches at night. Well as I said harassing raids it was properly named, and also which was interesting, somebody worked this out; of course we'd take a lot of empty beer bottles 'cause you know if you can blow into an empty

11:30 bottle you get a whistle, well when you drop a beer bottle through the air going down from a height, it whistles, so that's a bit scary too, so we'd be dropping bombs and empty beer bottles and going 'round and 'round and 'round over a particular Japanese township and then when just before you know dawn was going to come, so you'd head off back home to, well it was in the Northern Territory then, or Darwin

12:00 and so it was a long job sitting on a wireless set or sitting in a turret all the time you were stooging around in the air, yes.

What exactly can you describe for me what exactly you would do as a wireless operator?

Well mainly, unless you were in an emergency, mainly you had to keep wireless silence, that is you're listening all the time for messages. If you were in

12:30 an emergency then of course you would have to transmit of course, the danger of that was you awaken the enemy to your position because they can take a direction finding on you, but mainly as I said the job is listening in case you're getting messages from base to do this or to do that, go to a different target or come back early for some reason or other, weather coming up or something like that but as I mentioned earlier, the reason why we had two operators, two radio operators

13:00 or wireless operators in both the Hudsons and the Liberators so that you could change and so you didn't spend all your time on the wireless, you took a break from the wireless and you went down there in the Hudson on the turret, or you went down on the Liberator on the side gun to keep a watch out for that and, yep.

How big was your work area?

In the Hudson because as I mentioned the Hudson had been designed as a civil airliner, it was fairly comfortable. It was immediately behind the pilot

13:30 in a kind of half cabin, you had a little table with the wireless set there and you had a reasonably comfortable chair that you sat on. I believe, I've never been in them but I know from talking to colleagues who flew in the RAF in England and planes like the Lancaster and the Halifax were designed purely as bombers and they were rather uncomfortable for crew. That's what I've been told. The Liberator, typical

14:00 of the Americans, were a much more comfortable plane, a much bigger plane inside but probably no better. Well for a start none of the Liberators or the Fortresses could carry the bomb load that a Lancaster could you know. The Lancaster was a better designed plane for its purpose. The Liberator was better than the Fortress 'cause it was a later design, but anyway getting back to your question, that's why the radio operator and you had two of them in order that they didn't die of boredom

14:30 or doing the one job for fourteen hours for example.

What was the temperature like within the planes?

Well always the higher you go the colder you get of course. We didn't have much heating no, not like a modern passenger plane. You just had to take extra clothing you know, or as you know all the air crew even in the tropics, we still had our flying boots because you needed them up in the air for the....

although

15:00 in New Guinea it was only on having to cross the mountains that you flew at any great height. For most of our work in New Guinea, over sea reconnaissance, we wouldn't be that very high. We would, I'm trying to think of what we would be. Probably three or four thousand feet I suppose, but in the Liberators we were a lot higher because particularly on these harassing raids you had to keep away out of trouble above the ack-ack. We were a fair way up from the ack-ack so it was a lot colder. I can remember

15:30 after the war when we were bringing back medical cases, army people you know, although we might have been on the ground, we might have been in shorts and khaki shirts and things like that we had extra clothing to put on once we got high and I remember we were picking up, where did we pick them up from? Probably Balikpapan I think ,after the war we picked up a lot of army cases and the chaps got in their shorts you know and just a shirt on and I said to these guys you know,

16:00 "You know it's going to get very cold when we get up to ten thousand feet. Have you got something? You got a blanket? Get a blanket out of your haversack." you see they had their army packs there. "Get a blanket out so that you've got it to put on when you when we get up high." and they said "Oh we'll be right." but they didn't know. They knew once we got to ten thousand feet how cold it was yeah. Yes, so it can get cold up there, yeah.

How did flying crews cope with fatigue on long.....

16:30 I suppose I don't whether with people with a lot of imagination you know, worried too much and got upset or not but I know it didn't upset me. I somehow I suppose, resigned or patient but it didn't worry me a lot. I don't know whether some of the chaps did get worried. They weren't supposed to leave their turret and because I wasn't

17:00 there to see whether some of them did get up out of their turrets and walk around and that. The pilot probably would know because he could he would feel the aircraft change its attitude slightly, well of course there were two pilots. The pilots were able to get a break because in the Liberator we had two pilots, so that on a long trip the captain would probably get, I knew he got up, I know Ray used to get up and walk around, well one of the things you would want to do is go and visit the crew positions to see how they were coping and that

17:30 and no doubt that if a good captain did that, that was a help to the crew too, to know that the captain was interested in what they were doing. He'd come 'round and talk to them a bit you know, particularly at night time when particularly, unlike Europe where night fighters were a problem, we were not too worried about night fighters over the Japanese positions. I don't recall anybody being shot down by at night by a Japanese fighter at night I can't recall. Not in

18:00 my experience anyway but they may have happened so that I think was a good thing for crew morale for the skipper to get up and go and visit the positions and come back while the second pilot was looking after the controls.

Did you have to maintain silence or minimise noise as much as possible or....?

No not really. The only thing is why you didn't talk much, it was so noisy. It was not easy to talk over it

18:30 because not like a passenger airplane where you know, the plane is insulated so well from noise, but in a big bomber with four engines going along and you know in a Liberator and as I said, it wasn't very well insulated inside so that was a sort of an objection to much conversation. It was the difficulty of talking to each other. You could intercom but even then intercom, you

19:00 were advised not to talk a lot on the intercom in the plane just in case you didn't want people talking when perhaps the captain had to give an urgent instruction so that excess talk was frowned upon in the intercom within the plane, and then if you wanted to go down and talk to one of the chaps as I said, noise would be a an inhibitor of conversation. Yes. Yes. It wouldn't matter getting out of the noise, getting out of the plane

19:30 because nobody would hear it outside the engines anyway, yeah.

You mentioned having a good imagination got you through at times. What kinds of things did you think about?

Oh I suppose what you would do when you landed you know, how would you spend your recreation time and that kind of thing and maybe if you'd just got some mail, you might have taken letters with you on board to read while you were listening to the wireless and that.

20:00 That’s something you would do. I don't think I ever tried to write a letter, it's too much vibration and it would probably distract you from listening to the radio but no, that's I think, oh and of course fortunately on a long trip on the Liberator we were able to prepare a little snack for each other you know. One engineer usually did that you know, have a snack and prepare a hot drink and pass it 'round

20:30 and that kind of thing, yes. We didn't bother with that too much on the Hudson because the flights were shorter. It wasn't worth taking all the gear aboard to give yourself a snack, yeah.

Were you receiving mail very often in New Guinea?

Not…. New Guinea wasn't so good in the early days. It got better as the allies started to get to get on top of the Japanese

21:00 If I remember the mail in 1943 was more regular because more ships came in. In the early days in Milne Bay we didn't get many ships in you see with supplies and I suppose the main supplies were food supplies and ammunition and so forth but certainly that at that stage in 1943 we got more mail more regularly. We got mail, yeah.

Who were you writing to back home?

21:30 Well being a member of a big family I had a lot of folks, well particularly when there's family, like my eldest sister she got married before the war ended so she was living somewhere else and of course Joan, when we got writing we wrote a lot of letters to each other naturally enough and she was on the various RAAF stations, Parkes as she said and then Townsville and of course I can't remember.

22:00 I suppose I wrote to my brothers but they were all stationed away anyway, at different stations, so I think mainly I got news of what they were doing through my mother and father and mainly through their letters.

Can you tell me how you began writing to Joan?

Yes. Well I think I think she began writing to me first because I used to write to my sister as I

22:30 sort of indicated, we had some sort of exciting times in PNG and some of some of them letters must have been able to get through without too much censorship and obviously my sister passed them over to Joan because they were on the course together and then Joan started to write to me and of course once that started I kept writing and giving her more and more and I know we lost them then, because we moved overseas and I had kept a lot

23:00 of the letters for a long time but I lost them somewhere in one of our moves, but no we had quite a strong correspondence before we ever met, yeah, and then when she was based at Townsville fortunately we had a couple of trips through Townsville where we were able to spend a couple of days together. And then we as I said, we got married before I got out of the air force. Easy day to remember, our anniversary day. Australia Day 1946

23:30 was our wedding day you know, and my pilot was as I said, was best man and he and I were still in the air force and by then our squadron had been, because it was after the war, we were based at Tocumwal and so Joan came and stayed with me at the base for a short while. What we can remember because we stayed in a hotel, I took a room in a hotel, is the mosquitoes were terrible in this hotel room in at Tocumwal, the mosquitos

24:00 yeah.

Had your sister passed on the letters to Joan maybe with an eye of hooking up her brother?

I don't know. Maybe. Probably later on as the relationship developed yes, yes. Actually I think we sort of had an unofficial engagement on one of my last trips to Townsville, I think we had an unofficial engagement, yes and then well she naturally enough, she got out of the air force

24:30 before I did and I had a trip to her farm, her parents had a farm at a little place called Coolamon which is near Wagga. It's north west of Wagga and it was interesting too, although I don't think her father was too happy, we had to do one trip from Tocumwal to Mascot and we were able to, I knew where the farm was

25:00 and Ray come down and we sort of shot it up and I think why her father wasn't happy was because all the horses and everything went 'round madly running around and I don't think he was too keen on that. Scaring all the animals.

Did she send a photograph of herself in one of the letters or….?

Oh yes I think so. Yes, yes. She sent me one yeah, yeah. Yes. Oh no we exchanged photographs, yeah.

25:30 I was lucky. I had a camera with…. later on perhaps tomorrow we can look at them.because Bryony [Archive staffer] mentioned on the phone if I had any photographs to show and I had a camera all the time I was in the air force, particularly in 6 Squadron and I got some good shots there too and it was interesting, it was funny talking about this diary. I kept this diary and it's very rough in

26:00 parts too, particularly in the tropics, there's a tropical weather, some of the ink is splattered on it you know, and it was only a couple of years ago that DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] you know, they were preparing this the Australians at War [television documentary series] and so there were some appeals in the newsletter, the DVA newsletters for veterans to those who kept diaries or had letters that you'd kept with experiences, to

26:30 so I wrote and told them that this and then you know they said, "What can we do about how can?" and my daughter, Christine, she was very interested in it so with a bit of persuasion, well what I also, what I

did, I spoke to the archive section of the [Australian] War Memorial and they said, "Oh yes we'd like to look at it and if it's worth keeping we'll ask you

27:00 could we keep it." and I thought, "Well if they're going to do that I'd better make a copy of it." So Christine typed it all out for me on the computer and then I took the original to the [Australian] War Memorial and they said, "Look, we'll keep it for a while and if we like it we'll ask you can we keep it." Which they did. They thought it was good enough to keep, so fortunately Christine had typed it and then they said in the archives, they said, "Why don't you, have you thought about getting

27:30 it published?" So that's what I did. I went ahead and fortunately my pilot, one thing I'd like you to read later. He wrote a marvellous foreword I think, in my opinion it's marvellous anyway, very good foreword and his eldest son has done a bit of work in preparing material for publishing so I gave it over to Ray's eldest son who prepared it for printing and editing and he had it printed so we ran off, oh

28:00 only a small run, about fifty copies, and fortunately the man who wrote as I mentioned, the man who wrote the story on the Milne Bay because he lives locally, somebody had passed him my name, he's doing in a sense what you're doing. He went 'round and this is why I think his story is so interesting. In addition to getting the official story he's gone 'round and got the various experiences and stories of veterans and somebody passed him my name, another

28:30 colleague of mine that was in 6 Squadron, and so he came and got some excerpts from my diary which he's printed in that book and some of my photographs which he's copied and he's a proprietor of a, he calls it 'The War Bookshop' where they sell a lot of books about military matters and the war stories and so on, so at my request he undertook to sell

29:00 the spare copies of my diary and they were all sold out unfortunately. I'm thinking of, or he asked me recently, he said, "Have you got the original?" the one that Ray Kelly's son did for me. The original what you call artwork you know, and I said, "I've got that." so I mentioned it but I kept a few copies and I've only got one or two left because naturally I gave them to members of the family and other colleagues so but

29:30 as I say, the foreword that my pilot got to write, I think it was a very good story 'cause he's also written a book, not of the war, it's a book about something else. That's right, it's his family history he's written, so he's got some background in writing and somebody else rang me up, must have been last year some time,

30:00 because you know once I handed the diary over to, the original over to the War Memorial they've got permission of course, or they've got the authority to give permission to people, students and others who want to work on it. Anyway I had a call from a lass who's obviously a freelance journalist for The Australian and she said, "Can I get permission?" she said, "We're doing a series of

30:30 stories in The Australian newspaper of veterans' experiences from diaries and newsletters and so forth and so on." and she said "Can I have your permission to access your diary?" So I gave her that permission and we don't get The Australian, we get the Sydney Morning Herald but Joan's sister in Melbourne gets it so we said, "Look keep an eye out for these stories." and

31:00 and lo and behold, a couple of excerpts from the diary and it was only today and it's that book there next to that photo. I got that in the mail from this lass. She said, "We're producing it as a book. All these stories." and lo and behold it arrived in the mail today and it's got two of the stories I've told you about Milne Bay in there, yeah. So.

Wonderful.

Yes it was nice. Yeah.

Can I ask you about....

31:30 **I've heard that flight crews can often be very superstitious.**

Um yes, that is true. The crews I was with I didn't notice any particular members who had particular superstitions, but I've heard that some of them have. Some of them had particular superstitions but not in my experience, like the two crews I was in,

32:00 like the two different pilots I had in 6 Squadron I don't know it wouldn't have been a superstition where the pilot, my first pilot was Bill Wheeler, the one who got the DFC, particularly out of Sale because Ray Kelly my other pilot he knew Bill quite well 'cause they were both officers until I got commission but Bill had had almost an obsession of polishing his shoes you know, marvellous,

32:30 shiny, black shoes and you'd always see him with a cloth ,like we were sharing an office in Sale while waiting to get word to go and fly a plane and he'd be have his cloth out polishing his shoes, and it was a bit unusual I thought that you wouldn't call it a superstition would you, it's only a bit of a little quirky trait I guess but no, getting back to your question I'm sure some of them would have had

33:00 some superstitions but not in the immediate crews I was with I don't recall anybody having that particular superstition you know, having to walk around something, or for example getting into a plane, they'd do it a certain way or whatever. I don't recall anybody having a problem like that, no.

Were there any rituals say before take off or when you heard a crew hadn't come back?

No, strangely enough

33:30 and this is something I mentioned in my diary that now that must have been something a little bit unconscious. We lost four crews in my time in and there was only one of them that I ever mentioned. Strangely enough I've not mentioned in the diary any of the crews having gone you know, any particular, I don't know whether

34:00 and I've tried to think about that when I was writing my own introduction to the diary and as I was going and getting you know, reading them and sort of clearing up things for my daughter who was doing the typing. Some little words that were a bit hazy or not clear and it struck me, "I haven't mentioned any of the crews in detail." you know, what happened with them and so on and I don't know whether it was sort of an unconscious thing. I don't recall it being consciously leaving them out

34:30 but I don't know whether, well if it was unconscious you wouldn't call it a superstition, not purposely, not to mention them because I don't recall consciously leaving them out. The only reason why I mention one of them is because this pilot, I think it was the second crew we lost, that's right, he was a particular friend of our pilot and they're both, their first name was Bill. Anyway apparently the rumour went 'round

35:00 "Oh Bill's gone in, Bill's been lost." and some of them thought it was Bill Wheeler like my crew, the crew I was in, but it turned out to be this other pilot whose name was Bill Campbell and he was lost. He died there. I don't know whether the plane malfunctioned 'cause everybody was killed, there was no knowledge of whether there was bad navigation and they ran into a mountain or what, but it might have been a plane malfunction because

35:30 their bodies were all recovered and in fact on one of our trips back to Moresby it was somewhere between Milne Bay and Moresby on the south coast of PNG where their bodies were found and buried, because he was a particular friend of my pilot, we flew over low over the graves on one of our trips back to Moresby and I've got that mentioned in the diary and that's the only one I've mentioned in the diary.

Did you mix often with other crews?

Um

36:00 mainly because we were NCOs in my crew, the first crew, we were all NCOs, even the pilot was an NCO, and so naturally enough your sergeants' mess was a good point for mixing and that, but you didn't meet with the officers strangely enough out of your flying time. For the NCOs the sergeants' mess was the focus of getting together and

36:30 chatting with other crew members so it was mainly other and you'll see that in some of the photos. You'll see that nearly all my photos of other crew members are mainly NCOs you see, particularly when I was an NCO myself. When I was on Liberators I got my commission at down at Sale so that when I went on Liberators I shared a tent with Ray Kelly then, 'cause Ray was commissioned or he was commissioned off course so he was a pilot, he was a flying officer when I flew with him in

37:00 Milne Bay, so we didn't see much of each other once we finished flying except we might go on a lugger trip together but normally in our days of staying in a tent reading or playing cards or whatever, you're with other NCOs, other crew members, and so I didn't mix a lot with Ray in Milne Bay because he would be with the officers but we had quite a good relationship

37:30 when we were flying but it was different when we were on Liberators because as I said I was an officer also and we shared a tent together when we went to when we went to Northern Territory and that.

Was there a hierarchy on the plane of particular ranks?

Oh yeah whatever rank the pilot was, and sometimes the pilot might have been a an NCO and he would have had say, a navigator who say was a commissioned man but it was understood

38:00 that the pilot was the skipper. He was the captain, ye,p but when I crewed up with Ray on Hudsons there was Archie Fry, myself, we were the two WAGs, Archie had a bit more seniority than me because he was he was on an earlier EATS [Empire Air Training Scheme] course than I was and our navigator was a flying officer same as Ray Kelly was, they were both officers, so they

38:30 were together of course in the officers' mess and Archie and I were together as NCOs and then we were together at Sale, Archie and I, and we both got our commissions at the same time but then unfortunately when we formed the squad the Liberator squad at Leyburn which is in near Warwick in Queensland Archie got tuberculosis, which was unusual these days wasn't it? Anyway of course he

39:00 was invalided out and we had to pick up a new a new wire radio operator.

Tape 5

00:42 Yes this particular mission it was more or less a, theoretically it might have been a rescue mission. One of the other squadrons, Liberators, called the 25 Squadron actually working out of West Australia. They had a raid I think on

01:00 one of the Indonesian towns, it might have been might have Surabaya. Anyway coming back from the raid one of the crews had experienced engine trouble and the skipper, a very experienced man fortunately for them, decided they would they wouldn't make it so they'd have to ditch and this was at night time you know, he did a marvellous job because the Liberator didn't have a very good reputation when it came

01:30 to ditching because of the huge bomb bay in the middle. It was inclined to break up in a ditching mission. Anyway he decided they'd have to ditch and they chose, they could see the breaking waves on a reef just off an island, one of the Indonesian islands, it might have been the island of Flores for example, but along that chain of islands of Indonesia. Anyway about one o'clock in the morning or something like that he

02:00 put it down on this reef just off the shore of the island and all the crew got out. Now they had messages back to base so early the next morning we were ordered out, the crew I was in, we were ordered out together with a B25 from No. 2 Squadron and a Catalina coming in as a possible air-sea rescue, so we took off to try and locate this aircraft

02:30 and also to see perhaps whether there were any survivors available in which case we'd call the Catalina in and so we got to the point, we saw the Liberator perched on this reef, partly covered with water, but mainly sitting on the reef and so we went down low with the B25 in front of us making a low pass over the beach to see if anybody was you know, any survivors perhaps were there to signal us and

03:00 it was a very good manoeuvre for the Japanese because unbeknownst to us, we found this out later, the Japanese had some soldiers on this island and they captured all the survivors. In fact the whole crew got out. They captured them all and so I guess they expected that somebody may come looking for them and as we got low over the reef they opened fire on both the

03:30 B25 in front of us and our plane and as soon as we were fired on of course both planes made a violent manoeuvre away from the island. The B25 had one motor shot out. We collected some bullets in the fuselage. Fortunately none of ours hit vital parts so off we went. We realised then there was not much we could do about a rescue operation of course so we radioed the Catalina and told them

04:00 to follow our track in and we would stay with the B25 in case he had to ditch, see with one motor out and of course it was only a two motor plane. Fortunately we followed it and both of us got all the way back to Darwin without any trouble, but you know it was a little bit dicey and then it was interesting the squadron leader, oh he was a squadron leader at the time, very experienced pilot and of course the senior officers they were very badly treated by the Japanese,

04:30 and fortunately, that would have been let me think, that must have been April or May '45 so they only had three or four months in captivity but in that time they were treated fairly badly. I remember one of them, it might have been the time when they were getting stories for Australians at War and I mentioned this episode and they thought they would speak to this squadron leader, he's still alive as a matter of fact, but he refused, he wasn't

05:00 involved. He didn't want to get any more publicity about it 'cause it was well written up at the time when the captives were released after the war you know, it was a pretty harrowing tale but in a sense their story is much more interesting than what I've just said about our involvement, but because I hadn't know about it when in our Liberator newsletter I mentioned this incident and I said, "Does anybody know what whether

05:30 the crew whether they'd been aware of our planes coming over looking for them?" and one of the crew members wrote back and said, "No, we had already been taken away from the scene." and so they weren't aware that we had gone out looking for them.

Was that ever a fear, that you would somehow be captured by....?

Yes we were 'cause naturally enough we were all prepared for that kind of thing.

06:00 For example the crew were all issued with revolvers, usually it was the Smith and Wesson .38 revolver and we had our survival kits you know, little packs of food and so forth.

What was in the survival kit?

Probably you know hydrated food, that kind of thing. For the Japanese we had sort of Japanese money or it was,

06:30 I think it was false Japanese money because the Japanese themselves made a lot of false money so we had Japanese money in our survival kits, mainly to pay natives or locals you know who might help us otherwise they may report us to the Japanese. A jungle knife of course, 'cause it was nearly all tropical areas, jungle knife, can't think of what else, there were probably other things there but memory's a bit hazy on

07:00 some of the details, but they're the main things. The revolver, jungle knife, some hydrated food and things like that.

You mentioned before that you'd been hit while you were going on that rescue mission. How much damage can say a Liberator actually sustain before ….?

A fair amount as long as it doesn't hit say for example, an oil a fuel line, and even to hit a fuel line because you've got a flight engineer

07:30 on board it depends how close it is to the hot motor. A fuel line can be overcome you know, they can close one line off for example but because it's a fair size, particularly the fuselage and the wings are a fair size, you could get quite a few pieces of shrapnel, bullets, without hitting any vital parts. There was another occasion

08:00 on the Liberators still patrolling that same area of Indonesian islands we came across a small Japanese coastal ship and we tried to bomb it but it couldn't, it being rather small and manoeuvrable, we missed with our bombs so we went in and strafed it. Well as I'd mentioned with the four turrets and each turret firing two .5 machine guns that's a lot quite a lot of fire power and being a wooden ship and of course

08:30 we had some of the incendiary bullets mixed in with your clip of bullets, we actually set the thing on fire and it sank but even that ship put up some fire against us and when we got back to base we looked 'round and we saw we had a few holes in the fuselage too you see, and that a stray bullet of course could kill one of the crews yeah.

Did that ever happen on any of your missions?

Not in my

09:00 experience. Not in the squadron I was operating no no, not during our period there.

What would you hear? Would you actually hear bullets hitting the plane and what did that sound like?

I missed that bit.

Would you hear the bullets hitting the plane?

Only if they were close to where you were sitting. For example with the noise of the plane, now that's a fairly noisy thing, four motors going flat out and that kind of thing unless the bullet was hitting somewhere near where you're sitting or where the crew's sitting

09:30 you probably wouldn't hear it, but as I say it's a pretty big you know, it's a pretty big plane. A lot of space where things can miss vital parts and miss any of the crew but of course you can be unlucky.

You were saying yesterday that on the Liberators because of so many guns, it was a bigger plane that you'd actually have dedicated gunners. Were you

10:00 **doing more wireless?**

Yes, yes.

At that stage?

Yes yes. Although as I mentioned the second radio op, or you would do a turn on the side gun because we were doing so much reconnaissance and not meeting any opposition, we there were not many occasions where actually any of the guns were used

10:30 but of course you'd have to sit there or the chap in the turret that's all they could do the gunners they would spend all their time in the turrets. So it wasn't I suppose, we didn't have to be as active

11:00 in the Liberator because of the war situation as we were for example in our first two operations on the Hudsons.

At the times when you were being a gunner was it particularly anxious being in that part of the plane because you knew that would be a central target for anybody firing back?

Must admit never gave it much thought really, but that was a bad part because I know from the one

11:30 survivor as I mentioned, the one survivor of those two Liberators that were shot down where they were hit and where the fire started was where the sort of starter motor was. If you can imagine the cockpit of the Liberator had two levels. On the top level would be the navigator sitting behind the captain pilot, the wireless operator sitting in his little sort of part cabin

12:00 behind the second pilot then on the level below that, there were steps down, there would be the flight engineer with his starter motor which is a petrol driven motor; then forward of him would be the bomb aimer and the nose turret, now from this friend who was the sole survivor of these two Liberators who got shot down he said they got hit just where that petrol motor was and that's what started the fire

12:30 and what he did, he was one of the radio operators. Fortunately the bomb doors were open. Well if they

hadn't been opened for the bombing they'd have been opened by the captain because that was the way the crew had to get out you see, and so what he did, had his harness on and he jumped right through from the from that top level through what was the stairwell to the lower level. He jumped right that out through the bomb opening

13:00 into the ocean but the last thing he remembered was the flight engineer unsuccessfully trying to put the fire out with a fire extinguisher but having to down the catwalk, which was in the bomb bay, to the rear of the plane with his harness on but without his parachute. It was a pretty grim story, yeah.

13:30 Just that survivor story was well written up. It was quite a story really. When he landed in the ocean and got rid of his parachute he landed not far from the sort of support vessels that were supporting the Japanese cruiser and they tried to run him down and in fact they were so close he kicked away from it, he kicked the hull of this ship to push himself away from it

14:00 when they tried to run him down. An air-sea rescue Catalina, there were a couple of survivors from the other plane in the water, an air-sea rescue Catalina was a very brave pilot, he landed in the water to pick them up. They'd picked up another survivor and this friend of mine and because his clothing had been burnt they were in the process of stripping his clothes off him when the Catalina was shot up.

14:30 So the two survivors and the Catalina crew they all had to get out because the Catalina was on fire. A second Catalina came and landed and picked up those of the Catalina crew and also only one of the survivors, the other one disappeared. This friend of mine was the one they picked up and of course he was being supported because he had no clothes on, they'd taken them off and that, and I'm not even sure whether he had time to put his life jacket

15:00 on again, his Mae West as we call them. Anyway the second Catalina managed to pick up the survivors that were left in the water and he got off and another Liberator from the formation was flying around providing protection for the second Catalina so it was quite a quite an operation really. Anyway that survivor, he's still alive.

Good on him.

Yes.

15:30 **He's once a survivor, always a survivor.**

Yes. My word. He’s like a cat with nine lives. He'd already used a few of them up hadn't he on that story? Yeah. Yeah.

You mentioned that the life preservers were called Mae Wests.

Mae Wests. Yeah.

Why was that? How did that name come….?

I suppose you know they were not like the ones you get now in a passenger aircraft. You know those little things that you can blow up. They had a lot of cork and I suppose if you remember the old films of Mae West [Hollywood actress] she was

16:00 a very busty woman so these cork life preservers were quite bulky here in the front of you and so hence the term Mae West.

You've told us about a couple of your ….the I guess your more dangerous campaigns or operations.

Mm.

IS there a particular hairy moment that sticks in your mind through all of that?

16:30 Two particular moments. The one I mentioned when we were attacking this cruiser this cruiser in Milne Bay. I was watching, now I've got my, I remember it anyway, but my diary record also helps to prompt my memory about it, but I was in the turret that day and when you

17:00 can actually hear the ack-ack fire you know it's pretty close. You can see it you know, when we were in our dive down to the cruiser and then coming out of the dive and particularly coming out 'cause the turret is at the back as it were and you're having sort of great grandstand view as it were of what's happening and you see the black puffs of ack-ack shells getting close, but when you can actually hear them bursting you know that it's getting

17:30 pretty close, so that was a little bit dicey and the other time was the time I mentioned where we got lost after finding another cruiser that we weren't able to attack it because of the weather and when it looked like we might have to bail out and of course to bail out over the jungle of New Guinea would have been a little bit tricky and so in fact this friend of mine, the one I mentioned I'd located quite recently, when he wrote

18:00 me a letter just the other day. He was reminding me of this particular incident. He said he also agreed it was very hairy but he was also saying one thing that I'd sort of forgotten that when the pilot said, "Look we'd better bail out." the three of us, the navigator and the two wireless we said, "Oh no, keep it going

if you can Bill." you know, "We're not too keen on jumping out over the jungle here." So that was you know, that was quite hairy until we could until we got ourselves back to Port

18:30 Moresby. They were the two most frightening moments. Strangely enough the ditching wasn't a great, frightening moment because we were more or less under control you know, it was a planned ditching. It wasn't like a crash landing for example. It was a planned ditching. Oh there was one other occasion, yes. Now this was frightening. I think again we were with 6 Squadron we were detailed off

19:00 from Milne Bay to get across to Horn Island to test-fly a Hudson which had crash landed some months before and it had been on the ground at Horn Island for months. Now we think ultimately what the trouble was the fact that that plane had been in that tropical heat all those months. We think probably because it had originally been a crash landing and because of that crash landing

19:30 the retractable landing gear, what they did they bolted it in the down position for a start, that would make it difficult to fly because you know planes always fly better when you retract the landing gear. Anyway whether the heat combined with the original crash landing had warped the air frame we don't know, but anyway that I think might have been the cause of our trouble. Anyway when we got to Horn Island and we inspected the plane

20:00 we knew we had to test-fly it. We had to take it back further south to a main base where they would fully restore it and on Horn Island there's only the one strip. Horn Island is actually the airport for Thursday Island so it's very close to Thursday Island. Thursday Island is not big enough and it's too hilly to put an airstrip there so as I said, Horn Island is virtually the aerodrome for Thursday Island and so the strip

20:30 it ended at the shore line, so you were taking off out over the sea and as soon as we got airborne Ray, that's Ray Kelly my pilot, straight away had trouble because the plane tipped to the left, to the port and have you heard them use the term 'trim' on a plane? Well the pilot has a little lever that he can trim the aircraft to get it balanced

21:00 back you see. Well Ray had the trim lever all the way say to the right but he still couldn't stop the plane tilting. Well because it was tilting it governed our turn. Our turn was say 'round to the port' round in a semicircle and an indication of the pilot's experience and skilfulness as we turned 'round we automatically lined up with the strip and so he

21:30 called out to us, "Look." he said, "We've got to get down out of this." because the plane was very, very difficult to control and so he put it down. Now the sort of bolted-down landing gear in a sense helped us because we hit at a much higher speed than we would in a normal landing but because the undercarriage was bolted down it withstood that hard force and as we hit I have a vision and I can remember sharing this vision or talking about it afterwards with the other wireless

22:00 air gunner, 'cause we were standing behind the pilot and the navigator, and straight away because this same drift of the plane, once we hit the strip we moved off to the left again you see, and down on the side of the strip off the actual landing area there were a couple of anti-aircraft positions, Bofors guns, not the big guns, the Bofors guns, I think there was a parked plane or two, well we hit with such force fortunately we bounced over them. We didn't hit them, we bounced over them

22:30 and then of course Ray had cut the motors and put the brakes hard on, so we pulled up and we all got out and we were really shaking. That was a really dangerous position we were in, yeah.

You were very lucky to have bounced.

We were. We were. Really, really yeah, and Ray, 'cause he used quite a few words, what you can do with that plane now, and so we had to get ourselves back to the squadron. We weren't

23:00 able to fly it down to the base. I think they scrapped it in the end but that was that was dangerous and that was we felt you know, some fear, but the pilot did a marvellous job to get it down without killing us all, you know. One other occasion there was a huge air raid, probably the last biggest air raid that the Japs put on Milne Bay. I remember the date quite well, 17th of January 1943.

23:30 They did what you might have heard the expression 'pattern bombing'. Our strip, Turnbull, it began at the shoreline and ran right through what was a clear a coconut plantation and above the plantation away from the strip was the camp for the squadron you know, all our tents and so on and this is where the sort of experiences of some of the older members of the crew that I mentioned having been in Malaysia and Singapore

24:00 and they said, "Oh." they were getting terribly…. we were all in our trenches because the air raid siren had gone and with the pattern bombing started of course there was very accurate, it started at the beginning of the strip and you could hear the bombs marching towards you know, coming along the strip and up onto the hill where the tents were and the noise was incredible. All 'round you and we thought, "Gee whiz, how many casualties are we going to suffer?" Not one person was injured

24:30 or killed but we couldn't put an aircraft into the air for a week or more because one plane was completely destroyed and every other plane was damaged. Some you know, fairly severely, so it was from the Japanese point of view a successful raid but we all laughed because we got papers up from the mainland a few days later and the raid was reported. This is an example I think of the censorship. It

said, “No

25:00 casualties.” Well that was correct “And very little damage.” but there was a lot of damage and as I said the squadron couldn't put an aircraft in the air for a few days.

Whereabouts through the Milne Bay campaign was that?

When?

When abouts?

Oh well, the battle was over by then but of course the Japanese were still very active in the area. I'm not sure when the battle of Buna and Gona, you know that came after Kokoda

25:30 because actually the two villages, Buna and Gona, are on the north coast of PNG and it was from there that the Japanese went up the Kokoda Trail of course but then they were pushed back to their bases at Buna and Gona and actually some of the Japanese soldiers or they were actually marines that came with the invasion force well they actually came to supplement the invasion force in Milne

26:00 Bay but fortunately they had they'd landed at an island called Goodenough Island which you might say is halfway between Buna, Gona and Milne Bay. They'd landed at Goodenough Island to rest overnight. They'd come down in barges and they'd been spotted by the Australian spotters and what the Kittyhawks did, they flew from Milne Bay early the next morning and they strafed all the barges so that force and that

26:30 would have been a force of I think, something like nearly five hundred Japanese marines, that force took no part in the battle of Milne Bay because they were all stranded. Some of them were killed in the strafing but the fact that all their barges were sunk and set on fire and destroyed or whatever they couldn't come 'round into Milne Bay and be part of the invasion force so getting back to what I was saying, there was still a lot of activity, enemy activity,

27:00 and one of the biggest allied victories was the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. Had you heard of that? Well that occurred later in 1943 so even though the Battle of Milne Bay was well and truly over there was still a lot of enemy activity going in the area.

Milne Bay is credited a lot for being won because of the air force. What was your relationship with infantry or did you have one?

No, well

27:30 not me personally but that was one of the good things about the Milne Bay operation because for once the Australian Army had good air cover you know, which they didn't have in Malaysia because for a start the aircraft weren't good enough and there weren't enough of them in Malaysia and Singapore, but this is one occasion where the air force played a very significant role and of course the army

28:00 could see the support was something they could actually see because the army was operating so closely in the vicinity, or the air force I should say was operating so closely in the vicinity of the army and the army could see what was going on, what the air force was doing ,so the relationship, particularly between the air fighter squadrons and the army was excellent and of course we were part of that too, so we also had a very good relationship with the army.

28:30 Where that was evident, invariably there were camp concerts and there'd be say entertainers that were natural artists. You'd find them anywhere you know, so there were army chaps who were very good entertainers so they were part of it. They were part of the concert teams that used to come around and give a concert to our squadron so those relationships, and if there'd been the kind of

29:00 antagonism that existed early in the piece when the army didn't get the support from the air force well it probably would have shown up in events like that, but of course the relationships were very good then, yeah. And also another example of that good relationship, some of the operations we were involved in when the Australians and the Americans attacked Buna and Gona, the Japanese forces at Buna and Gona, our planes were involved in a lot of supply dropping.

29:30 I remember one occasion we operated, well we went up to Port Moresby 'cause that was the best base to get the supplies and fly home over the Owen Stanley Range and drop the supplies for the army, well we took part in that too, so that was another an example of you know, good relationship between the army and the air force.

Was there a great sense of victory after Milne Bay?

Oh yes. Yes. It was great and I know they made a fair bit of it down

30:00 in the press down south of course. This first victory over the Japanese.

What was it like for you personally?

Well you know you sort of, we were all…. what's the word, chuffed by it you know, that'd we'd been involved in something that was a rare occasion in those days you see, and you know one up for us and I know

30:30 we were all very happy about that.

Were there any kind of celebration or....?

No not particularly, because you know you're operating individually and at that stage of course the squadron was split. We had the aircraft that were sort of having minor repairs done; they were back on Horn Island. There was another flight operating out of Port Moresby and then the flight operating out of Milne Bay so there was no occasion when we were altogether really to have

31:00 a party. In any case there were still lots of things having to be done. For example the Kokoda battle was still raging. It probably started before Milne Bay, yes I think the Japanese had started up Kokoda before Milne Bay but of course it was still going on when the Milne Bay battle was over but no doubt that must have been very heartening to the Australian troops to have that so there were enough other actions going on which

31:30 were made any celebrations rather muted you know. Any sort of reasonable get togethers for example.

If I could just go back to your work with the Liberators and the reconnaissance missions that you were doing in the East Indies. Can you tell us a bit about what the main aim of all those recon missions were?

For the?

For the reconnaissance operations you were doing?

Oh yes. Well as I mentioned harassing raids was one of the main

32:00 aims, to keep the Japanese busy, make them I suppose tired, try and damage some of their installations, that kind of thing. Also in the daylight flights when the reconnaissance included day light hours of course as I mentioned, were looking for this sort of coastal shipping, this ship we sank on one of our missions.

32:30 That would be interrupting Japanese supplies up there 'cause they were rather stretched, you can imagine if you keep in mind the geographical arrangement of the Indonesian islands stretching from west to east, from Java all the way through say to Timor and so on, so the Japanese had a lot of installations on all those islands and naturally they had to supply them so looking for Japanese shipping was also one of the key

33:00 elements and then later on of course the Liberators were involved in supporting the allied landings on the beaches of Borneo for example, Balikpapan was a big oil port in Borneo and of course that was one of the reasons why the Japanese went down there, they wanted the oil of course and that was I think, that was the AIF, I can't remember which division [7th Division] but the AIF landed

33:30 on the beaches at Balikpapan and they were supported by Liberators and other aircraft too, but our 82 Wing, our crew personally wasn't involved in that support but other Liberators of the squadron and the other squadrons of the wing were involved in that supporting the AIF landing on Balikpapan. In fact we lost the CO, one of our squadrons.

34:00 They were shot down not by fighters but by enemy aircraft fire. Yeah so I suppose in summary, the jobs of the Liberators A harassing raids, reconnaissance to looking for enemy shipping and then of course acting as a strike

34:30 force to support the army when they had a battle like Balikpapan and Tarakan later on to fight so. I suppose those three objectives covered what they had to do mostly.

As a wireless on a Liberator I mean you've talked a bit about.... you were listening for...?

Yeah. For instructions or information.

For instructions or information so that was to do with navigation or what sort of things would you be listening for?

No,

35:00 mainly I suppose the navigation would only come into it from the point radio point of view, if the navigator himself had lost his way or something like that or something happened, or for example if he'd been killed in an you know, by when the plane was attacked, like we had an occasion when in Milne Bay with the Hudson, that's the only occasion when you'd use your radio

35:30 as a navigation aid but otherwise it was mainly listening out for information not only from base but also back from other aircraft who might have got into trouble and you had your various frequencies that you had to check with and also of course later on when the weather stations were developed, weather reports were very important also but there wasn't a lot of,

36:00 in my experience we didn't have a lot of information that we had to act on. That we personally acted on you know. It was mainly listening out and if nothing happened that was okay you know, but a lot of the time you would go out and you'd never be given any kind of message or instruction because your

mission was you know, okay [(UNCLEAR)]. I remember when

36:30 we sank that ship from that operation in Milne Bay we radioed back in, we did radio back to base what had happened because sometimes if we never got back to base they wouldn't have known what had happened so that's one occasion when you'd have to break silence to…. well it'd be in code anyway you see, so you we would send a short message back to base to let them know what we'd don,e what we'd achieved.

37:00 **Can you give me an example of the sort of thing that you would have sent back at that stage? I mean you mentioned it was in code but how….?**

Yes well naturally enough you'd write it our yourself in plain language. For example you might say, "Mission accomplished, ship sunk, no survivors." something like that and then you'd always kept it short as possible and then you put that into the code and send it off. And

37:30 as I mentioned, when we did the ditching in Milne Bay, of course apart from telling base that we were ditching and then I think I mentioned to you that the other WAG that was operating the set that day, he kept his hand on the key to give the direction finding stations enough time to make a get a bearing on where our position was and as long as you had more than I'd say one station making the bearing on you, and they could

38:00 cross reference it and knew exactly just where you were going down.

Is it appropriate to ask a bit about the code itself? What kind of systems you were using?

Well the fact that for a start it was Morse code but within the Morse code you were given a particular code to use for particular period

38:30 so that of course if you kept on using the one code all the time, naturally the Japanese probably would break it but it was interesting that the Americans, a lot of them were not I think as well trained, particularly the early Americans, they didn't seem to be as well trained as the Australian Air Force crews were and a lot of the Americans used plain language, they didn't use code.

So they'd give themselves away a lot?

Yes, but not only give themselves away but also it was

39:00 very much more easy for the Japanese to interpret. You see they probably no doubt would be listening in on our messages but they weren't, the message wasn't self evident to them unless they could break the code you see, but with the Americans using plain language I don't know what their policy was, whether they didn't care whether the Japanese knew or not but still we

39:30 knew that a lot of the a lot of the American crews used plain language and not code.

So would you have key words that you would substitute for others or was it in terms of coding or was it a shortening

Well usually a shortening system for a start because they wanted to keep the messages as brief as possible but at this stage I can't remember you know some of the precise details of coding.

That's okay.

40:00 **Were there any times that you actually picked up anything else on your frequency that wasn't yours?**

Well we knew that for example on this trip when we were trying to get back to Moresby using the code letters to get us back, we sensed that the Japanese were trying to jam our frequency to make

40:30 it difficult for us. We were aware of that that, they had stationed and that they knew they had worked out our frequency and they were trying to jam it, in other words to make it difficult for to follow these bearings we were being given by the DF [Direction Finding] station. Yeah.

Tape 6

00:32 **Okay John there's a few questions that I have from everything that we've talked about so far.**

Mm.

Just Bomber Command in general, the strike rate was pretty ominous just in terms of crew. I mean there was a high turnover. Were you aware of that when you were….?

No. Not out here. I suppose it's the kind of thing, I don't suppose they wanted to publicise a lot you know.

01:00 Since the war there's been some very good books written about you know, Bomber Command in

England and two views. Of course the Canadians I know were very critical of the RAF Bomber Command 'cause they reckoned the Canadians' casualties were higher than anybody else's, although I don't know whether they were higher than the Australians, but a lot of that it didn't filter through to us back out here

01:30 at the time. Most of that came out sort of towards the end of the war, although I suppose things like that big raid on Dresden probably highlighted that, probably, but that was getting close towards the end of the war anyway so, but no, I don't recall in our squadrons talking much about it at all really, no. In fact I can't recall it coming up significantly in conversation.

02:00 The only one thing we knew as a general thing that your chances of survival by flying in bombers in Australia were better than in back in England. We knew that, that was something we knew, so obviously some information must have filtered down to us. We just knew that chances were as I said, we probably lost more than they did in England through bad weather

02:30 because the tropical weather was a bit unpredictable and also of course particularly in areas where we were flying like PNG the mountains were very high.

Given all of the travel that you did after the war I was just wondering whether you were disappointed that all the work that you were doing during the war was quite close to Australia. Were you looking forward or hoping to get further afield?

Yes I think

03:00 that's true. A lot of the chaps of course I think were hoping to get a posting to England you see, that was a natural thing you know, because many of us you know, you think about Australia at the time and the chances of travelling overseas were very remote you know, particularly coming out of the Depression and that, so I think nearly everybody in the air force was hoping to get a posting to England and of course when Japan entered the war and then the

03:30 RAAF command kept so many graduates from the EATS courses back in Australia to man the new squadrons that was I suppose an initial bit of a disappointment. Not a big disappointment you know, but something you know you missed.

04:00 **Just back to the campaigns you were involved in. You were flying over a jungle a lot of the time. Was it actually difficult to spot the enemy that you were kind of trying to target at all?**

Oh yes.

Did the terrain play….?

Yes,

04:30 but the things that we were looking for, like shipping, that wasn't so hard to spot of course. Our squadron, our didn't involve say looking for Japanese personnel like groups of soldiers or anything like that. That was more like the strafing people, like Beaufighters and the Kittyhawks and things like that, particularly if they had to go on strafing missions you see in support of the

05:00 Australian Army that our targets were not like that, no. No.

Did you prefer the Hudson over the Liberator or the other way around?

Yeah in one way yes. For a start your crew was smaller. You felt more a unit and that also meant that your squadron was smaller. You got more. For example I've often thought back on my Liberator days. We didn't know

05:30 many of the other crews because for a start our crew was a crew of eleven so that it in itself was a big unit you might say. Then to meet a lot of the other crews, so that was an awful lot of people you see, and strangely enough, recently looking back and talking to some of our colleagues you got to know the skippers of the other crews

06:00 you know, and again the point I made earlier, in the messes you didn't mix like the NCOs' mess was a separate mess to the officers' mess and when I was in Liberators of course by that time I had a commission so I didn't mix at all with the sort of NCOs except in our own crew, but I didn't mix with them of course in the mess, I'd have mixed with them on the crew operations like when we were

06:30 away together, but other than that as I say, you didn't get to know your colleagues so well in a big unit as you did in the smaller unit like the Hudson that's why, and when I look over the log book too I did a lot more operations in Hudson than I did on the Liberator. Say our operational existence on the Liberator lasted from say March

07:00 1945 to August 1945. Once war was over with the Japanese surrender, I think I'd mentioned this earlier didn't I, that we dropped all our gunners see. We were then kept on, we stayed on flying mainly doing supply work so all we needed was sort of a skeleton crew you might say. So all our gunners disappeared, our bomb aimer disappeared and the second radio operator disappeared so

07:30 from a crew of eleven we went down to what would that have been five? Two pilots, navigator three, radio four, flight engineer five, yes we dropped, out of eleven we dropped six of the crew so but my time with 6 squadron on Hudson was almost twelve months, it lasted from August 1942 to July 1943 so for several of those reasons then I preferred being in the in the Hudson

08:00 to the Liberator.

Given you you'd been aware of the rise of Hitler and what was going on in Europe

Oh yes, yes.

What went through your mind when you had heard that the Japanese had entered the war?

Because we were still in training. Let me see where I'd have been. We were still in Ballarat finishing the wireless course. Well, the first thing of course that struck you, "Well gee whiz, the war's

08:30 coming to our back doo." you might say and by the time we'd finished our wireless, or were moving onto our gunnery training of course Darwin had been bombed, Singapore had fallen, Indonesia I think was occupied. Now what day did the Japs get to Rabaul? It could well have been before I finished my gunnery that the Japanese were already in Rabaul so then you

09:00 you know things were getting grim. You felt, "Hello we're…" you know, "Gonna be involved here very smartly."

So you thought you were going up against a very strong army?

Yes. Oh yes my word because you know that at that stage the Japanese were sort of beating all before them. And that's why there was a lot of personal satisfaction to have been involved in Milne Bay.

Did you get a sense at the time that that

09:30 **was a kind of a turn of the tide? It's often regarded as that.**

Yes we did. We did. We felt that things were going our way a bit and particularly I'm sure the army felt much so that way and shortly after Milne Bay of course the Australian Army started to get the better of the Japs at Kokoda and so things from there on went forward, so there was your first step of and it was a great shot in the arm for the

10:00 RAAF to be to be so much involved in the in the battle of the Bismarck Sea which was you know, you might say a complete rout for the Japanese. It was a huge loss for the Japanese, the battle of the Bismarck Sea, and although we were only marginally involved I think. The only way our 6 Squadron was involved, and our crew wasn't personally involved, but some of the crews had the job of trying to

10:30 find the some of the survivors from the Japanese fleet who'd got away in boats and things like that they had to make sure that if they landed on some of the islands not far away and some of them were found and sort of shot up too but that was a sort of a mopping up operation, but most of the work the RAAF were involved was of course the Beaufighter squadron and the Catalinas who originally found the Japanese fleet and shadowed it.

Did you witness

11:00 **or experience I guess, kind of a growth in maybe pride you might say in the RAAF considering that the air force had started off had a pretty shoddy start at the beginning of the war?**

I suppose as I mentioned there was a number of our experienced crews had come out of Malaysia and Singapore which was a largely a defeat for them

11:30 and the turning around from Milne Bay onwards you know, you did feel a lot more personal satisfaction or also satisfaction on behalf of the of the squadron that you know things were now looking up for yeah.

Okay if I could just talk about strafing for a second. I mean we've spoken to a couple of guys and had some various descriptions. They've given us images of

12:00 **turning the seas red and things like that, was that part of your experience?**

For strafing you said?

Yeah yeah.

Well the only incident we were involved, well two incidents we were involved that I've mentioned. The strafing of those crew of the ship we sunk which was mainly done by the pilot using his forward guns, and also I suppose strafing in that Liberator incident when we sank that

12:30 Japanese coastal ship, set it on fire and sank it yeah. So they were the only two occasions 'cause the type of planes we were involved, Hudsons and Liberators were not involved. They weren't aircraft that you did a lot of strafing work in them anyway, they were not were built for that. Compared to a Beaufighter or a fighter like a Kittyhawk they had a lot more jobs that involved strafing than we did.

It was more part of just a a

13:00 **an addition onto what you were**

Yeah, yeah.

Doing yeah?

Yeah.

Oh okay. Were you involved in on any ops that I guess that would class as mopping up?

Ah.

Or that were regarded like that at the time?

No not really, no no not really. No.

More antagonising and....

Yeah yes, yes. That's right. Yes. No not so much mopping up for us. No.

Can you describe for me

13:30 **in some of the raids that you were talking about that you were doing before, when you unsettled the enemy, what you might have seen or heard on some of those raids that gave you the impression that you'd done a good job that....**

Um.

That you'd actually....

Well I think there was some satisfaction in saying, "Well you know we're harrying the blighters just to keep them out of bed."

14:00 you know in a rather superficial sense, keep 'em out of bed, keep 'em in their trenches that kind of thing and you just hoped that you might get a lucky hit on a on an ammunition dump or a gun emplacement like an ack-ack. Occasionally you might, well you wouldn't see a lot from that height we were doing these raids of course. You would see, naturally enough they would

14:30 try a few ack-ack shots at you. You'd see them from them mark of the incendiaries which were always in the ack-ack coming up but we didn't feel particularly worried that we'd get hit with those because it's a pretty much a hit and miss affair. Different to the kind of ack-ack that you knew was fired from German cities you know at the RAF for example. No,

15:00 you just hoped. Occasionally you'd see a fire from, obviously your bomb must have hit something that burnt, but particularly at night you wouldn't see a lot from that height. You'd just hope that you were doing something well, we felt we felt satisfied that we were doing something to irritate them if nothing else you see. Hopefully you'd score some kind of significant damage but you didn't know. It's not like going out, I know we went as a, I don't know whether we went as a

15:30 whole squadron or at least two flights of the squadron, we made a raid on Surabaya at night but I think it was aborted because of bad weather. We got nearly all the way and then we couldn't see the target. I think we turned around and came back but it's not the same thing between that kind of raid, which is you might say a strike, than say a harassing raid, where you might just have a single aircraft or perhaps at the most two aircraft flying around doing these harassing things. Yep.

16:00 **Was it really difficult as a gunner, I mean I mean I can't imagine it for a start when you're actually there and you're kind of in a bit of a battle.**

Mm.

And you you're trying to actually hit another plane and you've got wind and speed and all these factors confusing the fire.

Yes.

How, I mean....

Oh I think you sort of from your training I guess, you do it more or less instinctively, Chris.

16:30 I know when one of our occasions, now I hadn't mentioned this before but we were coming back from a reconnaissance patrol at Milne Bay and we knew from the message we got over the wireless that there was a Japanese raid on Milne Bay while we were out on the flight, so we were coming back and actually we ran into the last part of the Japanese raiding force. We saw them and we went down

17:00 low so that we hoped that they wouldn't see us but unfortunately the last three escorting fighters of the Japanese force saw us and they turned 'round to attack us. With the Hudson the policy always was to get down as low as you could to the water so they couldn't attack you from underneath. That was a weakness and they lined up the tail and I was in the turret and we exchanged fire but fortunately

because they'd been you know, a long way from base and they were at the end

17:30 of a raid and they must have been short of fuel because they didn't maintain the attack and it might have been tricky for us if they had, with three fighters attacking us, but we exchanged shots with them. I couldn't see whether we had any hits but they turned away. Who knows, you don't know whether you've damaged them or not unless you saw them go down but whether they sustained hits one wouldn't know. We didn't, fortunately, we didn't, but as I said we were lucky in that they were at the end of a long raid and still had a fair way to go back to Rabaul

18:00 so that they didn't keep the attack going for very long.

So did you actually see them advancing up the rear or….?

Oh yes, yes. I was in the turret and I could see, I had to swing the turret between, one was attacking from, well say that would be the port rear side and one was here on the right so I had to keep you know a few shots at this fellow and then come around. I can't remember now where the third one was. He might have been more or less underneath. I just can't remember unless one of them broke away more quickly

18:30 than the others because of his fuel situation. Anyway as I said we exchanged shots for awhile and then they pulled away and when we flew back in we could see that there was a ship on fire in the harbour. I think I've got a photo of that somewhere. A ship on fire in the bay but I think it was mainly the other strip, not our strip that was invaded raided that day. Oh, now wait on I might I may be wrong. We might have, I think we had to land at the other

19:00 strip because we couldn't land on Turnbull and then later on we went and brought the plane back to our strip because there were two strips in Milne Bay. Strangely enough they're called Nos 1 and 3 because No. 2 was surveyed but never built but they kept calling our strip either Turnbull or No. 3 strip but there was no No. 2 but yes I remember that now. Yes we did. We had to land at No. 1 strip because there was I think an unexploded bomb or something on our strip, and my diary will confirm that

19:30 but I think that's what happened. Yeah.

Did that sort of thing happen a lot, unexploded….?

No not at the stage we reached. There were always a bit, I suppose the army found that more than we did you know, bombs that say missed the target or missed the strip and didn't explode and then somebody later on said, "Oh hang on there's a there's a crater here and there's a bomb sticking in it." but there were occasional examples of unexploded ordnance. Yeah, yeah.

20:00 **Okay just check my notes for a second. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between air crew and ground crew? I understand ground crew were vital.**

Yes that's right.

Vitally important to your operation.

Oh my word. We had a particularly close relationship. Usually a particular group of ground staff were assigned to particular aircraft so

20:30 we went down to where our aircraft was, we would always have the same ground crew, we knew chaps and it's fortunate, one of the ground crew of 6 Squadron he lives in Oatley so we get to we see each other quite a bit really. His wife and Joan they worked on some of the stalls for the local school, the primary school, their kids were about the same age as ours but usually we you had a good relationship with the ground crew that looked after your

21:00 plane 'cause you knew the same guys you see each time.

Oh right. But was there a strong sense out in the field that between sort of air crew and ground crew. I mean were you sorry let me just refrain rephrase

Jealousy or what?

21:30 **Um**

Not really no, not really.

No, not jealousy

Particularly as again in the sergeants' mess the senior ground staff, the ground staff of course were sergeants and so you mix a lot with them in the in the sergeants' mess so you knew particularly as I say the senior ground staff chaps you knew quite well and no, you know there's sometimes there's a bit made of the fact that

22:00 ground staff people usually weren't as well paid as say flying people and that kind of thing. Another thing affecting lasting relationships was that ground staff usually stayed with a squadron a lot longer than air crew. Air crew usually as you know in England, I don't know what policy was here frankly, but usually I know that air crew postings occurred from

22:30 the length of time that your skipper had been in action or on operations and interestingly enough because the crew I joined after the first crew as I mentioned, the pilot got malaria and stayed south and now he was one of the like and I was one of the crew that left with 6 Squadron when they went north into operations, whereas when I joined up with Ray Kelly, Ray was one of the first lot of replacement crews that came

23:00 and that would have been say November '42, so when I got my posting south it was with the crew and it was based on his length of service in operations and so my length of service was probably longer than the regular air crew because I was there from August 'til July whereas the rest of the crew's service was from November to July, so in a way I had a bit longer in operations than the average would have been, so the length

23:30 of service of air crew was in the squadron was a lot shorter than ground staff. I know this chap I mentioned I asked him, "When did you leave?" and I think he must have been two years in the tropics before they got a posting south. The Hudsons were all phased out 'round about August 1943 because they'd you know, been our front line bombers for so long and then of course by that time the

24:00 Beaufort bomber was being produced in much bigger numbers and 6 Squadron became a Beaufort bomber squadron about six weeks after I left it but those at ground staff chaps they converted to looking after Beauforts. They didn't get a posting away because the new aircraft had come. They had to convert. Mind you there wouldn't have been a lot of difference in some parts of the technology for the ground crew

24:30 to shift from say a Hudson to a Beaufort.

Okay, what had I mean, you had some quite long flights and all the things that you were doing.

Yes.

What did you do for R and R [rest and recreation]?

What did I do for

What did you do for recreation?

Oh yes. I thought I'd mentioned this. We had a lugger attached to 6 Squadron and

25:00 particularly after the early days where we were very busy and had no time like particularly when the battle of Milne Bay was on and its aftermath we were nothing else but flying missions and then resting after them but when the squadron settled down at Turnbull and we had enough crews we used to have a rest day and we would there was this lugger was attached to the squadron and we used to take turns in going on the lugger and we'd

25:30 go out in the bay and do some fishing or visit native villages, pick up fruit, oranges, bananas, paw paws, things like that and they were very restful. Yeah, very very good.

Okay.

Occasionally we did a walk. For example I remember a couple of times, although it was a bit tricky because of mines and that, but we I remember doing a couple of walks into Milne Bay where the battle had gone with the Japanese, the ground battle had gone on. We walked back through there and saw where

26:00 all the particularly along the coconut palms had been stripped by the Kittyhawks and the Hudsons strafing the areas. Particularly you know, there was one part of the battle where Japanese soldiers would climb up the palm trees and settle in the top and act as snipers and of course the army passed this word to the to the RAAF and that's why a lot of the strafing was done in the tops of the palm trees to

26:30 winkle out these fellows who were doing that kind of thing, but mainly it was a bit tricky and it wasn't very, not like taking a walk say in the Blue Mountains. It was, walking through the tropical forest was a bit arduous you know, so we found it much easier to go on the lugger and laze around and swim and fish, yes.

So would it be just the air crew that would....

Yes. I must say you'd have to ask ground staff what they did for recreation,

27:00 I don't know. But that's what we did. Yes the ground crews the crews would be, as a crew you would be given a day off and you pleased yourself whether you went on the lugger or you stayed in your tent and played cards or went to the mess and listened to music you know. They had gramophones and that kind of thing and listen to music and or drank beer or whatever.

The illnesses is quite a is a pretty big thing

Yes yes.

27:30 In the very early days at Milne Bay I think it was very high. I don't really know the figure. I suppose it would be wrong to quote a figure but I know that malaria and other and particularly some sort of tropical skin diseases affected a lot of chaps, yeah. Well I can quote the example of two of our crew, that's fifty per cent of the crew, went down with malaria you see.

Was there

28:00 **I guess a higher alert for it within air crew considering….**

I don't think so. I don't no I don't think so.

Did you keep a closer eye on it?

In fact probably the ground staff because of their working on ground conditions hot conditions on the ground and so forth. May maybe there were more susceptible to picking up some tropical wogs

28:30 you know. I don't quite know about that but I don't think air crew wouldn't be necessarily any more vulnerable to tropical illnesses than the ground staff.

But would you keep a closer eye on it because of you know, obviously for pilots for example or was that something that you'd have….

Oh I don't really think so Chris, we had just one medico attached to the squad and I suppose his job was to look after the health of everybody you know. He might,

29:00 I don't know whether he took particular care say of mental problems of flying people because of the extra stress. I don't know about that. I didn't see any examples of it in the crews I knew and that I don't remember that anybody had any particular mental problems you know. People going a bit ga-ga or something. Not in my experience anyway. I know it probably happened somewhere in other areas but not in my experience.

29:30 **You've mentioned the term WAG a lot**

Yes.

Was that a particular air force term or

No it's just a term for wireless air gunners,

Oh right.

Wireless operator air gunner. It was an official title, WAG.

Oh there you go.

Yes yes. W-A-G , wireless air gunner, yeah. They knocked out the word 'operator'. Sometimes you'd see it written as W-O-A-G, WOAG, but we invariably it's WAG.

Right. Do you remember where you were and what you were doing the day the news came through that the war was over?

Where? In England or here?

For you. Where you actually were in the field?

Yes. I wasn't flying because strangely enough that was August the 15th and we were in

30:30 Darwin or Morotai? I think we were in Darwin but we weren't flying because my pilot had got appendicitis and of course he was in hospital so our crew wasn't flying. In fact a couple of our crew managed to get jobs with other crews who were short of a person or two. What I did, although it wasn't on VE Day [Victory in Europe] because it happened shortly after, but I know I wasn't flying, I was must have been probably in the mess or

31:00 in the quarters talking or reading or whatever when news came through but the because the skipper was out of action for a few weeks one of the crews were having to take an aircraft south shortly after, must have been later on in August, and I got a ride down. I took some leave. I got a ride down and it was very fortunate because the sister that trained with Joan she was getting married early in September and I

31:30 hadn't expected to be at the wedding, but I turned up for the wedding and so it was very handy, so I know I wasn't flying. I wasn't on a mission or anything it just exactly what I was doing, as I say I was either in quarters or in the mess when it happened, yeah.

And that was VE Day for you?

VE Day yes. VJ Day sorry, VJ Day [Victory over Japan].

VJ Day.

VJ Day. VE Day occurred earlier didn't it, it occurred

Yeah.

It was interesting though, because even before VE Day things were winding down of course in

32:00 Europe, as we know, and at least one if not two of our Liberator crews were ex-RAAF chaps who flew in England. Probably on Bomber Command or Coastal Command, I'm not sure which but they weren't the only ones. There were quite a few joined Liberator squadrons because they'd been pilots or crews on heavy bombers. It wasn't much trouble to convert to a Liberator. They were very much the same kind of thing

32:30 I know we had in the wing we had at least one crew in our squadron but other squadrons all had the one or two ex-RAF Australian crews come into us, yes.

The reconnaissance missions ops you were doing to the East Indies. You were based in

Mm.

Darwin from there

Oh well, Long strip, say the Northern Territory. Based in the Northern Territory. We were on a strip called Long strip there were a lot of new strips

33:00 made to handle all the bombers and I don't know whether you're aware that the first, and this is an unusual thing, we actually had an American Liberator group that they called them, not wings, they had an American bomber group attached to the RAAF in the Northern Territory and that was one of the ways in which Australian crews were trained on Liberators. They were attached to this American Liberator group but it was

33:30 actually under the command of the RAAF and a lot of our crews trained with them and then they were the nucleus of the RAAF Liberator crews and the American group finally were moved back to MacArthur's command and they went to the Philippines and wherever, but that was all finished by the time our squadron got to the Northern Territory but those strips were made. There was Long strip and Fenton and another one called I think called Manbulloo

34:00 they were used by first of all by the American Liberator squadrons and then by the Australian Liberator squad so our first strip when we went to the Northern Territory was Long strip and then for a time we moved to Darwin and then we finished up in Morotai. You know Morotai's an island, it's somewhere between the Philippines and Borneo, Morotai. A small island.

Was it good to have your feet back on Australian soil for awhile?

Oh yes. Yes.

34:30 Yes, that's right. Yeah but you never felt far away from it of course being in PNG yeah. Of course well of course in those days of course PNG was still under Australian administration yeah.

I guess not quite the same as actually being here.

No not the same as being back in Townsville or Brisbane or Sydney, no. No.

You mentioned the US crew that were there

35:00 **that would give the training. Was it....?**

Yes that was that was in a place called Nadzab.

Right.

In New Guinea where we went.

Oh yeah. I know where that is.

And I must say we didn't have much, the only person who had much to do with them would have been the pilots 'cause that was the main job of conversion was the pilot to learn all the new controls and how to handle a Liberator and so on and because all our pilots were all experienced pilots, all the captains were all experienced pilots,

35:30 and all, like my pilot Ray Kelly had all done a previous operation the Americans were surprised how quickly these fellows took to it and converted. In fact I remember Ray telling me that he said his pilot, his American pilot, his instructor was a little bit embarrassed because he hadn't done as many hours flying in operations as Ray had done, even though it had been on a different aircraft. So our chaps converted

36:00 very quickly. In fact on our training course once the pilot had learned how to land and take off and land and take off several times in our course we were actually doing raids on Rabaul as crews.

So the US crew were there specifically as a training mechanism?

Mm.

In a sense.

Yes. That's true. It was like an OTU in a way yeah. It was another OTU.

36:30 There were the three ways of that they used to convert the Australians to Liberators. They make Tocumwal a Liberator OTU and that was purely like RAAF from experienced pilots who'd flown them. There was this Nadzab conversion under the Americans themselves and then the third one that I mentioned that American group of Liberators flying in the Northern Territory who took Australian crews and converted them on the job, you know on the job training as it were

37:00 and they were always doing raids those Liberator American Liberator squadrons, with Australian crew members.

Fascinating. Towards the end of the campaign and particularly up at to Rabaul there was a bit of chat about, there's been a bit written about a sense of

37:30 **a campaign that was a little bit unnecessary, some of that was unnecessary. Was there a feeling of that amongst your guys?**

No, but it may have and probably it's not, I'll just mention it briefly 'cause I don't know how widespread it was but the crews and crew members that came back from England

38:00 and we had one of them in our crew, he was the flight engineer, I don't know whether it was a widespread feeling but one got the feeling that they thought it was a little bit pointless but the rest of us didn't. We still felt it was still part of our war that had to be finished you see. We probably felt that their attitude

38:30 was a bit wrong, you know. I think they felt that their war was a bigger war as it were, a more dangerous war, which it may well have been, but we still felt that after all this was the war near us and we you know had to see it right to the end and finish it, yep. .

Were there any sort of fears around that the Japanese could sort of rise up again at that stage?

No, no.

Or did you feel any....

39:00 No, no feeling about that at all. No, I think we felt that they really should have given up earlier, kind of thing you know because their losses were pretty severe yeah, yes.

Tape 7

00:32 **John, in your time in Australia during the war did you have much to do with WAAAF?**

Oh not a lot because naturally enough on the squadrons in New Guinea, PNG there were no WAAAF there. The nearest was where Joan was based in Townsville. There might, no there was some radar operators further north but I only knew about that later on. I didn't know that but no we had

01:00 on the all the operating stations we had no WAAAF, no. Not even in the Northern Territory because the squadrons were on the move and moving up into action and of course as I mentioned even in our Liberator squadron we moved up to Morotai and certainly there were no WAAAF on Morotai. Nurses, something else of course. Nurses were in hospitals where they were, I think there would have been well I never went to the hospital. There must have been a hospital in

01:30 Milne Bay, although probably they might have been flown to Moresby I don't know, but there would have nurses probably in Moresby. I know there were nurses in on Thursday Island because I went to a reunion, Joan and I went to a reunion of veterans who served in units on Horn Island, that included air force and mainly army, and there were quite a batch, it was interesting to meet them, there was quite a batch of nurses and they they'd been

02:00 in an army hospital all there must have been two. There was one on the mainland of Cape south of Cape York somewhere and one on Thursday Island but no WAAAF no. No.

Because you had family in the WAAAF and you were talking to Joan, what did you know of the work they were doing to support the air force?

Well I knew of course what Joan and my sister were doing. I knew they were wireless operators and of course

02:30 we had that in common my being a wireless operator but all I knew was that on the few months I was in on mainland stations before I joined 6 Squadron I was also working in a ground wireless operating room but the WAAAF more or less took over from the men as more and more trained and of course the

WAAAF had a lot of cooks and drivers and in some cases I think they had

03:00 mechanics, you know, motor mechanics. I don't know whether any of them worked on aircraft I wouldn't remember that, but certainly they were clerks in offices, typists, bakers you know cooks I mean, and of course the wireless operator. The wireless operator I think was one of the sort of most trained WAAAF operators, yep.

I just wanted to ask

03:30 **given that your wife was a WAAAF and that women are now in all forces in active duty**

Yes yes in action. Yes, yes.

What would your thoughts have been during the war about having women as ground crew?

Oh I don't think it, ground crew; I think we would have accepted that. I don't think any of us you know thought of women being part of the flying into operations or anything like that. I don't, probably the thought

04:00 never arose about that. As I say we knew them on the various ground stations back in Australia as doing those jobs I've just outlined, yes, but I don't think the thought never crossed our mind that they would ever be in sort of flying operations and involved going into action, yes. I never gave it much thought.

That's okay.

04:30 **Darwin when you got there, when you came back and were based in Darwin**

Mm.

Were you surprised or by the damage, could you see the damage there?

Yes yes. In fact I've got some photos there of some of the damage but actually the damage was naturally enough well I suppose it was confined to two places the air strip of course the buildings and the air strip and of course the building the buildings near the port that's where the main attacks occurred but we occupied, instead of having to put up

05:00 tents when we went to Darwin for the short time we were there we occupied what had been some of the permanent units for the air force at the at sort of at the top end of the air strip. They were pretty shabby I think at the time but they were you know they quite liveable. They were permanent buildings. We moved in for awhile. Short time until we went to Morotai

05:30 **Was it an unusual feeling flying from Australia on an operation and then coming home?**

I don't know whether you'd call it unusual, I suppose it you know, 'cause Australia's so big anyway, the sort of operational area seemed to be a separate part you know, because naturally enough as you know

06:00 a lot of civilians were evacuated from Darwin, so it was really a sort of a war time town area and of course for the other parts where we were down in the strips, then there weren't many people anyway you know, there were no settlements around where the strips were made except for air force buildings and accommodation and that kind of thing so that

06:30 flying back say to the south all the towns of the south that certainly was a very welcome break of course to get back home, yes. Those were, mm.

So Darwin didn't feel like Australia?

No it didn't feel like any of the towns back home because it was under war time footing and there were nearly all service personnel around you know army and navy chaps and air force fellows, yes.

07:00 I don't remember that we were in Darwin for very long really. We must have been there for probably a few weeks and then as I say we had moved to Morotai, mm. Did you want to talk any more about the post war experiences?

I was just going to about when you stripped the planes back and you began the transporting.

Mm.

Who were you picking up?

Going north

07:30 we took supplies. Coming back we invariably took medical army cases, our aircraft particularly didn't bring back any POWs but some of the aircraft brought the POWs back out of not only out of Singapore of course the main camps no, there were still POWs in areas of Java, those islands and this crew I mentioned that were captured by the

08:00 Japanese, they were in a POW camp in Java somewhere so some of our crews brought POWs back. I remember we picked up quite a load from Balikpapan but they were army medical cases and various

personnel really coming back and as I say going up we were well taking supplies up for the various units that were still there in those areas.

Were the air crews talking about the POWs that

08:30 **they were picking up and the state they were in?**

Well as I say because our crew didn't pick up POWs and we seemed to be, we didn't mix a lot there, we were doing our jobs and we were on our move ourselves, we'd moved from Morotai back to Tocumwal as various personnel, ground staff as well as air crew were all brought back to the mainland, we carried on our operations to the north, to those northern bases

09:00 actually working from Tocumwal and particularly as Joan was staying with me there when we got to Tocumwal, that was after January '43 sorry '46, '46 we're into now. When my non-flying times I was usually with her in the hotel you see or having a swim in the Murray River so we didn't talk a lot about them coming back. We knew that some of the crews had brought them back you know we said, "How are they?" and that

09:30 kind of thing but we didn't have a lot of discussion about it, no.

Was Joan still active in the WAAAF at that time after the war?

No she was, I think she got out in late 1945 I think. September or October, something like that. She got out of the air force, yep. 'Cause I know when we were married she was certainly out of the air force yes.

Did you have a lot in common, having

10:00 **both been wireless operators?**

Yes we did actually yes, and I think our interests were similar. Naturally in the letters we exchanged you talk about books you've read and recommend one book to another we were both very good, matter of fact now days I think Joan reads more than I do, so we were both good readers and we both loved and still love classical music. As I mentioned we're subscribers to the symphony concert so

10:30 we had those things in common, so we had quite a bit in common really. Similar interests and Joan was a very good tennis player in a way she you might say, considering the talent of a male tennis not a female tennis player, she's probably a better tennis player than I was.

11:00 Even now she holds her own in our tennis club we have more men than women and she holds her own with the men, yeah. So that was another interest we had in common. And of course growing up on a farm she was a very good rider, unfortunately we've lost them in our moves but she had an awful lot of riding ribbons for having you know riding.

How had Australia

11:30 **changed after the war when you got home?**

Ah.

Had Australia changed?

Just think about that. Well I suppose one of the things I remember pre-war and post-war of course was the fact that the war I suppose removed more quickly the traces of the Depression because naturally there was a lot more work available

12:00 and immediately after war of course as you know, it was virtually anybody who didn't have a job was unemployable you might say because it was full time work and that was one of the big changes that we'd have noticed in our family from pre-war days, we you know we were just getting over the Depression when there was a lot of unemployment. The war brought full employment and post-war was full employment you know so I suppose that would be one of the biggest changes and that that change brought

12:30 about the fact that there was a lot more money about, a lot more, like for example we would be one of thousands of people who were having a home built. This home was built in 1949 and that was common. In fact it wasn't easy to get hold of a builder. This was what do you call,

13:00 almost like a package home. We've changed it since you know but it was sort of a, trying to think of the word we wanted. You know what I mean? You can get a home, that's where they build a whole lot of homes the same off a plan and that was one of the quickest ways to get a home and so fortunately I'd bought this block of land on this trip that I'd mentioned earlier, where the pilot was

13:30 sick with appendicitis and I came back to Sydney and my Mum, by that time Joan and I were engaged, and my Mum, we lived at Hurstville Grove, which is not far away from here, and my Mum said, "Look there's a block of land going over at Oatley." so I got on one of the pushbikes the family had and rode over here and I bought it and it took us a couple of years to arrange, 'cause building societies were still developing.

14:00 War service homes was a thing that was in existence since World War I but they hadn't caught up with

the modern times because their maximum loan amount was below what you needed you see, so we didn't go into we didn't borrow through war service homes. They caught up with times later on and they raised it but fortunately the local RSL [Returned and Services League] created

14:30 a building society and we got our loan from them and so we went ahead and built this which was you know, a home off a plan but a lot of that was going on you see, there were so many ex-servicemen doing this kind of thing. Starting young families and needing a home and so on yes. So they were some of the big changes straight after the war that we noticed, yeah.

Was there a lot of support for ex-servicemen when they came back?

Oh yes, yes.

15:00 Not like what happened after the poor old Vietnamese [Australians in Vietnam War] soldiers. No there was a lot of support. The RSL was very active and the air force association was very active, that kind of thing.

Did you become involved in any service associations?

I was a member but not an active member you know. In fact I don't remember that I went to many of the Anzac marches because I've been

15:30 to more of them since I retired, because, well partly I think you know you're you had children, young children growing up, you had a career in fact I think I might have mentioned earlier that I did a lot of coaching at night you know, to get an extra few dollars, so those other things were went by the board because you were so busy raising your family and

16:00 getting a career yeh and then as I mentioned in 1964 I joined UNESCO and then we lived overseas for eighteen years. The children were with us for the, well the eldest daughter was with us, we all went for the first two years. The eldest daughter she had got a job in Australia which she left and went with us but she didn't like it in the Middle East so we were quite happy for her

16:30 when we came on home leave, we used to get home leave every two years and fortunately this house was vacant although we had let it, it was vacant when we came back on our first home leave so then Christine stayed. She got a job back here and she stayed. She didn't like living over there and the other two stayed with us for another two 'cause they were still going to school and there were good schools in Beirut where we were based so they stayed with us for another two years and when we came back on our next home leave Michelle

17:00 went into Methodist Ladies College and David went into Scots College as boarders of course 'cause we went back to Lebanon and Michelle did very well. She won a very good scholarship to Sydney University. David was at a bit of a loose end. He wasn't as good a scholar but he got a job and they were living in here, living in this house and it was very good of

17:30 the UN because as I said, every two years we came home on home leave so we saw the children, stayed with them on long holidays but in the intervening year the two who were still at school, Michelle and David, they had a paid leave by UNESCO to come and stay with us and that was good for their development because they did a lot of travelling and it broadened their horizons you might say. In fact we had a comment from the both the

18:00 Scots College house master and from Michelle's teachers that they seemed to have a wider knowledge, general knowledge, than some of the other kids who'd never travelled.

Was it difficult to be away from the children?

Yes it was. It was.

For such long periods?

It was difficult. Fortunately Joan's younger sister, the one in the young one in the photos she we

18:30 have always had a close relationship with her 'cause she's closest to Joan and she acted as a kind of guardian for our kids and they invariably went there to her place in Wagga when they had holidays like the holidays through the year that they didn't come to us, so that that was one of the, you might say one of the down sides of being away from your kids yeah.

In Beirut

19:00 **or the Middle East, did you see any evidence of the conflict the World War II conflict that had been there?**

Oh yes. One thing we did and we made a point of doing this. It was interesting, Beirut was our headquarters but of course our operation covered the Middle East particularly Gaza, the West Bank of Palestine and Jordan and Syria and Lebanon. That's where the refugees were and

19:30 in each of those countries, not Syria I don't remember in Syria but particularly in Gaza and certainly in Lebanon where the evidence we saw was there are Commonwealth war graves in both those countries. A big one in Gaza and it so happened that the guest house that we stayed at and Joan used to come with

me and children came with me in the first couple of years went on their holidays in

20:00 school holidays in Lebanon we had a chap staying with us he was in the guest house with us and he'd been there to restore and renovate the graves, the war graves cemetery in Gaza and so he invited us to go there and he took us over the and there's a lot of both World War I of course there was a very famous battle you might have heard of the Battle of Beersheba which

20:30 the Australian Light Horse won so there were quite a few graves from that period and also there were World War II graves because the 7th Divi you know had to go into Syria and Lebanon because the French troops that stayed with Vichy France and didn't defect you might say, like [General] de Gaulle's people did. They of course fought

21:00 against the Australians and the British there so there was and then I think I mentioned yesterday didn't I, that on the railway line that is, it runs from Beirut all the way up the coast to the northern border, that wherever that railway line crossed a river some of the bridges had been destroyed and been rebuilt by the Australian

21:30 7th Division army engineers and they've got the rising sun built into the pylons of the bridges, and there's a plaque we went to, in fact we were invited when we were living in Beirut, being Australians, we were invited to an unveiling of a plaque on the coast about 26 kilometres north of Beirut where this plaque is in the memory of the 7th Divi engineers for what they did.

22:00 The plaque because it's so close to the sea it had been corroded by the salt water so a new plaque was installed and we were invited to the ceremony where the new plaque was unveiled and that was an example of the evidence of the World War II changes. The thing that had happened.

You told us yesterday about your work with the United Nations. I was just wondering

22:30 **what I guess what the most satisfying part of that work was?**

It was a project that was very satisfying because you saw the results in a fairly short time. Like the first course that I mentioned, our first training course was completed within two years and you saw the improvement in the classroom teaching by the methods of teaching that we were part of the course and

23:00 it was a project naturally enough it was inspected by supervisors from UNESCO and the project was so well thought of that the model was exported to some of the African developing countries. This teacher training model which combined correspondence methods of teaching with face to face methods of teaching and classroom inspections of course to see

23:30 what they were learning and what the theory they were learning they were putting into practice and so that within the time that I'd trained my count local counterpart to take over from me, we had graduated several hundreds of teachers in the United Nations schools so that it was certainly a cause of personal satisfaction that you were involved in a project that

24:00 you know, was rather successful because you knew from some of the press reports and a number of UN things are criticised, you know a lot of the UN projects they say, "That's a waste of money." and so forth and so on and one thing that was interesting as I mentioned, I was on leave without pay from the New South Wales government and he was a man I knew quite well, but we he was the director

24:30 of Technical Education of the New South Wales system and he paid us a visit. He was on a visit to Europe and he dropped in and paid us a visit and inspected our program and I think well I'm pretty certain one of the reasons he was doing it to see whether it was worthwhile for me to stay in this project. If not they'd have pulled me back you see. They'll say, "Oh well that's a useless project we can use your services better back in Australia." and I'm pretty certain that it

25:00 wasn't just a social visit although he was a friend, but it wasn't only a social visit. I'm pretty certain that when after the first two years the question came up UNESCO wanted me to stay there and they had to ask the Australian government to renew my leave without pay contract you see and they did renew it and I'm pretty sure that was one of the reasons why he came to see whether I was doing a useful job or whether it was just

25:30 a waste of time and they could use my services better back home you know, but then as I mentioned at the end of four years I had to decide then whether to stay with UNESCO or go back home and I decided, well the family decided, it was better to stay there.

Given the extensive very positive work that you did with UNESCO how do you reflect over I guess how important

26:00 **the war was in the grand scheme of your life?**

World War II.

Mm.

Oh I suppose you might say a great learning experience. When I see young chaps now who were my age you know, when I went into the services I suppose to use an old cliché, it meant we grew up very quickly

26:30 compared to you know young fellows now. That I think being thrown into danger and also being thrown into contact, close contact with a lot of chaps your own age and doing the same kind of thing and you realise there's a lot more give and take you know, you've got to get on with people and particularly if you wanted to be a successful team in an aircraft.

27:00 All of that rubs off I think in say broadening your outlook, making you more tolerant that kind of thing. I think that if I compare the peace-time situation and the war-time situation I think that they're things that come out of it for you for your own development.

I guess looking back and knowing what you know about

27:30 **your experience in hindsight would you would you still have joined up and gone away?**

Well knowing the circumstances which created World War II, yes. Yes. Yes. I wouldn't have for example, if I had the choice I wouldn't have for example joined up to go to Iraq you know because I disagreed with a lot of other Australians with Australia's involvement in Iraq.

28:00 I certainly wouldn't have done that from what I know now. And of course naturally enough, well I think a lot of the young people now would probably feel the same way about that about Iraq but the certainly the circumstances for joining up in World War II were completely different. Yeah.

Do you march on Anzac Day now?

Yes. Yes and I have for quite some years since I

28:30 retired, yes.

What do you talk about on Anzac Day with the….?

Well it's interesting. We don't…. occasionally we talk about common experiences but mainly if any of my crew come down which two of them do, of our crew of eleven there are, well there were three we don't know about in fact. I've done what I've found in this letter I've written recently to the Veterans' Affairs seeking information

29:00 about these three people we don't know, but we know that the three who came from Queensland have all died, died some years ago. There's my pilot, three of the gunners, and myself, that's five of us so we know there's five of us still alive. Three we know are dead and the other three are the three that I've written about, "Does anybody know where they are. Who and what

29:30 they're doing?" and so on. So when we get together at say at the most recent Anzac march the two gunners, one was a nose gunner, one was a tail turret gunner, he came down from the Gold Coast, now when we talk we talk a bit about our experiences but also you talk about what your family's doing you know, and now we're older of course, what the various ills and so on have got people. Because the other two

30:00 they had trouble, they didn't think they could complete the march because they're both having trouble with their legs but it so happened this year because of the worry about demonstrations and so on we noticed that the streets were completely barricaded. So they were looking, it was interesting, as we march we were talking. They were looking for a place. Their legs were getting tireder and tireder. They were looking for a place to break off and break through the barrier and go back to where we were gonna meet after the march. They couldn't find one and that was different to previous marches, you could break off

30:30 so they had to complete the whole march with me and then we were able to walk back down Elizabeth Street because that was open for the, 'cause you know what happens that the bands, when a band goes round early they're needed so they walk down Elizabeth Street and they go 'round again. Some of the bands go 'round about three times because the march is so long but no, we talk about ordinary things. As I say, what your family's doing how the kids are going, what about the grandchildren you know whether grandchildren are there

31:00 and things like that. Not often we talk about as I say with other crews we probably have because some of our experiences are not common so quite often we're talking with other with some of the other crew members of different things but when your own crew get together you're more likely to talk about shared experiences.

Did you talk much with your children when you came back after the war about

Well

31:30 **when they were growing**

Let's say not too much, in naturally enough in their early days they wouldn't have understood a lot of it, but I always remember when it was interesting. David is the youngest of the three and I don't know what age he was but he was still a young fellow and we must have been looking through one of my albums and to show you how things change and you don't see this but what he said was

32:00 he said, "Oh." he said, "Your aeroplanes have propellers!" See he wasn't used to seeing planes with

propellers so that was you know a bit of an eye opener but I was never, not like some chaps you hear, particularly World War I of course their experiences I think a lot of them was so horrifying a lot of them never wanted to talk about it but I was quite happy to 'cause as I mentioned I'd kept I had a camera, I was lucky to have a camera all through my

32:30 war service and they look through the photos and they ask questions and things like, as mentioned I think I mentioned it yesterday that Christine, our eldest daughter, she was mainly responsible for my going ahead and getting my diary published because I put it away and I hadn't dug it out for years and she was interested, she was very interested in it so she read

33:00 about it and then I said we were prompted by the appeal in the veterans' newspapers when they were producing this Australians at War documentary and they were asking for veterans to add letters and diaries and things like that and that's when and of course the fact that she lives in Canberra I got her to ring up the archives people and find out if they were interested and they said, "Yes very interested." so on one of our visits to Canberra I took the diaries which were scattered in about

33:30 three little notebooks you know. Some in pencil, some in green ink, some in blue ink, some were blotched with moisture from the tropical humidity and as I told you the story they kept the diaries and they've kept them permanently. They didn't return them. They thought they were well worth keeping. So.

Had you looked over the diaries….

Yes.

Much over the years?

Yes, well it's much easier

34:00 for me to read the printed version of course, so yes in fact I went over a bit knowing this interview was coming up, I went over a bit to refresh my memory on some things yeah, but the funny thing about the diary I never wrote it I never continued the diary after I finished with 6 Squadron and I came to an explanation. I wondered, "Now why didn't I do that?" so I put that in this in the foreword to this diary why I didn't keep it. I think

34:30 at the end of the first operations I know I must have aged not only physically but mentally and of course naturally enough at the end of a period of operations and as I explained my period was longer than most because of what happened with the different crews and I probably got a little bit weary, war weary, a bit fatigued of the constant operations, the tropical conditions and that kind of thing and

35:00 and you get a little bit blasé too about service life you know. There's a lot of red tape and things that you don't agree with so that when I went back as a staff person and you're back in the mainland you're a bit more then I suppose filling in a bit of a time. You did your job alright but it's not the same motivation as when you were in action, see what I mean? And leave

35:30 was more regular, so amusements and entertainment were a bit higher on your on your agenda and by that time of course I was having a stronger relationship with Joan so letters were important and we then managed to meet occasionally and then excitement heightened up when we knew that the Liberators were being provided and that already some of the older crews,

36:00 the ones that had been at East Sale longer than we had were going off and manning these new squadrons so your excitement lifted you know. You thought "Oh we were looking forward" and you were looking forward to that. Getting back into action was something we did look forward to but for some reason I never picked up the diary again.

That's interesting.

A lot of the information probably would have been the letters I was writing to Joan, yes.

Just one last question.

36:30 **You showed us the picture of your plane**

Yes.

yesterday. I was wondering did crews get to name their own planes?

Some did. We were not like the Americans you know. The Americans are full of this. You see so many pictures of the Americans and their names on their planes and so forth. From the squadron I think our pilot, that one was the reason why it was painted, illustrated so much and it's appeared in a couple of

37:00 other books actually, the nose of our plane and it was the only one in our squadron that had a, that I remember that had a thing put on the bust of it. You can see there it was, I don't know whether you can read the print, oh yes you can, it was called 'The Tojo Busters' see. Not unlike some of the fancy names the Americans had. I think in one of my, I've got some photos of our time in Nadzab and of course we were using American bombers on the Australian course, I think there's one there,

37:30 I think you can read the symbol on it. It's a typical American symbol with a bosomy lady and what not

you know, yes, but Australians didn't go in for that.

We're about at the end of the tape so I was just wondering is there anything else that you'd like to say that we haven't covered?

No. Well just a few things and a couple of things of experiences in the Middle East.

38:00 We were there for the 1967 Five-Day [Six-Day] war Of course naturally enough in Lebanon they were pro the Egyptians of course. Nasser was a great hero to them racing around and people said you know we said, "Oh we don't want go out on the street." because naturally there were demonstrations against the Brits and the American and our local friend, now this shows you I suppose the naiveté

38:30 of them they said, "Oh well you won't be attacked, you're Australians." you see but I said, "How will the people in the street recognise me as an Australian and not a Brit or an American?" you see. The fact that I look different I look Western they might take me and that was brought home by some of our Swedish friends. They went 'round the town with a little placard to their front saying both in English and Arabic, they had somebody to translate it, 'I am Swedish.'

39:00 so that nobody would attack them but we were taken to the airport, the UN was going to evacuate us you see, because of the demonstrations in Lebanon. Twice we went to the, each time we would, friends who were not UN people it was English people working in Lebanon we'd take our stuff from the fridge and give it to them to keep in their fridge and then we'd come back, the plane didn't arrive

39:30 to take us away so back we came, we took our stuff out of the fridge again. Next day, it's on again. “You're going to be evacuated." so put our stuff back to their fridge and went out to the airport. The war was over so five days it lasted you see. Just came back. So we never got evacuated but we were evacuated when the civil war in Lebanon broke out that was a serious time and we were first of all evacuated to Jordan and strangely enough,

40:00 it was a bit ironic, I was put in charge of the convoy that was moving, we were going to drive from Beirut through Lebanon into Syria and then into Jordan and I was put in charge of the convoy. At that stage the Lebanese army hadn't broken up and they were they were going to escort us through the fighting in Lebanon you see and I couldn't get my car to start to get to the base to start

40:30 this thing, and what happened you see, that your car wouldn't be stolen whenever I came home at night I used to take the rotor out of the distributor so in my hurry the next day after we'd packed the car when I put the rotor in I put it in the wrong way that's why I didn't realise this I found this out later so the car wouldn't start and I just had to leave it and then I rang up the base and I said, "Look I can't get my car going, can I get permission...." we had attached to our unit we had a big American

41:00 station wagon. I said, "We ought to take the station wagon out anyway." and the boss agreed and he said, "Yes we'll take the station wagon." so we piled all the stuff from the stranded car into the station wagon and Joan 'cause the kids were back home by then they were not with us, so Joan and I, we piled in this and I joined the convoy and I was the last vehicle in the whole convoy and right behind me with its gun poking out over the station wagon was one of the Lebanese army tanks and they escorted us all the way to the Syrian border yes.

41:30 **Was it frightening being a civilian in....?**

It was then because there was a lot of a lot of gun shots, our particular part was fairly safe but it was all around you see. You couldn’t move much, you didn't dare move much and because as Joan mentioned ours was a tall building, eleven stories high our apartment building, and we went up on the roof and we could see in the night time you could see the firing and you could hear it in day time but you could see it in the night time because of the

42:00 the incendiary bullets.

INTERVIEW ENDS