Australians at War Film Archive

Norman Tims (Norm) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **So we're recording now, so we'll start like we were saying, with your early years, yes? Caulfield, that's where you grew up?**

I grew up in Caulfield, yes. Did I mention that in my memoirs? Maybe not. But yes, we lived in Caulfield, or sometimes

01:00 in my grandparents' place in Malvern, near the corner of Inkerman Road and Malvern Grove. Mainly Caulfield, yes. And I went to the Caulfield North Central School in Balaclava Road, North Caulfield for the sixth grade, and my maternal grandfather decided that I'd better go to Caulfield Grammar School, where my uncles had been. And so off

01:30 I went at the end of grade six at state school, and lo and behold, after about two months, of course at grammar I found myself in the equivalent of grade eight, so I had a hurdle, it meant that I was physically a year younger than my classmates, and a year smaller than my classmates and I had a year to catch up. But because the school was so

02:00 good and our masters were so good, eventually I did. And I enjoyed my years at Caulfield Grammar immensely, made some great friends, and it was a good school. So then I got a job at what was known as the flax production committee, which was part of the department of supply, and the flax production committee was responsible for the growth of flax in various states: Western Australia, Tasmania,

02:30 western Victoria and probably some others, the flax being used for the manufacture of webbing, for parachute harness and army equipment and so forth. So it was a protected occupation. But I'd always been mad about aircraft ever since I was a little boy, if I heard one, I would rush out and see it. I'd had my appendix taken out and I was home convalescing, and I heard this

03:00 aircraft near my home, so I hurtled out of bed, much to my mother's horror, to see this aircraft. But they really had a hold of me. As a child I used to see this amphibious aircraft doing joyrides down at St Kilda, called the Cutty Sark and it was amphibious, and all the time I was fascinated by aircraft. Aged about 10 – am I going from one subject to another too much?

No, no, that's fine, just the way you're doing it.

Aged about

03:30 10 my old man took me out to Essendon Aerodrome with my paternal grandmother and my mother, and decided I'd have a joy flight. So it was a biplane, I can't remember what particular biplane it was, so the old man got on the front seat, and then I got on his lap, and the pilot took us round Essendon for about a quarter of an hour, completely and totally illegally of course, you're not allowed to sit on peoples' knees in an aircraft. But I loved

04:00 that and I never forgot the feeling of height and it was just a great experience. So I guess that's stayed with me all my life, and therefore I wanted to fly. But at this Flax Production Committee it was a protected occupation, and I didn't want to be protected. But fortunately my boss, Mr Dolling, was a World War I veteran, and I said to him, "Mr Dolling, I'm not going to sit here for the rest of the war, will you let me go?" And he said, "Yes, I will, what do you

04:30 want to do?" I said, "I want to fly." So he agreed to release me and I applied to join the air force. I was then 18, and an aircrew trainee, and then I was accepted and away I went.

Okay, that's a really good overview of that period of time up to your enlistment. Can we go back though, back to childhood in Caulfield and

05:00 **Balaclava Primary?**

Yep.

Can you recall very much about your childhood and about school, and what school was like for you?

Well of course being born in 1924 I was a small child when the Great Depression was on, and although my father never complained bitterly, I know that things were very tough and that we had to be careful what we ate, and so we ate

05:30 a lot of rabbits and you know, various cheap foods and so forth, but my sister and I - there was only one other child, my sister, two years older - we seemed to enjoy our lives. The old man was a pretty fierce character actually, he'd been a World War I veteran, went to Gallipoli and Egypt, the western front, he was wounded on more than one occasion,

06:00 he was ill a couple of times in France, he was commissioned in the field and won a Military Cross at the Battle of Mont St Quentin; he was quite a man. But he was a tough man, and he wasn't very communicative, although when I started to play golf with him at the age of about 14 or 15, he used to offer little snippets of his wartime experiences. But he belong to the 21st Battalion which was absolutely

06:30 decimated, in fact so much [so] that when it came to discharge in 1919 there weren't enough of them to call a battalion, so they transferred what remained of the 22nd. So you can imagine what sort of impact that would have had on his life. But he was a fiercely determined man who to my mind was terribly decent, a good man, but tough, he needed to be. He

07:00 was operated on for stomach ulcers, so he lost half his stomach between the wars, that didn't stop him trying to enlist in the 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And they said, he wanted to enlist in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], "Mr Tims, you only have half a stomach, I don't believe you're medically fit enough to join the RAAF." Undeterred, off he went to the army, and joined the 2nd AIF instead. They promoted him to captain, and

07:30 he just had an internal job with the communications unit. But that was the sort of man he was, quite a character.

When you were a child, did he talk to you much about his war experiences in your childhood?

No, he was very reticent about them, he obviously had some horrific ones, and lost so many of his fellow battalion members I don't think he wanted to remember.

08:00 But he told me he was promoted to sergeant on one occasion, from what do they call them, lance corporal I think, but he swore at an officer so he was immediately made a lance corporal again. But anyway, that didn't stop him getting a commission in the field finally. But he did everything he could to protect my mother and my sister and myself during the Depression. He was a very clever man, he

08:30 patented a chalkboard called Timson Play Chalkboard. Now we had the school chalkboard market to ourselves for many years, thanks to his ingenuity.

Do you mean the blackboards in schools?

Yes, green chalkboard. Yes, he …

What was ingenious about what he did?

Well, finding the process to put the surface on the hardboard, which was used as a base, so that it didn't shine, it always remained matt, no matter how much use

09:00 it had. And he was able to do that. Don't ask me how, I just benefited from his ingenuity really. The point being that before the war it used to be all imported from the United States, and of course when war broke out the imports were finished. But anyway, he set off to try and make the chalkboard, he had a pretty good idea of how you did it, and he did it.

Did he export?

Yes, we did, we had agents in Singapore and Hong Kong, New Zealand, but we

09:30 didn't go any further afield than that. But yes, we had a good export trade for a number of years, until competition became rife of course and we had to find other things to supplement the chalkboard business. He asked me to work for him after the war. I went back to the flax production commission and it drove me bonkers really, I didn't want to be sitting at a desk signing papers

10:00 for payments to others. But he was pretty ill then, my father, and he said, "Will you come and work for me?" This was 1946. So I said, "I don't really want to Dad, because I've been offered a job at TAA [Trans-Australian Airlines] as a pilot." But I said, "I know I'm going to have to, yes, I'll come and work for you." The pilot's job resulted from me walking down Swanston Street one day and there was an instructor from Benalla,

10:30 where I learnt to fly Tiger Moths for Doug MacDonald, who was an old boy at my school, and Doug said to me, "Norm, are you back at work?" I said, "Yes I am, Doug." "What are you doing?" I told him. He said, "How do you like it?" I said, "I hate it." He said, "How would you like a job with TAA?" I said, "I'm not much use to TAA Doug, I only ever flew single engine aircraft, I've never flown a twin or a multi."

"Doesn't matter Norm," he said, "You make application for a pilot's job and I'll shove it in the

11:00 right direction when it comes in." But I couldn't let the old man down, so I had to work for him. He didn't offer me a partnership or anything, because he was so ill he couldn't drive himself to the office and so forth. So that's what I did. And so I stayed there for the rest of my life, my working life.

What did he get his Military Cross for?

I've got the citation, will I get it? No?

Perhaps in the break we could get it,

11:30 **if you could just describe what ...**

I've got a copy of it there, yes.

Actually, yes, you might as well read it.

You say when.

Okay, yes.

"Awarded a Military Cross for gallantry," the citation reads, "At the capture of Mont St. Quentin on the 1st of September, 1918, in charge if a Stokes gun," that's a Stokes trench mortar, "A Stokes gun and crew, he advanced with the attacking raid and despite heavy machine-gun fire, he brought his guns to

12:00 bear on enemy nests with much success. On reaching the objective he reconnoitred the position alone, and although constantly under heavy shellfire, he served his gun for several hours with good effect. The success of the advance and consolidation was largely due to his fine courage and resource." So you know, he was really somebody.

When did you first learn of the citation?

Beg your

12:30 pardon?

When did you first learn of the citation?

When did I? I always knew that he had a Military Cross, but I can't remember when I – because he would never talk about it, he would never show it to anyone, no. But my mother had a copy, so that's where I first saw it. He never talked about it, he was just so modest. But that's quite a citation.

Well what were your

13:00 **impressions of him then as a child, knowing that he had ...?**

As a child: a strong disciplinarian, and I misjudged him because I was told when I got on the troop train to go north, to go to Townsville, the personnel depot there to be posted to an operational squadron, he was at the Spencer Street railway station with my mother and my sister and my girlfriend at the

13:30 time, and my sister told me subsequently that he had tears coming down his cheeks. And that amazed me. But that really was what he was like, but underneath it – above was the strong exterior, and you would have considered him unemotional at all times. But a very popular man, he was very popular at his golf club, popular amongst

14:00 men. Anyway that was – when I heard about him farewelling me and you know, being emotionally upset, I was quite amazed. So I have a lot to thank him for, and as a man I admired him hugely. That's about all I can tell you about him.

He sounds like a man with a lot of initiative.

He was, yes he was.

Self-made in some ways?

Yes he was, as well, to go from private to lieutenant in the field is something, yes.

And your schooling, Balaclava Primary School, was that a small school ...?

It was called Caulfield Central School, a very good headmaster called Mr Corry, I

15:00 don't know how I remember this, but again he was a World War I veteran, Mr Corry. So you didn't mess about at Caulfield Central School, or else you were in real trouble. But we had great teachers, strong discipline, and you were there to learn and you knew you were there to learn, no use messing about. So thanks to Caulfield North Central School, not Caulfield Central School, Caulfield North Central School.

15:30 It saved my grandfather a year's fees at the Caulfield Grammar School, that's how good the teaching was, it wasn't my brilliance or anything, but just the teaching was so good. And fortunately of course at the grammar school the teaching was equally good, if not better. So I was very lucky to have a good

education.

And in what sense were they disciplinarians? What sort of disciplines would they use on you?

At Caulfield Central?

Yes.

Caulfield North Central School? Well you got a whack with a

16:00 cane or some sort of physical treatment. I don't think I got – yes – you used to have to hold your hand out and they'd whack you with a ruler or something. I think I only did that once or twice. Of course at grammar school I never even got the cane, so I must have been very well behaved. But it was a great school. I tell you who I was at school with, Lindsay Thompson, he was in my form at Caulfield Grammar.

16:30 We used to call him Left Hand Side Triangle, because his initials were L.H.S.Thompson, he was known as Left Hand Side Triangle. A great bloke, I still see him at luncheons, he was a top scholar, he was a good footballer, a good cricketer, and a good bloke. So you know, there were some pretty high calibre people at Caulfield. My headmaster, Frank Archer, I see his son at the golf club every now and then, Frank

17:00 Archer was a wonderful headmaster. One of my later teachers was a fellow called Davis Hughes, who became the minister for public works in the New South Wales government when the Opera House was being built. And he had a great influence on me too, and he went into the air force, and we used to call him Basher Hughes, a delightful man. All the masters were good at Caulfield.

17:30 If you didn't learn, it was your fault, not theirs.

Why was he called Basher?

He used to – he was a formidable build, and a great footballer, and he used to threaten, "Now listen Clayfield, if you don't behave yourself, I'm going to bash you." And of course he never did, but he'd walk up to them and they'd cringe in horror, so he called a nickname Basher, but he never hit anyone, that I saw.

18:00 **And what were your preferred subjects?**

Mathematics. I finally got the maths 2 prize in my leaving and matriculation, yes, it took me all those years to get the prize, and it was the only one I ever got, but I really liked algebra, trigonometry and geometry. Arithmetic, well anyone can do arithmetic, but trigonometry was probably my favourite subject, with

18:30 geometry, and I loved algebra too, I just loved maths. And they're handy subjects if you like them and you do reasonably well. I didn't play a lot of sport, I played golf and tennis, individual sport, because being so young, I was too small to play in the form team, they were all bigger than I, so I resorted to golf and tennis, which I enjoyed.

So what was the reason for you being moved

19:00 **up a grade when you were ...?**

They seemed to think I had potential to do that, and I don't know why, it just took two or three months I think, and they assessed me, obviously, and said he can do better than this year, so they moved me up and made life difficult for me, because of it. But only for a while, I caught up. But I never caught up physically, I was always amongst the smallest. But that

19:30 didn't seem to matter, it mattered in terms of team sport, because I couldn't play in the football team, I was obviously too small, but I didn't feel inferior, and I never got bullied, I wouldn't have put up with any bullying anyway, but I never – because of my size I was never picked on, I must have had a surly look in my blue eyes or something but I never got bullied, small and all as I was.

And what about

20:00 **recreation and play and you know, after school and weekends, what did you do?**

What did we do after school? We'd play cricket in the street, or football in the street, I might go and play tennis somewhere, but homework always predominated of course, had to be done. Yes, street cricket, street football, main activities.

Did you live in the one house for a

20:30 **long time?**

No. My first recollection of the house was in Malvern Grove, the corner of Malvern Grove and Inkerman Road, Caulfield, that's my first impression. Then my next impression was Langdon Road, Caulfield, number eight, then I remember Langdon Road, Caulfield, number 33, then I remember staying with my mother's uncle and aunt

21:00 during the Depression while the old man went north to Queensland and tried to do a selling tour to get some income, so I stayed with them for a few months I think, actually. Then where did we finish? After Caulfield – oh, we rented a flat in Murrumbeena Road, in

21:30 Murrumbeena, and that was the last home I had before I was married. So we moved around a bit, here, there, but almost always in Caulfield or Malvern. The house in Malvern Grove was straight opposite my paternal grandparents' house, and lo and behold two doors up were my maternal grandparents. That's how my mother met my father, I

22:00 suppose, because they lived only two doors apart. Yes, my childhood seems a little blurry now, although I've got some very strong memories of it.

So your parents both grew up in the same area, did they?

Yes. My maternal grandmother was English and they migrated out here. And she used to take me to Anzac Day parades when I was a

22:30 little tiny bloke, and I used to wave the Union Jack. I don't know why I waved the Union Jack instead of the Australian flag, but that's what she got me to do, she was very English. My mother's side were possibly mainly Irish, so I'm a make up of Irish, English and Scottish, and as Margot will tell you sometimes my Irish side comes through.

23:00 My grandfather was born in Castlemaine in 1864, that's my maternal grandfather, where my mother's mother, my maternal grandmother came from Mudgee in New South Wales, and she was a lovely old woman, I remember being really cut up when she died.

23:30 **So it was your paternal grandmother who was English?**

Yes, she sure was.

So she was very much for the empire and …?

Oh yes, I was raised and trained in that mode, you see, that's why I'm a non-republican because of my childhood and my grandparents. I don't see the need for a republic, but that's just my view.

So apart from the flag, carrying the Union

24:00 **Jack, what other ways did that allegiance …?**

Well, at Caulfield North Central School, every Monday morning we used to sing the national anthem and the flag would be raised, and you know, that was part of my upbringing too, so I've always been brought up as an empire man. I guess it's appropriate that I was a member of the Empire Air Training Scheme, but empire, yes.

24:30 That's just because I was educated that way by my family. I'd never change my mind.

Do you remember what your grandmother would sort of educate you in? What particular …?

Yes, she was a stickler for the correct presentation of cutlery and the correct use of cutlery, I remember her for that, showing me how the knives and forks are arranged and what order you use them and so forth.

25:00 My memories are fading of her, but she was very much an English lady, my paternal grandmother. My paternal grandfather must have been a very quiet man, because I don't have lots of memories of him at all, actually.

So you knew the territory around Caulfield very well?

Yes, very well, yes, yes.

25:30 **What about the community? Was there a sense of being part of a small community?**

No, I can't remember any great friendliness with nearby neighbours, I don't know, it was just a family kind of area. Near the park, the Caulfield Park there, where I first learned to hit a golf

26:00 ball, where I first used to go and watch lacrosse being played, I don't know, I just like Caulfield. When I was first married though I bought a house in Ashburton, and I felt as though I was moving into a foreign land then. However, we quickly settled down.

But you said you played a lot of street cricket.

Played?

You

26:30 **played cricket and games in the street, so that's a lot of kids getting together from the neighbourhood.**

Oh yes, but just immediate neighbours you know, across the road or next door, just immediately around there. I can't remember their names now - Neil Blake I can, there's one. Izzy Israel was another, I can remember. Dick Orr, Doug Orr, it's such a long time ago, 70 years almost.

27:00 **Do you remember the backgrounds of any of these …?**

No, no I don't really.

The family …?

No, I don't know what their fathers did for a job, no, not really. I guess my mother would have, or father would have known, but I didn't know. So there was a great variety of backgrounds. Not very many Caulfield Grammarians that lived anywhere near me.

27:30 **So getting a public school education, your father must have been earning enough to be able to afford to send you there.**

My grandfather paid for my Caulfield Grammar fees. I can remember seeing an invoice for a term's fee at Caulfield Grammar, I must have been in intermediate, of 13 pounds 10, $27 a term. But of course we're going back to 1937, '38,

28:00 '39, 1940. Yes, 13 pounds 10 shillings I think it was. Today it'd be 1300 pounds now. I hate to think what it would cost to educate children now.

And what was your uniform like?

Oh, very neat, navy blue and white edging, what do you call that edging stuff?

Piping?

Piping, yes. And a very nice

28:30 school crest, I don't think I've got an example of it now, but a very neat uniform, and you wore a cap, and don't let yourself be seen around the streets with your uniform on and no cap, that'd get you a stroke or two in the headmaster's office. So they were insistent on neat and tidy dress, so I guess that helped my air force life a bit, I didn't mind the discipline, being dressed correctly, unlike the present day and age.

29:00 **So your mother was very particular about making sure your uniform was clean and …?**

Yes, she was. Yes, my mother had an interesting life, she was born in a place called Balranald up in the Riverina. Her father, my grandfather, had a sheep property there, together with his brother,

29:30 Uncle Will, so my mother spent her early years there, and she had a governess to teach her, provide some form of education. And they came down to Melbourne about 1900, from what I can gather, and I think Grandpa Webb and Uncle Will did pretty well with the sale of their property, so he always seemed to have enough money, and that's why

30:00 he not only paid my fees, he paid my sister's fees as well. So the old man didn't have to worry about that.

Where did your sister go to school?

She went – she seemed to change schools a bit, she went to a funny little school in Hawthorn Road, Caulfield, run by a Japanese bloke called Mr Inigaki. And from there she went to

30:30 Tintern? No, she didn't like Tintern, so then she went to PLC [Presbyterian Ladies' College], and I think she finished at – no, MLC [Methodist Ladies' College], she finished at MLC. She went to Tintern and didn't like that, then she went to MLC, and finished up at the branch in Glenhuntly,

31:00 I think it was Glenhuntly actually, the branch she finished up at. Then she went to work for the Shell Company, and spent her working life there, subsequently married, four children. She's still about, she's two years older than I. In fact she'll be here on Wednesday for my 80th birthday party. We've always been terribly fond of each other, my sister and myself. Only the two of us,

31:30 so we had to get by.

So what did you do together as children?

Pardon?

What did you do together as children?

Nothing very much, we used to go on school holidays together, mostly Marysville, to the guest houses up in Marysville, Mt Kitchener House, and Marylands and Marylynne, and we'd play tennis occasionally, Audrey and I. We didn't have a lot of activities in common,

32:00 but when I got to the stage of some degree of sensibility, aged 16 or something, we became great friends and we have been for the last 64 years. I'm very fond of her.

What is she like as a person?

She is angelic really,

32:30 and I'm not just saying this because I'm her brother, but she has an angelic nature. I have never heard her, in all those years, voice a word of criticism of anybody, nobody, absolutely nobody. She's a regular church-goer, she belongs to the Church of England, not the mothers' group, there's another group of women who are

33:00 sort of the backbone of the church, but she never thrusts it down anyone's throat, she's just a gentle, lovable person, and she's been a great prop, I remember when I came back from the operational squadron and they didn't know I was coming home, they didn't know my tour had finished, and I caught the train to Murrumbeena Station where we were

33:30 living, and knocked on the door, and she came to the door and opened it. Well, she burst into a great flood of tears and she was so relieved to see me again, and that's what she was like then, and is now, a very warm, forgiving sort of character. I can't quite work out how she and I are so different, but we are. But she's one of the world's

34:00 delights, is Audrey.

And what was your mother like?

My mother was – what was she like? She was a pretty determined sort of person, didn't suffer fools very gladly at all, if at all, very fierce mother, very protective mother, and

34:30 on reflection perhaps, too much so, because I didn't want to grow up a mummy's boy, if I could possibly avoid it, but she was very, very maternal. Fiercely loyal, a good daughter I would have thought to her parents, and certainly a good mother, she did her best, yes. I had to look after her, my father died in '53, she died in '81,

35:00 so I looked after her for 28 years, and she was very appreciative, I know she was.

So you lived with her?

No, no. No, she lived with my sister and family until they could stand it no longer, only because there were too many of them in the house, so she had a unit just nearby, and we used to visit her frequently, but she lived

35:30 alone. And then she went to a nursing home for the last few years of her life, but she was well looked after there.

What were her interests when you were a child?

What were her interests?

Yes, your mother's interests?

Her family, I guess, I can't think of much else. At what stage of her life are you talking about?

36:00 **I'm imagining you as a child, you know, nine, ten years old, into being a teenager, and what your mother would be doing.**

Well I can't think of anything, she probably did do things, but I think she saw her main occupation as looking after Audrey and me and Charlie, her husband. I can't think of any – she might have played cards, but I can't remember going to the tennis or any outdoor sport. I think she was an internal girl,

36:30 really. But I'm not sure exactly what her main interests might have been, probably cards, I think they used to play solo or Bridge. Solo.

Did she have a garden?

Yes, she wasn't the best gardener, no. Yes, she had a garden, except when we went to Murrumbeena, then she didn't. No, she wasn't a gardener. That's where I

37:00 inherited my non-gardening from, I think. I like cutting lawns, that's all.

And where would she shop for the family food, family groceries?

They used to go to Glenferrie Road, Malvern, I think mainly. There were shops nearby in Hawthorn Road, near the corner of Hawthorn Road and Balaclava Road, and when we lived in Langdon Road, Caulfield we could choof up there on foot, but I think Glenferrie

37:30 Road was Friday nights, would it be Friday night? Yes, Friday night, the old man would drive us up there and she'd hurtle about, do the shopping here and there.

And what would you do?

Sit in the car, wondering how long she was going to be, that's what we did.

So were the shops open late on Friday nights?

Pardon?

Were the shops open late?

Yes, until nine

38:00 o'clock I think, I think it was nine o'clock closing on Friday night in Glenferrie Road. Eight or nine, yes. Late night shopping, and that's almost 70 years ago. I don't know whether that applied to all shopping strips, but it certainly did in Glenferrie Road, Malvern.

So was it a busy shopping strip?

Yes.

Lots of activity?

It was, yes. It was

38:30 probably busier then than it is now, because places like Malvern Central and all the supermarkets and so forth, I don't think it's as active now, I wouldn't really know. I haven't seen it on Friday nights, but I think it would have calmed down quite a bit.

Did you have a bike as a kid?

A bike? I did. One of my favourite uncles who worked at the Myer

39:00 Emporium gave me my first bike. Unfortunately it wasn't a Malvern Star, which of course were all the rage, and if you didn't have a Malvern Star you were down hill a bit. But my dear Uncle John Colvin bought me a Myers bike called Comet, you've probably never heard of that. But I didn't care whether it was a Malvern Star or what it was, it had two wheels and I had a lot of fun out of that. So I rode a bike, yes, I used to ride it to school when we lived in Caulfield, in

39:30 Landon Road, yes.

Tape 2

00:31 **Okay, so you were telling us about the football, can you begin that story?**

Yes, because one of my strong recollections of childhood, going to the football at the Junction Oval, which was St Kilda Football Club headquarters, down at the corner of Fitzroy Street and whatever, and they were taken – my two grandfathers would take along a packing case for little Norm to stand on, and they would buy me peanuts and Minties.

01:00 And I used to love that. And the old man would come too with probably his brother or brother-in-law, and they would rush off to the George Hotel, I think it was, for a drink while grandpas and I sat in the car. One Saturday after the football, Dad handed my grandfather the key of the car, and off they went to the pub, and unfortunately my grandfather broke the key

01:30 off in the lock. And when the old man came back I thought, "He's going to explode, there'll be a hand grenade thrown here." He was as cool as you could imagine, I've never forgotten that, he somehow or other overcame the problem, I don't quite know how, but he got the broken key out of the lock and got the car started. And I was amazed, I thought, "He'll throw a tantrum here." But not him. But I used to love the football. Was there something else I remembered?

02:00 **What team did you support?**

St Kilda, yes. And I still do to some degree. But that was one of the highlights of my week, going to the football with my grandfathers. What else? Oh, I used to follow Richmond actually, because this uncle who'd bought me my first bike, Uncle John Colvin worked for Myers, and he would take me to work on

02:30 a Saturday morning, and I would stand in the lift with one of his work mates and spend the morning in the lift, going up and down, up and down, and when Uncle John knocked off, off we'd go to see Richmond play football. So he was very kind to me. Yes, they all were really.

So your two grandfathers were good mates?

Well they got on very well together,

03:00 I never saw them as friends really, but they may have been. If they were it eluded me, but they certainly got along very well together. I don't know what they thought of each other really. And that was another of my childhood pleasures. My grandfather, paternal Grandfather Tims had a three quarter size billiard table at his place in Malvern Grove, and he taught me as best he

03:30 could how to play billiards, not snooker, but billiards. And that served me in good stead right throughout my service life, because frequently on the stations there were billiard tables, we could play snooker, we usually played snooker rather than billiards, so yes, that was a pleasure, it was always nice to go to Grandpa Tim's place and have a hit up on the billiard table. I had lots of privileges as a child, really, when I think back.

04:00 Life seemed uncomplicated to me, but no doubt it was complicated to my elders, but it didn't seem so to me. I just enjoyed everything I did.

Well something else you've mentioned that's slipped my mind now, it was a story about your father.

Teaching me to play golf? No?

You could tell us about that, yes.

Well, where were we living then?

04:30 I think we were living in Malvern Grove temporarily at the time, but he'd take me across the road to the park and he'd say to me, "Now Norman, if you can hit a golf ball to that fence in two shots, I'll give you a shilling." And so Norman actually hit the ball into the fence on the second shot, so I won a shilling. And I guess that gave me a bit of a taste of

05:00 golf, and I thought, it'd be nice to play. So eventually, some three or four years later he joined me at Kingswood Golf Club where he'd been a member since 1930. I believe – I was told I was the youngest junior member they ever had, ever admitted at Kingswood. I was 15, I think, 15 years. So that was a gift he gave me, the golf, because I played golf until recently,

05:30 for over 60 years, so I was very lucky. I didn't play during the war of course, and I didn't play post-war when I was in 21 Squadron, but apart from those eight years I played golf all the time, all that period. Very fortunate. But I have my old man to thank for that.

So was golf a popular sport back then?

In the '30s? It just seemed to be coming into its own, yes.

06:00 Kingswood Golf Club at that stage were out at Dandenong, and they built their new course at Dingley. But no, it seemed to be becoming popular in the early '30s, I think that's when it took off. Never looked back of course. No, the old man was on the committee of Kingswood Golf Club, and there were a few old diggers there along with him, and they were a

06:30 great bunch of men. And he played golf with only half a stomach, and did it quite well. He got down to a handicap of seven, and I thought, "Now Dad, I'm going to get down to six." And I never did. I got down to seven, but I couldn't get down to six. But he would have been pleased, he was dead of course, but he would have been pleased to see me on seven. But that's how determined he was, taking up golf at the age of about 22,

07:00 he was born in 1897, he would have taken golf up early '30s, '33, with half a stomach, and he still got down to seven.

And when you say golf was just taking off, were there not many golf courses around?

No, and there weren't very many public golf courses, so they gradually grew and so did the private clubs. A lot of

07:30 old clubs of course existed, I mean Royal Melbourne is 114 years old now, I think, 1891? Yes, it had its century in 1991, so there are many old golf clubs like that, not many, a few old golf clubs. Perhaps it's just my impression that it took off in the early '30s, perhaps that's because that's when I took up golf – I don't know. It

08:00 was considered I think a wealthy man's game for a while and then they suddenly discovered that you didn't have to be wealthy to play golf.

So what were the clubs like? Were they like they are now, or were they different?

No, hickory shafted, when I first started to play golf, the steel shaft came in – I think again in the '30s the steel shafted clubs came in, and now look at them. But no, hickory shafted clubs were the initial ones that

08:30 my father had, in fact I think he handed me down his clubs when he got some steel shafted clubs. A fairly crude equivalent, and the golf balls were very crude, they wouldn't travel very far.

Were they the same design with the dimples?

The balls?

The golf balls.

Yes, they were, dimples, Dunlop golf balls were dimpled. Originally they were smooth of course, no

dimples at all, some

09:00 revolutionary character invented the dimpled golf ball and away they went. I would have been happy to play with a boiled egg, I loved the game so much.

But you used to practice at the park, you said?

I did, Dad and I used to practice at home, chipping into the lounge chairs, much to my mother's horror. No, I was dead keen, Dad and I won the fathers and sons open

09:30 competition one day at Kingswood, I was 16 I think, or 15, 16, oh well. So we were very pleased with that, got our names in the papers and so forth. So golf's been kind to me, and I have my old man to thank for that.

So were you ever a caddie?

Have I caddied?

Yes.

Yes I have, but only after –

10:00 I played pennant for Royal Melbourne for a year or so and I got too old and too short, so I caddied for one of our players, Charley Baillieu his name was actually, name is, so yes, I have done some caddying, and I quite enjoyed that, we'd go from whatever course we were playing on, and I'd caddie for Charlie, we got on very well together.

And what about

10:30 **collecting golf balls when you were a kid? Is that part of your golfing experience?**

From creeks and things, you mean? No, I spent more time losing them than collecting them actually. No, a non-collector.

So you had to replace your own balls?

Yes, and we'd find them in the rough occasionally and

11:00 we'd take them home and paint them, because they were terribly scarce. I think the old man used to pay for my needs, Dunlop 65s and Dunlop Warwicks, yes.

Are they different types of golf balls? The Dunlop 65s and the …?

Yes, one was more expensive than the other, allegedly it would go further,

11:30 I don't know whether that was true. The Warwick was the cheaper version of the Dunlop 65. I think the Dunlop 65 still exists today, I think. It's so long since I've bought a golf ball, I don't know.

So when you – what age were you when you finished school?

I finished school in 1940, I was 16 years, I didn't complete

12:00 the year because the job came up and I had to take it before the end of the school year, and I still had to sit my exams regardless of that. But I was 16 and a half, just 16, well 16 years and a few months.

So did you get a merit certificate or …?

I did my intermediate certificate, I did my leaving and matriculation

12:30 in one year, in 1939. In those days you could matriculate for university as well as pass your leaving in the one year. Then I was too young to leave at 15 and a half, so they sent me back to Caulfield Grammar for what they call a year of honours, which was really supplementing your matriculation certificate in case you wanted to go to university, which I never did,

13:00 not until post-war. So I was quite young when I left school. You can't leave at 15 and a half, because my form mates were 16 and a half, and that was all right.

What were your aspirations when you finished school and you were looking towards your future, what did you want to do?

Well I really didn't – I didn't have

13:30 any specific occupation in mind, it's just that through a friend of the old man's, this job came up in the public service, so I took it, then I had to sit for the permanent public servants' exam, which I did and duly passed, so I became a permanent public servant in about '41, when I was 17. I don't know whether I would have been happy to have

14:00 stayed there if there hadn't been a war.

So with the war coming, did that influence you, did it?

Well, of course the war had already started in 1940, and I knew that eventually I'd be in the services. I didn't think much else about anything else really, about that, all I wanted to do was join the air force and become a pilot.

So you'd well and truly made up your mind about

14:30 **that?**

Yes I had. That's when I had to implore Mr Dolling to let me go. Yes, it just seemed to me to be the natural progression of my life, to join the RAAF and to fly aircraft, I don't know why I was so cocky about it, but I just felt that that was my lot. And so it turned out.

So in 1939 when the war broke out,

I was at school still, of course.

15:00 **Yes, but what did you think?**

Well, I used to follow the progress of the war and the ruinous things that were happening at that time. It wasn't an obsession with me, but I knew one day I'd be in the services. Yes, it wasn't an obsession, but the feeling was that that was what my fate was going to be.

15:30 **Could your father see it coming, the war?**

I don't know. He may well have. If he did he didn't say so to me. But of course as I told you before, when it did arrive, he rushed to join the RAAF with half a stomach. Patriotic man, actually.

16:00 **But he did end up – yes, he joined the RAAF?**

He went into the second AIF because the RAAF rejected him. Not unfairly, by any means, dear old bloke, he should never have gone back, he was born in 1897, so in 1939 he was 42, which was a bit elderly really. However, I don't think so

16:30 now, but I did then.

So he had a business going at that point, when the war broke out?

Yes, when he came back from World War I he worked for an electrical firm called Bailey & Grimster, and he went back there, I think he worked there before he joined up and he went back there, but I don't think he stayed terribly long after the war because he went to work for my

17:00 grandfather, you know, in much the same progression as I went to work for him. So my grandfather was Chas E. Tims, Chas being short for Charles. And my father was Charles William Benjamin Tims, and he went to work for Grandpa Tims and they had this importing business and a few other things and bits and pieces, and he stayed there until he died, really.

So he left the

17:30 **business? What happened to the business when he joined the RAAF?**

My grandfather just – well he wasn't in it then, but he was 2nd AIF. He had a brother called Alex Tims who was his partner, and his brother carried it on as best he could, but the old man was frequently on leave because the furthest he ever got away was Albury, though he was able to get back and supervise the

18:00 business during weekend leave and all that sort of thing, yes. But it kept going all right, but he had that heavy sort of overview of it, and my uncle did what he was told to do, mostly.

So just tell me a little bit more about the flax production committee that you worked for.

Yes. Well its job was

18:30 to pay all the farmers who produced the flax, and they used to take their flax crop to depots I guess, and have it weighed and then we'd get a note of the weight of the flax and pay them. It was really just a finance department, and we were clerks, I was a clerk, checking claims and just about what the responsibility was, not very exciting.

19:00 **And what was the flax being used for?**

For making webbing, parachute harnesses, what else, pack - what do they call those things soldiers wear?

Haversacks?

Yes, haversacks. Wherever webbing was used, it was made from flax, did you know that? No, I

19:30 didn't either until I went to the flax production committee. But that's what it was used for, for manufacture of webbing or whatever. And there were probably lots of other uses apart from haversacks

and parachutes. It was obviously a vital commodity, and that's why we're all supposed to be in protected occupations.

What department were you working for?

The department of supply, it was

20:00 part of the department of supply, very dull existence. The only bright spot was General MacArthur had his headquarters across the road, and we'd watch General MacArthur arrive with his entourage, he wasn't there for very long, but it was quite exciting to see General MacArthur. It was just near the office business between Queen's Street and Market Street in Collins Street on the south side.

20:30 **Did you have a nickname for him?**

MacArthur? We did actually. When we were at a place called Hollandia, which was the capital of Dutch New Guinea, we were operating from a ship called [HMS] Cyclops, and a Dakota arrived overhead and somebody said, "Do you know who's in that Dakota?" And we said, "No, who is?" They said, "God." "Oh," we said, "We could use

21:00 him on our side." They said, "No, General MacArthur." They called him God up there, that was the only nickname I heard. Have you heard of others?

No.

No. Yes, "Here comes God," they said. Pretty right too, actually.

So you were working for the department of supply, and all this time it was supplying …?

Yes, they're growing flax on their properties here.

For the military effort?

Yep.

So did that become a sort of bigger industry?

21:30 I don't know, I often wondered what happened to it post-war, when the demand would have obviously died down, there would be still some demand, and there may well be still some flax growers. No, as I say, West Australia, Tasmania, western Victoria, I think they were the main areas of growth. I got to know the names of farmers, heaven knows how many of them. But it was quite an effort, and I rather

22:00 gather it was a new industry, the growing of flax, I don't know that it had been done before.

So you got to know the names of the farmers?

Some of the farmers used to make out claims forms, they'd come in and we'd make out whatever the form was to get them paid, yes. I can't remember their names now, but I knew some of them quite well.

So you had personal contact with them?

Yes, if there was some query, or they thought they'd been underpaid or something went wrong, yes. But I remember making a

22:30 trip with Mr Dolling down the western district, why did we do that? I don't know, we were visiting some farmer down the western district somewhere, we stayed overnight somewhere, can't remember why, I think that as my sole trip with the flax production commission. Commission? Committee. flax production committee. I don't know why it was a committee, but that's what it was.

23:00 yes, it was a strange business name, wasn't it? Committee, flax production committee.

So was it a very big department?

No, no, there wouldn't have been more than 15, 15 in the clerical section of it, and Mr Dolling would have had a staff of about 15. I met

23:30 a lady there whose name was Jess McLeod, and she was a keen horsewoman who was an instructor at the famous Waverly Riding School out at Jordanville, you've probably never heard of it, but it was the riding school, and she introduced me to riding, and on Saturday mornings when we worked, we used to work Saturday mornings in the flax production committee,

24:00 and we'd go to Flinders Street, catch the train out to Jordanville, walk across the paddock, and I learnt to ride. So I owed her a great debt because I loved riding horses. So that was an offshoot of working for the flax production committee. But I was rather keen on Jess actually. She married a fellow, a horse person, called John Tomlinson. I used to write to her when I joined the air force, I used to drop her an odd line. I owed her a

24:30 lot, because I loved riding, used to get thrown off occasionally.

Where would you ride? What area?

If you catch the train to East Malvern, and you keep going, the next station is Holmesglen, and the next station is Jordanville where the Salesian golf course is, you know where the Salesian golf course is, Well

25:00 it's just before Mt Waverley. And we used to get off the train at Jordanville and the golf course was on that side and we walked through the paddocks and the Waverley riding school was on the right. Run by people called Irving, I remember the three sisters, Marjory, who was in the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service], Kay, little Kay who used to work at the riding school,

25:30 and Pippa, Pippa Varlesdon her name was, her husband was killed in the Middle East. But they were three great ladies, you'd have a prang on a horse and stagger into the stable, "Righto Norm, here's your next horse, on it, and off you go." It was the best thing they could do, I mean if I had a prang, and I had a beauty one day, this horse bolted, his name was Trooper and he bolted through the paddock, out onto the bitumen road, I

26:00 came off, one of his hooves went over me and ripped the back of my sports coat open, didn't scratch me, so I staggered to my feet and tottered into the stable area, and there was Kay. "What happened Norm?" And I said, "The bloody horse bolted with me Kay, and dumped me on the bitumen road." "Oh," she said, "That was bad luck. Well, you're riding Boggabris, here you are, hop on." So back to the

26:30 paddock I went. However, it was all part of learning to ride. But I was lucky that the horse didn't take the top of my head off. We didn't wear protective helmets or anything, in fact didn't wear a hat at all.

Gosh, it's amazing you survived.

Yes, but – no, I really love horses and I loved riding them.

But what a good idea to get you straight back on the horse.

Oh yes, the only way to go. Otherwise you'd become nervous, I think. I didn't have time to be nervous.

27:00 I remember old Mr Irving was around the stable area looking rather snobbish, at me staggering in, yes. No, they were good ladies, they were really something, those women. They moved from there, they went out to – the road to Healesville somewhere, I never rode out there. Anyway, that was a

27:30 consequence of Jess McKay, Jess McLeod at the flax production commission – committee.

So would you be on the phone talking to farmers about their crops and …?

I wasn't especially, but I think yes, there were frequent conversations. It ran pretty well, I don't remember much in the way of altercations.

And where did they have to bring the flax

28:00 **to?**

Yes, good question, the mills, there was a place there for flax. It was called rhetting, r-h-e-t-t-i-n-g, I think that means watering the flax, softening it up for processing. But how they reached the stage of webbing, I do not know, all I did was sign papers.

And you said earlier

28:30 **that your father took you down to Williamstown rifle range. Why was that? Why did he take you there?**

He thought I'd be interested to watch the rifle shooting, because he was a member of the St Kilda rifle club, and a team member, and they used to have a team of St Kilda against a team from somewhere else. He just thought – I don't know, he seemed to encourage the use of weapons. He bought me a Daisy air rifle when I was

29:00 very small, which probably wasn't a good idea, when I think about it, because there was the odd dead bird to be seen round our home in Caulfield. But he taught me to shoot and he used to take me to the miniature rifle range at the Malvern railway station, they had an indoor miniature rifle range, where you shot .22 calibre – a famous rifle, famous, can't think of it now.

29:30 He was determined that I was to learn to shoot, and he accomplished that all right, because by the time I got to the air force I was a pretty good shot. But I was bit lethal with that Daisy air rifle, a definite menace.

So tell me about that. What would you shoot?

Birds mostly, I used to lie in wait for them and clobber them, there wasn't much else to shoot.

Whereabouts? In the park or …?

No, in the back yard,

30:00 yes.

What sort of birds?

Any birds, black birds, sparrows, anything that came within range used to get clobbered. Not many of them, but I shot a few, I must say.

Anything else you'd take a pot shot at?

No, no I don't think so.

Street lamps or ...?

Pardon?

Street lamps

30:30 **or ...?**

No, I don't think so, I don't think so, I can't remember being all that naughty with it. No, just birds I think were the main target. Oh, we'd set up bottles and things in the back yard and shoot at them, yes. I don't know that it was a good idea of my old man's, but it certainly taught me how to shoot.

So what was the set up at

31:00 **Williamstown? I mean what kind of targets were you shooting at?**

You know, the big conventional targets, and the range varied, I just forget what range – I used shoot at 200, 300 yards, and I'm not sure how far they went, they might have gone to 400 yards, because the old man was a pretty good shot. As I said before, I saw him score this possible, which is the maximum score you can get with the number of rounds that you can use, he

31:30 hit the bullseye every time.

So was that rifle range being used for training purposes for the army?

I don't think it was, I think it was just used for rifle club competitions, I don't think it was a service establishment. I don't know, no, I don't remember any service connection, just the rifle clubs. I don't think it's done today, well I know the

32:00 rifle range doesn't exist any more, but I don't know that rifle clubs are very popular now, I doubt it. Skeet shooting is, I think they do a bit of skeet shooting, pigeons, clay pigeon shooting.

Okay, so we'll move on to when you enlisted in the RAAF, but I'm curious, with

32:30 **the subjects that you studied at Caulfield Grammar, did you have it in your mind then that the subjects you wanted to study would be appropriate for getting into the air force?**

Not really, I don't think I connected subjects to service, no, I don't think so. I was just lucky that I was good at maths, and that was the biggest help of all. But no, I didn't project forward to what use they'd be in the services really.

33:00 Yes, I just enjoyed maths. I'm not so keen on English or history, geography I couldn't stand, French I did, Margot thinks my French accent is appalling and it is, however. I quite like French. Geography and history were not my bag,

33:30 except I had an uncle, my mother's brother called Leslie Alfred Webb, he was at Caulfield and he was dux of the school, was he? He was dux minus one, and he was an historian, he could recite the secessions of kings and queens of England over a period of about 300 years, he was quite amazing really. He had an interesting job, my uncle, he was deputy master of the Royal Mint in William Street, hence

34:00 his boss was the chancellor of the exchequer in the UK [United Kingdom], and he was paid by the United Kingdom, and he had this remarkable flair for history which I never had. As I say, he could recite the succession of all these kings and queens. He was a great uncle too, he was a terrific man, very good to me.

So when

34:30 **you joined up, the RAAF, was that when you turned 18?**

The day I enlisted I was 18 years, two months and 23 days, 23rd September 1942, I was 18 and just a little bit. But I'd already done some

35:00 studying, they issued a book to air crew, to air crew volunteers to learn about navigation and this and that, and I studied that very, very heavily so I knew when I came to use the contents I'd remember them. It was a kind of – I forget what it was called now, and I'm not sure I don't still have a copy, but it was something that helped no end.

35:30 Yes, I was only a kid, really.

What about exams to actually register for the air force? Did you have to do an exam, sit an entrance exam?

No, we used to – no, but we were given night classes at, there was a technical school near the Melbourne University, I can't think of the name of it now, and we used to go – and there was

36:00 night classes after work there, teaching us a bit about – what did they teach us? Navigation, mathematics, that sort of thing. Can't think what they called it. Anyway we were on the reserve really, in the air force reserve at the age of 18, waiting to be called up. Yes, when I think of 18, it was pretty young.

36:30 **So it was over a couple of months before you were called up?**

Yes, two months and 23 days. The army tried to grab me, but they failed.

How did that come about?

Well they – apparently they called me up for a medical examination and I went to that, now where was it, down at Ripponlea I think. Anyway they said,

37:00 no, no, I told them that I'd already enlisted in the air force and was on the reserve. "Oh," they said, "No, you're too small, too thin for the army, we don't need you." I don't know whether they were joking or not, because I was pretty small and thin, but this was under conscription of course, and I didn't want to be conscripted, I wanted to be a volunteer. Anyway they didn't go any further with that, when they knew I was enlisted in the RAAF, they just dropped the whole thing.

37:30 Yes, too small, too thin.

So when you were first called up, where did you go to, where did you begin your training?

I was called up as an air crew guard, and air crew guards were scattered around, waiting to go on course, onto their actual air crew course, but it was a way of getting into the air force and

38:00 just waiting until they put you on a course, on an Empire Air Training Scheme course. So off I went to Shepparton, and I did my initial rookies' course at, I think it was called 1RD, 1 Reserve Depot at Shepparton which was the opening course for ground staff people and – the rookies

38:30 course for ground staff people, and I fell on my feet, because at the same time there were three blokes transferred from the 2nd Medium Regiment I think, Royal Australian Artillery, into the air force, and they came with me to Shepparton. Now they were older than I, but they looked after me like a junior, just like a junior brother, they were terrific. Ron

39:00 Kingsley, Mick Northey, and who was the tall bloke? But they befriended me, and they were a great help, but then I was only a little kind of mother's boy at the age of 18, and they were soldiers who'd been around for a while. But I was lucky, they picked me up as a mate. Ernie Waterworth was the other one. And we'd go on leave, and they wouldn't let me drink, they'd go into a hotel and they'd say to me, "You're not coming in here Norm, you just go

39:30 down to the local Y [YMCA. Young Men's Christian Association], or somewhere, we'll pick you up later on." They were that good. And from there when we finished our rookies' course at Shepparton, off we went to a place, I'll bet you've never heard of, ever heard of Marangaroo? It's just near Lithgow, and our job was to guard a tunnel, a disused railway tunnel full of mustard gas bombs,

40:00 and not many people had heard about this, but that's what we had to do. And we were there for about three months, October, November – two and a half months, and we were called up for our air crew training then. So we went from glorious Marangaroo to Number 1Initial Training School Somers. We got there in December '42. And we went on to Number 35 Empire Air Training Scheme

40:30 course, and that's where it all started, Kanga and I and Mick and Ernie. Ernie and Mick survived, Kanga didn't he was sent to – when he did his Tiger Moth training at Benalla after that, they sent him to Canada, to Calgary, to do pilot training, and unfortunately he was scrubbed so he

41:00 went from Canada to the UK and was killed on a training accident, in an aircraft. But those three blokes were the making of me, they were tough characters, but they were just terrific mates. Anyway, I digressed a bit. They came to Benalla – to Somers with me, and then Mick and Ron came to Benalla with me, and learned to fly Tiger Moths.

Tape 3

00:30 **Before we get onto the training, the nitty gritty of the training, you could tell us a bit about Melbourne during those first years of the war. I mean do you actually recall hearing the news of the declaration of war that Sunday night?**

I don't have a strong recollection of that, being at school of course, and I guess I didn't read newspapers every day, but eventually when I did read newspapers they contained nothing but doom and gloom, believe me, the

01:00 evacuation of Dunkirk and various disasters like that, the Germans rolling through France and other countries, and I remember being up at Healesville at a guesthouse on school holiday, and riding a horse actually, and I'm sitting on this horse thinking, "How is this war going to go? Is it going to go in our favour or are we going to lose?" And I was only

01:30 15 then I guess, this was 1939, 1940, just a series of disasters, one after the other, but then it all got better, in due course. But there wasn't a lot of chatter amongst school boys about it. I suppose the adults spoke a lot about it, I don't remember that. I just remember doom and gloom, that's all.

02:00 **And you said you know, from an early age you had an interest in flying, in planes- -**

In aircraft.

- -in aviation. Were you following the fortunes of the air force, the Royal Air Force?

Not especially, no. The Battle of Britain of course occurred when I was 16, in 1940, and I was highly interested in that, but I don't think at that age, 16, you take things terribly to heart,

02:30 you know, you just hope for the best, with a kid of 16.

And what about, I mean you went to the flax production committee, or commission, the committee- -

Yes, I'm just trying to remember whether it – I'm sure it was committee, not commission, the flax production committee, I'm pretty sure, yes.

Okay, and your office was based – you were in the city in Collins Street, and you mentioned MacArthur being opposite you,

03:00 **what was the mood like in Melbourne at that time, as the war progressed, sort of '40, '41 and so on?**

The mood in the streets?

Yes.

I think one of perennial optimism, you know, that's Australia, isn't it? You're never down till you're really down. I don't remember any great concern, I think people were thinking about building slip trenches in their homes and avoiding bombs in case,

03:30 but I don't remember an atmosphere of pessimism, I only remember an atmosphere of, "Well this is how it is and let's, you know, accept it." I think morale was very good, really.

Was there a slit trench in your back yard?

We didn't, no, no. Where was I living then? In a flat in

04:00 Murrumbeena, so no, we didn't have any slip trenches. I never thought, I suppose it was childlike, I never thought they'd be necessary myself, that was my own personal feeling. I could never see the war coming to Australia, but of course, you know, that's childhood optimism for you. It came to Australia all right, just ask the people who lived in Darwin.

So I know you've told us, you told us on the previous tape, when was it that you enlisted with the air force?

The

04:30 22nd of September 1943.

So this is well after the Japanese…?

Yes, well yes, '42, I beg your pardon.

Oh, okay.

The reason I said – I got my wings exactly a year later to the very day, the 22nd of September, 1943, but I enlisted and went to Shepparton on the 22nd of September, '42. So yes, the Japs had been in the war since December the 7th, '41,

05:00 what's that, eight months, ten months earlier.

What sort of effect had that had do you think on the morale in the general …?

The Japanese entry?

Yes.

I think – the further north you felt I think the more effect it probably had on morale. But the government handled it pretty well I thought, and kept the public's morale up. I don't know, I never heard any panic

anywhere,

05:30 no.

So what was it that really drove you to enlist? I mean you mentioned you had just turned 18 a few months prior, but what was the sort of major motivating factor for you?

I wanted to join the air force and be a pilot, that's all I wanted to do, be a pilot. Not interested in a navigation job or air gunner, just a pilot,

06:00 I wanted to fly aircraft, that's what motivated me.

Were there any friends who had joined up before you?

Not really, no. Who went into the air force?

Yes.

No, not really. My best friend at school failed to make the air crew medical, so no, not really, just all on my own thoughts.

06:30 I used to look in envy at anyone wearing pilots' wings, I must admit, and think, "Gee, I wish that was me." But no, no, nobody else had anything to do with it.

So what was the appeal of being a pilot in the air force?

What was the …?

The appeal of that? What was the attraction, what appealed to you about it?

I just wanted to be a fighter pilot, I suppose the Battle of Britain had something to do with that, yes, I wanted to fly fighter aircraft, that

07:00 was my big ambition.

And what did your parents think of that ambition?

I think the old man was very much in favour, and being an only son my mother was very much not in favour. However, she knew I was going to join the service. But they were very supportive, I think the old man thought it was a pretty brilliant idea.

And was that something they found out beforehand, or after you'd signed up?

07:30 After, I guess, yes. As they saw my air crew training unfold they then realised what I wanted to be. Mind you, you didn't always have your – you weren't always granted your prime wish, but Number One ITF Somers as in all the other initial training schools, you had to go before a selection committee, who would decide whether

08:00 you were going to be a pilot or a navigator or an air gunner, and they would decide for you. They said to me, "Why do you want to be a pilot, Tims?" I said, "Well, wouldn't there be a man of my age, I just felt that I could fly aircraft." "And why do you think that Tims?" And so I boastfully said to them, "Well I drive a car exceptionally well. If I can do that I see no reason why I can't fly an aircraft."

08:30 Well they all chortled. But anyway they granted me my wish and classified me as a pilot. We were classified and known as A1B A3B; being A1B, A3B meant you could be any air crew category, anything, you were suitable for any of them. So that was a start. Anyway, they granted me my wish.

So up until that point,

09:00 **even before Somers, you'd spent some time, you were telling us, was it air guard, air crew guard?**

Air crew guard at Marangaroo.

Marangaroo?

Nobody's ever heard of it, I'm astonished. No, not really.

And before that you – was it Benalla?

No, no: Shepparton.

Shepparton, sorry.

Number 1 Recruit Depot for ground staff recruits.

So what happened at Shepparton?

Oh, you just went through the routine of

09:30 having all your injections and learning to march and to do rifles rule and what else did we do? We used

to have NCOs [non-commissioned officers] marching us around the blessed parade ground all day. But we didn't do anything particularly useful I don't think, and it didn't seem too much of a hardship, but that was because of my army mates, they just made it so easy for me. But I have a vivid memory of one injection day, when we were being injected against

10:00 typhoid, I think, and we were in a queue, and we were injected, we walked out of the hut, and we're standing there and out walks a bloke and falls into the gully trap, and out walks the next bloke and falls into the gully trap with him, and out walks the third bloke, and faints into the gully trap with the other two. And Kanga and I are wetting ourselves with laughter, we can't figure out

10:30 how on earth they could possibly faint after an injection. But they did, one after the other, the domino effect, one, two three. Oh dear, I suppose it wasn't really funny, but we found it funny. So no, life just went on, we had a passing out parade, I got clobbered on one occasion because the commanding officer of the station and his warrant officer, the stipendiary, the WOD [warrant officer discipline] and a couple of other characters walked past us and we were working - what on

11:00 earth were we doing? We were moving rocks or some darned thing like that. And as the CO [commanding officer] went past, I saluted him, and of course he took no notice of such an ignorant recruit anyway, so he ignored me totally, so okay. So then he walked past a second time so I ignored him. Well, the warrant officer, the stipendiary, WOD, grabbed me and he gave me kitchen duty for one night, which was a fairly small punishment. But I thought, "If

11:30 he's going to ignore my salute I'm not going to salute him again." He was only a wing commander anyway. I was an AC2 [air craftsman], the lowest form of air force life.

So it sounds like that was – they were really just trying to indoctrinate you into some disciplinary – it was the military way?

Yes, I took that part of it pretty well Col, really, but I didn't like being ignored when I had, what I thought, done the right thing. However, it was only a

12:00 minor matter, and it wasn't very hard working in the kitchen for the night.

Do you recall other examples of punishment?

No, I can't remember because my army mates were too well disciplined to disobey anything, they knew what to do. I didn't mind Shepparton. I would have much rather have been at Somers with the air crew

12:30 rookies' course, but that wasn't to happen until later. Anyway, off we went from 1RD Shepparton, how did we get there? We were taken by bus to Cronulla, caught the train from Benalla to Lithgow, we were picked up by a tender at Lithgow and taken to this frightful place called Marangaroo, where we stayed for, October, only about

13:00 six or eight weeks, I suppose. We used to go down to Sydney on leave, we'd go to the Blue Mountains on leave, Katoomba. Kanga and I and Mick, and we had the time of our lives, we'd meet up with young ladies at the Y, and all that sort of business. But we were overjoyed when we were able to put the white strip on our caps and proclaim ourselves to be air crew.

At what stage did that happen?

That could only happen when you were

13:30 posted to an air crew training establishment, otherwise you just wore your P cap, without the white – they had a name for it but I can't think what it's called. Anyway, it was just a little distinguishing piece of white material, sat on your cap and proclaimed the fact that you were an air crew trainee.

So you mentioned you were guarding a tunnel which was full of mustard gas?

Mustard gas bombs, yes. Not generally known.

14:00 **So what were your duties? Purely being sentry there or …?**

Yes, sentry, one end of the tunnel, or the other, and you have the orderly officer or the orderly sergeant come round every now and then to make sure you're awake. I mean nothing ever happened there, and nobody would have known there were mustard gas bombs there, and I think they were probably relics from World War I, I'm not sure. But why they kept them, I have no idea. But that's what we were guarding. And

14:30 apparently a couple of the guards must have caught a small leak from one of them, because they were hospitalised. But it didn't affect me or my friends.

Was that a concern though of yours, the health risk that might …?

Yes, apparently it was, of course they didn't tell us that.

What sort of quantity did they have stored there?

Quantity? Number of bombs?

Yes.

Hard to tell, I would think there would have been some hundreds,

15:00 it was quite a lengthy tunnel, how long would the tunnel be? About 200 yards, maybe a bit longer. There would have been quite a stack of them. What they were going to do with them, how they were going to use them, I have no idea, hopefully they wouldn't have used them at all. Where would they use mustard gas bombs? Not in the jungle, they wouldn't be very effective there. Anyway, that's what we were guarding. And it was also an army armament

15:30 storage area, the army shared it with the RAAF. Lithgow, yes.

And was this your first time out of Victoria? Had you travelled across the border before?

Yes, yes. No, apart from holidays and things like that you mean? But first time out in the RAAF, you mean?

Well, ever, I mean yes, you had travelled …?

Oh yes, yes I had,

16:00 as a child I had been to Sydney a couple of times, and my uncle who gave me my first bike, and I, went on a couple of the coastal ships, the [HMAS] Katoomba, we got from North Wharf to Sydney, to Brisbane, and then back by boat to Sydney and got on the [HMAS] Kanimbla and back home to Melbourne, that was one of my trips as a child.

16:30 And my uncle had the time of his life, I didn't dare tell his wife, she wanted to know how the trip was, and I said, "Oh, very good, very good Aunty Ethel, thank you." "And how did John enjoy it?" "Oh, I think he enjoyed it." So that was all she got out of me.

Why, what did he actually get up to?

Well, he seemed to be very friendly with the violinist in the orchestra on the ship. Yes, so there you are. He was a very good

17:00 looking bloke, actually. Anyway, I didn't dare tell Ethel, his wife anything about that. And I remember when we in Sydney, when we arrived in Sydney we went to Bondi and swam in the inner pool on the harbour side, there was a pool there, in June of that particular year, yes. I can't remember how cold it was, but it must have been. No, he was a great bloke, he was very good to me as a child, he was the one that took me

17:30 to Richmond football matches and put me in the lifts at Myers for the morning, gave me my first bike.

And did you have a steady girlfriend at that time?

No, no.

You mentioned, was it Jess? You mentioned a Jess?

Oh, Jess McLeod, but she was seven years older than I, and I liked her very much, but no, didn't have a

18:00 girlfriend, no. I used to take girls out at school, the school dances and things, but I had no regular girlfriend, no. One of them came and saw me off actually, when I went to Townsville, come to think of it. Too busy learning to fly, to worry about girlfriends. We used to have girlfriends at Deniliquin and Mildura in our training times, but you know, only casual girlfriends. We were

18:30 always rushing around looking for female company.

And what was Sydney like during that period?

Well, it wasn't terribly long after the midget submarines had arrived, in fact Kanga had an uncle who live at – I think the place was called Clifton Gardens, do you know Clifton Gardens in Sydney? It's on the Harbour. And we went there, we went

19:00 there by ferry, and we came back by ferry and suddenly there was a great warning three star – three round warning of an impending air raid. But it wasn't that at all, they thought there were some more Japanese submarines coming in, it was pandemonium. But nothing happened, it was just a false alarm. Sydney, Sydney was bustling and just as delightful as it

19:30 always was and always has been; I love Sydney. We used to have great times on leave down there, I had an aunt who used to put me up, I had other relatives who had a nightclub at La Perouse, and I'd go and stay there on weekend leave. We just enjoyed life, every moment of it. I was wildly excited at the thought of going to Somers.

So how long,

20:00 **you were six, eight weeks at – I'm going to mispronounce it, Marong…?**

Marangaroo. Rookies' course started on the 22nd of September, '42 and I reckon it was about a four

week course. Now that would have taken us to the end of October, and we would have got there about the end of October, we would have left there about six or seven weeks later to go to Somers, so we weren't there very long.

But

20:30 **did the rookies' course involve much training to do with the specifics of flying and the planes themselves, or …?**

What, at …?

At Shepparton?

No, nothing at all, no, just ground staff recruit training. But nothing to do with flying at all. So we learnt nothing there about air crew.

21:00 But we didn't mind, we knew why we were there, just to get into the air force.

So what was the next step up to your period guarding the mustard gas bombs, what was next for you?

That was when we were posted to Somers then, the end of '42, to begin our air crew training.

21:30 They taught you - what were the subjects we learnt at Somers? I can't really remember them. Morse code, for a start. What else? Aircraft recognition. I know we had a lot of subjects and we used to have a lot of lectures, and don't go to sleep in the lectures or you'll finish up in the jail,

22:00 or you'll be thrown off course, and that happened to a couple of blokes, they were caught sleeping during lecture time, and they were thrown out of air crew. So I was very careful, at lunchtime I would bolt my lunch down, and I'd go and lie on my palliasse. We didn't have beds, we just had straw filled palliasses, and I'd do my best to have five minutes sleep, even five minutes, and I never looked like going to sleep in the afternoon, but that was when most blokes succumbed out to lunch, they'd be sitting there and all of a sudden they're

22:30 asleep. But the subjects I can't really remember, they were all to do with air crew training, but I can't remember precisely what they were. Morse code I do remember.

How many words a minute would you manage?

Oh golly, we had to have – I think we had to pass a certain standard, would it have been 20? I don't know.

That sounds like a lot, actually.

Yes, it does, doesn't it? Maybe 10.

23:00 I remember we were put in this theatre and shown frightful photographs by the medical staffers, as to what happens if you got VD [venereal disease], they were very graphic pictures, everyone was laughing their heads off of course; 'how could it happen to me?' A funny – I don't know why I remember that; I think I remember that because Kanga was laughing his head off because he'd seen it before.

So Kanga and the other chaps, the other mates you had, they were

23:30 **all with you at Somers?**

Yes, they went from Marangaroo with me to Somers, yes. And after Somers Kanga came to Benalla with me, the Number 11 Elementary Flying Training School. He was the only one, Ernie didn't come, I don't know, I don't think Ernie was categorised as a pilot, I think he finished up as a gunner. And Mick,

24:00 did Mick come too? I think Mick came to Benalla too, I think Mick and Kanga were the only two who were selected as part of Somers, Ernie wasn't.

And can you tell us about some of the instructors that you encountered there?

At Somers?

Yes, any of the characters …?

Well I can remember the –

24:30 it was either the warrant officer, the stipendiary, or some other sergeant who used to drill us, and boy, did they used to drill us on the parade ground at Somers. And we played cricket, because it was summer time, we used to swim a lot, we'd do gymnastics, the training was pretty vigorous really, but we were healthy young men. Before I

25:00 went into the air force, I was playing squash twice a week in the city after work, I was as fit as a fiddle, I was only thin, weighed about – I weighed about nine stone three, and I was about five feet eight and a half, I grew two and a half inches in the air force, and I put on a bit of weight, a stone or so, but I was as fit as a fiddle, I was thin but I was strong. So nothing physical disturbed me at Somers at all. But it was

rigorous

25:30 training. The subjects again, as I said before I can't remember them really, the actual subjects.

And was it really the case that fellows were scrubbed for sleeping during lectures?

In the lectures, yes. One got thrown off our course, he lived up the road from me in Murrumbeena Road, can't think of his name now, he got heaved out. It was pretty tough punishment,

26:00 I reckon, having got that far. If you go to sleep - you can't seem to help going to sleep. However, they were merciless. I suppose they gave them some sort of ground staff job from that point on. I think it only happened a couple of times.

So you were living in the barracks there at Somers?

Yes.

And were you getting much leave at all at that time?

We got a fair amount of leave, yes.

26:30 I don't know about every weekend, but probably every second weekend we were able to go home and courtesy of my Father and my uncles I was able to get hold of a car and drive around on leave. Yes, from memory the leave arrangements were pretty generous. Catch the train to – now where would we catch the train to? Past Frankston to – not Balnarring,

27:00 down that way somewhere, if the trains were operating on the Peninsula, can't think where they started from, Stony Point maybe? So we had train transport and other times, and Uncle would lend me a car, or the old man would.

And how did it feel to have to be wearing that uniform? To know that you were part of the air force, or soon to be?

27:30 Good question. How did we feel? I think we felt very proud of ourselves, the fact that we were able to make air crew training. Yes, we had a pride in the uniform. I don't know whether we looked that crash hot, but certainly we liked the uniform, yes.

28:00 **So you told us about that interview you had with – being instructed about …**

The pedigree selection board.

Yes. So after that what was the upshot?

You continued on at Somers I think for another four weeks if you were categorised as a pilot or a navigator. The gunners went to an air gunnery school, they didn't spend the extra four weeks at Somers, I think that's the way it went. And what we

28:30 learnt in the extra four weeks I have no idea, but I'm sure our course was four weeks longer than the air gunners.

So long, was it, after the interview that you were told, yes, you'd been categorised as a pilot?

It couldn't have been long, I think they posted the names up on a noticeboard, and you went and had a look and hoped like heck you were amongst the pilot nominees and yes, you were. I think it was only a matter of days.

29:00 **And what was that like for you?**

Oh, a good feeling, yes, a good feeling. And then you had to go to the equipment store and get your flying suits and our helmet, and the new helmets had what they used to call pixie hats, because they had a point on the top of them which gradually receded as you kept them and flew in them for a while. Yes, and other air crew items of equipment, I can't remember them all, but I

29:30 certainly remember a heavy inner flying suit and an outer flying suit and a helmet, and I think also a pair of flying boots, I think we got as well. And we had to cart all this equipment to Benalla with us. That was a good day, when we picked that up.

And was there some kind of passing out ceremony there?

Yes, yes there was. I can't remember the details of it, but yes, there was. There was a

30:00 kind of graduation parade, yes, they usually had that.

Do you recall if your parents came down for that?

No, no. Well the old man was away in the army anyway. No.

Had he given you any sort of parting words of advice before you took off?

Who?

Your father.

30:30 That's a very intriguing question, and I wonder what made you raise it, but he felt that all the sex education I needed, I would naturally get at school from my school mates, so he didn't feel the need to say anything at all. But as we were driving down Dandenong Road near the corner of Orrong Road, I was taking him to work, "Listen son," he said, "When you go into the air force, as you're going

31:00 to next week, I want you to be careful of one thing. Don't have anything to do with prostitutes." And that was the old man's total and utter sex education for me. Yes, "Don't have anything to do with prostitutes." And I thought, "I wonder what makes you say that, Dad?" But I didn't ask him, I just wondered. Yes, that's the only remark he made.

Well, you said he'd seen a bit of action in his

31:30 **time.**

Yes, I think so, and that was the impression I had, but I didn't dare ask him. I think it might have had something to do with France, but I couldn't be sure, in fact that's my bet.

So you were getting that message from various sources, there was the film they played for you at Somers, and your father's advice? That seems to be the sum total of sex education for you.

Oh yes, yes, my mates, my school

32:00 mates and things, yes. It was never mentioned at home, not ever. I don't know whether it's a good thing or a bad thing. However, that's the way it happened. I think in those days people were very shy. Anyway, I took notice of what he said.

Good. Right, so after Somers you mentioned

32:30 **Benalla, yes?**

Benalla, yes. Number 11 Elementary Flying Training School, a great station, they had some great instructors there. Ian Johnson, the test captain and secretary of the MCC [Melbourne Cricket Club], he was an instructor there. A chap called Mac Holton who was a brilliant Collingwood footballer and cricketer, and a brilliant instructor. A fellow called Johnny Mason who was my instructor,

33:00 he was an old Caulfield Grammarian a couple of years – he died about a fortnight ago, and I felt very sad. He was my permanent instructor, although my log book will tell you I did my solo with somebody else. But they were great blokes, and this chap who offered me the job at TAA in Swanston Street, Doug McDonald, he was an instructor there as well, he was known as Cloudy Joe McDonald. So they had a great team, but they gave me a

33:30 duff instructor, he was from a famous Melbourne family, and I'm not going to mention the name because it would be derogatory, he was an awful instructor for two reasons. He was a bit of a shouter, which you can put up with, but his other fault was, he wouldn't let me fly the aircraft, he wouldn't let me take control of the aircraft, he was too damned scared. And

34:00 fortunately they took me away from him and gave me another instructor, and I'd spent about – if I look in my log book I guess I would have spent about eight hours with this original, having learnt absolutely nothing about flying a Tiger Moth. The new instructor, after two hours I think it was I went solo, because he allowed me to fly, so it took me about 10 1/2 hours.

34:30 **So you're tracking down the hours…**

When I went solo, yes. I started my first flight in a DH82 which was a Tiger Moth, on the 7th of April, 1943. For that week I did four hours 10, no solo. Next week, April the 12th, the 16th, four hours 30, no solo. Total, eight hours 40.

35:00 Three more flights with that character, still no solo. So that's 30, 65, another two hours, so that's 10 hours, about 10 hours 50. On April the 23rd, Pilot Officer Acton,

35:30 same day, Pilot Officer Acton. The 25th of April, Pilot Officer Acton, April the 25th, self. So it took me 20, 40, about 12 hours to go solo. But after how long, 120, 140, two hours 35 with Pilot Officer Acton, I went solo. So that shows you what the first instructor was like. Famous

36:00 name, I won't mention it, but a famous Melbourne name.

Well you don't have to name names, but did he have a nickname at all? Was there – surely he must have had a …?

No, not that I know of, no. And the same bloke was posted to 78 Squadron up in the islands – oh no, first of all he was posted to Mildura, and he put up a bit of a black there, he dropped all his practice bombs onto somebody's poultry farm, which didn't endear him to the commanding officer. He got to 78

36:30 squadron and they sent him home LMF. Do you know what LMF is? Lack of moral fibre. He couldn't

handle it, the operation side of flying. So I was a bit stiff to have him in the first instance. However, we got over that, thanks to Pilot Officer Acton.

Were the other recruits or trainees experiencing the same thing with him?

I think I was his only pupil, in

37:00 fact I'm sure I was. And they took away from Stuffy, yes.

So you weren't able to air your thoughts, opinions, to him, about the way he was conducting this?

No, no. But I wondered why they gave me another instructor, I think they must have realised that, you know, I needed a better instructor.

So when you had Pilot Officer Acton…

Pilot

37:30 Officer Acton.

…who had a little more faith and knew what he was doing…

Yes.

So tell us a bit more about him, what sort of a man was he?

I can't remember him very well, except a pleasant man who let me fly the aircraft. As I say, after two hours 15 with him, I went solo. This other character – and then they gave me my permanent instructor, Sergeant Mason, on April the 26th, and I stayed with Johnny until I left

38:00 Benalla. Yes, he got me right through the course, John Mason.

And what about him? Can you tell us a little bit about his style?

He was a gentle instructor, he – if you made a mistake he corrected you humanely, he wasn't a screamer, just a gentle, helpful man who praised you when you did something

38:30 well, but was gentle with you if you did something badly. So we got along fine. Being an old boy of my school probably helped a lot, but we finished up great mates at the end of when – the 23rd of May was my last flight there, where I had with the squadron leader Griffiths, who was the chief flying instructor. Funny thing, when I got my records from Canberra of my service career, there's nothing in it to indicate Benalla, not one bit

39:00 about Benalla. It's mentioned in my history, but there's no report or – however. Squadron Leader Griffiths, ultimately he was to interview me for my commissions. And I remember to this day, you were supposed to fly, you were supposed to land your aircraft as near to the flight hut as possible, but to the left of all other aircraft

39:30 lined up. So when I did my test with Squadron Leader Griffiths, the final test, I could see these aircraft all lined up on the right, so I landed on the left, well he was very cross with that, because he had to walk, he had to get out of the aircraft and walk, and he was a decent bloke and he interviewed me for my commission in 1945. No, Benalla was a great station, I enjoyed that, except for the initial debacle.

40:00 **What can you tell us about – you were flying Tiger Moths, what were they like to fly?**

Oh, a beautiful aircraft, absolutely beautiful. They were so delicate, and if you tried to tack in a very strong wind and turn across wind, you had to really know what you were doing, but in the air they were just a beautifully coordinated aircraft, not much power of course, but

40:30 just a delight to fly. And if you could fly a Tiger Moth well, there was no earthly reason why you couldn't fly any other aircraft, no matter how sophisticated, as well, really. They really were a basic trainer, which if you could fly properly, you could fly anything. I loved them.

Can you still recall that first experience of going solo?

I do, it was at a place called Goorambat

41:00 Airfield, which was a satellite airfield at Benalla, about probably six to eight miles west of Benalla: Goorambat it's called, and Pilot Officer Acton said, "Okay, I'm getting out, I'm leaving you to it." And he said, "I want you to get up to 3000 feet and do a loop." And I said, "Righto sir, I'll do that." So off I went and the feeling of exhilaration, it's still with me actually, I've never forgotten the sensation I had of taking that aircraft off the

41:30 ground by myself, and up I went and doing this and that, and at 3000 feet I thought, "It doesn't seem quite high enough for a loop to me, I'll go a little bit higher." It might have been 2000, anyway I thought, "I'll go a little bit higher." Then I thought, "No, this is not quite high enough either." So I went a bit higher. Anyway, I did my loop and I came back and I must have put in a pretty reasonable landing, he said, "That seemed pretty good to me," he said, "Except I thought you were going to take the

windsock with you when you took off." I said, "No,

42:00 I did see it sir, actually." But I've never forgotten that sensation, the freedom and just the exhilaration.

Tape 4

00:31 **Let's start that story again, he that shall remain nameless and Doug, the ...?**

Doug McDonald, yes, Cloudy Joe.

Tell us that story.

They must have had an altercation about something, this ex-instructor of mine. And they arranged to meet in the boxing ring. So I went along to watch this, because it was well advertised round the station, and I'm barracking

01:00 like heck for Doug, "Knock him out Doug, for God's sake." But he didn't. I don't think they did much damage to each other. But there must have been something really upsetting for that to occur, because Doug was a placid, delightful bloke, a terrific cricketer, I remember seeing him at Caulfield Grammar take a catch in slips like I've never seen, he was that sort of guy. So he must have had some reason to challenge comrade X in

01:30 the boxing ring. As I say, not much damage was done in either direction. So he didn't get me off to a good flying start. However, the others made up for it.

And you mentioned some other names, Ian Johnson the cricketer.

Yes, he was one of the instructors, he wasn't in my flight, but he was there, with this Mac Holton. I went to a lunch last Thursday,

02:00 and Mac Holton's cousin was sitting next to me, an ex-vice marshal, called Les Holton, but he wasn't a pilot Les, he was equipments officer, a delightful bloke, got to a good rank for an equipments officer. But he and Mac were similar temperaments.

So it sounds like – you talked about doing the loop in the Tiger Moth and making sure you were just a bit higher ...

I had enough height, yes.

Erring on the

02:30 **side of caution, yes, understandably. Were there many accidents at that time?**

We didn't have a prang on my course, but people have been known to kill themselves in Tiger Moths of course, but no, we didn't have an accident of any sort. Very lucky really, no, not very lucky, good instructing I suppose was the reason behind that. So our course was unscathed. The same at Deniliquin when I did my Wirraway course, we didn't lose

03:00 anybody. Different story in OTU [Operational Training Unit], but that's another story. No, it was very safe and secure.

And what about things like navigation, were you sort of learning the ropes there?

Yes, we had to do cross-countries, we'd do them with an instructor, and then we would – I'd better put my glasses on I think, I'll see better.

03:30 **We're on.**

We're on?

Right. So cross-country- -

Here we are.

- -exercises, yes.

May 11th, cross country, Benalla, Murchison East, ever heard of it? Shepparton, Benalla. That was with Johnny Mason, my instructor. Another cross country with Johnny, Benalla,

04:00 C-o-r, is that Corryong or something like that? T-u-n-g, where on earth's that? Tungamah? I forget now. Benalla. So they were both dual cross countries. Here we are, Benalla, Nathalia, Echuca, Benalla, I remember that.

04:30 Okay. Yes, I remember that because when we landed at Benalla, which we had to do, all the local ladies had arrived with morning tea, and we felt so proud of ourselves arriving at the destination, because we

reckoned we probably had a great chance of getting lost somewhere, but I can remember that vividly, landing at the Echuca airfield, and these ladies with their morning tea of scones and tea and what have you, and they off we'd choof again, back to.

05:00 Benalla. That was my first solo cross-country. Enjoyed it.

And how were you navigating on those longer trips?

We had aeronautical maps and we had to work out our course first of all, taking into account the wind and what direction we wanted to fly in, and what effect the wind would have on our track, we'd have to set a course to achieve a certain track according to the wind direction.

05:30 We had to work all that out ourselves. And I think we were issued with a thing called a Dalton computer, but I can't quite remember now. But we worked it out okay, and of course it was all visual and country towns that were familiar, and if in doubt, follow a railway line. But no, an enjoyable exercise really, and satisfying when you got to your destination.

Did many get lost?

If they

06:00 did they didn't admit it. We used to do some naughty things, but that's another story again.

Well can we hear that other story?

Well this was on Wirraway training at Deniliquin. After we left Benalla we went to Deniliquin, and we used to do night cross-countries, but what we used to do instead was to take off, get out of sight of Deniliquin aerodrome, turn our navigation lights off, and do aerobatics for

06:30 about an hour, night aerobatics, and come back and land. And nobody ever knew we hadn't quite made our destination. "How'd you get on Tims?" "Oh, well thanks sir, no problems." Oh dear. Yes. Do you want to hear about Deniliquin, service flying?

Well what was the next …?

That's the next stage?

Was it? Okay, well maybe let's finish up with Benalla. So you were there how long, with EFTS [Elementary Flying Training School]? Just a rough idea?

07:00 Yes. I can tell you exactly.

Okay, we can be exact, that's fine.

April – we did actually – a month – what they call tarmac touring, we did a month before we went onto flying, and we used to have to push the aircraft out of the hangars, and we used to have to spin the props and start them, and if there was a strong cross wind and turning across wind was difficult, we used to have to walk

07:30 out with the aircraft and push it around and at the end of flying for the day we'd put all the aircraft back in the hangars and you know, just general jobs around the airfield, we did that for four weeks. But actually I was ill, I had to go to the hospital in Benalla, and I had near enough to pneumonia, and so I was there for a week or so and then they sent me on sick leave back to Melbourne. And I'm standing in the train, because there's no seat and I'm feeling like

08:00 death, and this pleasant woman said, "You don't look very well." And I said, "No, I'm not very well, I've just been in hospital." She said, "Please take my seat." I said, "No, I can't do that." She said, "I insist that you do." So she gave up her seat for me on the train, which I thought was, you know, really something. So I missed a fair bit of that tarmac touring month, which is a pity, because I would have enjoyed that.

What was the purpose of the tarmac touring, what does that mean?

Because we had a month to fill

08:30 in before we could start our flying, and there was some – there must have been some muck up earlier in the proceedings, so 35 course, when it got to Benalla, instead of going straight on to flying, had to wait a month, and that happened to other courses, at other flying establishments too. I don't know what was the initial cause, but something went wrong. But we would have been there all of March, '43, we started flying in the beginning of April

09:00 '43, and the last flight was the 23rd of May, so we were there flying in March, April and May. In fact we were there February, March, April, May, I guess. Yes.

And what sort of a report did you finish up with?

"Has attained required standard" -

09:30 that's about par. "Sixty hours, 43 minutes of dual and pilot" – yes, I enjoyed every minute of all that.

What was life like on the ground there at Benalla, what were the quarters like and general conditions?

Comfortable enough, we were so thrilled to be flying, we wouldn't

10:00 have cared if we had to sleep on bare boards really. But no, pretty good, the meals I can't remember very much about, but they couldn't have been too bad, we all remained alive. But we had a very good course orderly, he was an ex-army lieutenant who'd transferred to the air force, now what was his name? He was a member of a wine family, he was our course orderly. He used to wake us up in the morning,

10:30 with rude shouts of this and that - Tom. Tom? A well known wine name. No, enjoyed Benalla immensely.

And he'd wake you up with what?

"Rise and shine, the Hallett Parker line, hands off cocks, put on socks." I think was his catch-cry. Tom, Tom,

11:00 not Lindeman, we had a Lindeman at Somers; Tom Seabrook. Tom Seabrook, I'll be darned, I don't know how I remembered his name. He was a great character, he went from lieutenant in the army to the lowest form of life in the air force, yes. Tom Seabrook.

And were you a drinking man at all?

No, no, my army mates wouldn't let me, no, they just wouldn't let me drink. "No Norm, you're not going to drink."

11:30 I became one eventually, but in my instructing days later on. But I'll tell you about that later, how I became a drinker.

So why did your ex-army mates make such an effort to keep you off the grog?

Well they thought I was too young to drink, at 18. See they were 20, a couple of years older than I am. Well grown up, but not Norm, no. We'd go and play billiards or snooker, whatever, we'd go to the YMCA and then

12:00 they'd whizz off to the pub, but they wouldn't take me. And they weren't heavy drinkers, I don't know what they drank, I never found out because I never went in there with them.

So when would it have been deemed okay for you to drink, in their eyes?

Never I don't think. I think I adopted their creed that drinking and flying don't belong to each other, well I soon learnt that, and I'll tell you why later.

12:30 **Was there anything more about that period, the Benalla, the Tiger Moths, that's worth recounting?**

No, I can't remember anything outstanding, just the joy of flying the Tiger Moths, and coordinating the ailerons and the elevators and the rudders, the horizontal plane and the vertical plane, it's just a sheer delight, and you

13:00 could feel it you know, if you did a smooth turn with the correct amount of aileron, correct amount of rudder and balance, just a beautiful smooth feeling. And once you got that, once you got that coordination, away you went. It took a while to develop it, and too much aileron and the aircraft slips in. Not enough aileron and the aircraft skids out,

13:30 because there's too much rudder. But the correct amount of aileron and the correct amount of rudder, and away you go. The elevators just keep you going up and down, they don't have a lot to do with coordination, but of course you don't – if you're doing a steep turn you don't want to lose height, so the rudder stops you from – the proper use of the rudder stops you from losing height. But the ailerons and the thing as I say, too much aileron and the aircraft slips in, and not enough and the aircraft skids out. You can feel it

14:00 on – they say flying by the seat of your pants, it's exactly that, if your aircraft's skidding out or slipping in, you can feel it, on your bottom. So once you get rid of that feeling you know you're properly coordinated. And then it stays with you forever then.

I think I've heard someone claim that with the Tiger Moths you could actually – if you had a good strong head wind - you could fly them backwards.

I've seen them go backwards, I saw a couple of instructors get up in Benalla one morning when the wind was

14:30 blowing like the clappers, and we couldn't fly, flying was scrubbed for we trainees. Up they went, and they're hovering above the air field, going backwards. Yes, I saw it. It might have been Cloudy Joe, when I come to think of it. Anyway, it was one of the instructors. Throttled right off, into the wind, maintaining height and going backwards. They were a beautiful aeroplane. You couldn't fly inverted, because they had an upside down engine. If you flew inverted the thing

15:00 chopped. You had to be very quick in doing a roll, a complete roll, because once you got on your back you had to get back onto your – right way up or else the engine would chop on you. And it would chop momentarily anyway, no matter what you did. Gypsy Major it was called.

It sounds like you enjoyed the aerobatic side of things?

Yes, I did. Yes, I loved doing slow rolls, and rolls off the top and

15:30 loops and yes, I enjoyed it all. Stall turns, Immelman turns.

Sorry, can you describe those turns for us?

Immelman?

Yes.

You stood the aircraft on its tail and just let it fall, at nil flying speed, let it fall, down like that, and pick up speed. Saul turn that's called.

16:00 The Immelman, what was the Immelman now? Something similar but I can't remember exactly. But that was the stall turn, just get up there and just let it fall, don't let it spin, whatever you do. Although if you let a Tiger Moth spin they came out of it so readily, just forward stick and opposite rudder and you're out of the spin in a fraction. That didn't always happen in all aircraft, I can tell you.

Was that low level flying?

16:30 Yes, yes, that's another story too, Col. But I loved it, I loved low flying. We had a low flying area where you were authorised to do it, but we didn't always do it at the correct height actually, sometimes we were a bit higher than the authorised height, if we were doing it solo.

Is that a Tiger Moth story or later on? The one that just came to mind?

Well, I can't remember a lot of low flying in the Tiger,

17:00 no I can't, but later on yes, in Wirraways yes, thereby hangs a tale.

All right, let's get onto that. I mean it sounds like it would have been difficult saying goodbye to the Tigers, you enjoyed them so much?

Pardon?

Actually leaving the Tigers behind and moving on to the – it must have been …?

Yes, although – no, not really Col, love them as I did, we knew we were going to fly what seemed to us to be ultra-sophisticated Wirraways, the old CAC [Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation]

17:30 Wirraway, you know, with retractable undercarriage and all sorts of instruments and things like that, so we were looking forward to that, and we knew that we had to graduate from the Moths. But we left them sadly, because we enjoyed them so much. I got to fly them later on in 21 Squadron post-war actually, we had a couple of Tiger Moths. Anyway, off to Deniliquin, Number 7 Service Flying Training School. And we get there and –

18:00 Waters, Group Captain Jerry Waters was the commanding officer of 7 SFTS. So he lines us all up in a lecture hut, welcomes us to the unit, tells us we're in for an enjoyable time flying Wirraways, he hopes at least we enjoy it, and he hopes we'll graduate at the end of our four month course. And he said, "I just want to tell you one thing. Any of you

18:30 who are caught doing unauthorised low flying, will spend a month in Geelong jail. So, I know you're going to do it; my advice to you is don't get caught, because that's what'll happen." I didn't get caught, but one of my friends, Alec Jenkins got caught, he came back to one of the satellites we were operating from that morning, and his main planes were all buckled and bent, he'd gone through powerlines. Sure enough,

19:00 off goes Jenks to Geelong jail. So he leaves 35 course, does his month in Geelong jail, he comes back, he completes his course, his flying training on number 36 course, and lo and behold he got one of the few commissions that were given on course. And I could never figure out what Jerry Waters was about. But he meant what he said, "Don't get caught. I know you'll low fly." We all did, but poor old Jenks just got a little bit too low.

19:30 **Seems a bit steep doesn't it, a month …?**

A month in Geelong jail, yes, yes. You see, he used to tell me pathetic stories about a couple of blokes who were keen smokers, and they used to – you know how fluff sometimes accumulates in a pocket of your jacket or suit? They used to get newspaper and they used to get the fluff out of their clothing and roll the fluff into a piece of newspaper and smoke it, would you believe? And Jenks said it was pretty tough, the food was pretty

20:00 awful. They weren't there to have a good time, they were being sentenced to a month's jail. Anyway, he

went on, he graduated in 36 course, of course after me went to the UK, flew Lancasters, got shot down, he was the only survivor of his crew. And I saw him again after the war a couple of times, I don't know where he is now. But poor old Jenks, he was the only one that actually got caught, everyone did it. Anyway, it was a great thrill to graduate on

20:30 to Wirraways, it didn't take all that long to go solo, I don't think. I had a character called Laurie Tarle who was my instructor at initial training at Deniliquin. A good bloke, but he used to [do] the 'nana occasionally. "I don't know," he used to say, "You blessed

21:00 kids in the air training corps." "Sir, I was never in the air training corps." "Well don't behave like as though you were." But he was a good instructor. Yes, it took me five hours 45 minutes to go solo in a Wirraway, but that was because of the good training we had on Tiger Moths.

21:30 Flying Officer Bovis, June the 13th, 1943, solo test, 15 minutes, 13th self, 20 minutes, that was my first solo in a Wirraway, so it didn't take long at all.

So can you tell us about what it was like to fly a Wirraway? What sort of a plane were they?

Well you know, terribly high powered after the Tiger Moth of course, but rudimentary and they were using them as fighter aircraft in Rabaul for heaven's sake, against Zeros,

22:00 that's all we had. But no, I liked them. You had to keep your wits about you because if you held off too high in landing, they'd drop a wing, as quick as look at you, you know, you'd be sitting there and if you – it didn't happen to me, but I have seen it done. So they were fairly delicate from that point of view, from the stall point of view, you had to be careful not to stall them too high, in fact you had to have your wheels very close to the ground at stalling speed. But

22:30 apart from that they weren't hard. I got into trouble once – we used to do silly things, we had a competition on our course as to who could do a loop at the lowest speed in a Wirraway, which is not a very smart thing to do, really. So we got down to about 130 miles an hour, I think, and I thought, "I can do one at 120." So I start the loop, I go on my back and it spins out of the –

23:00 out of the sky. I recovered from the spin, and my nose was going down, so I pulled the control column back, the nose comes up slightly, then it stalls again. So I thought, I'll give it a bit more, so I kept going downhill until I got to about 150, 160 miles an hour, and I'm running out of air a bit. So I pulled the control column back and, phew. I discovered later it's called a

23:30 progressive stall. And I thought, "It'd better work on the third attempt, or goodnight nurse." But it did, it came out on the third attempt. I just wasn't allowing it to build up enough speed. But it flicked and spun, at miles above the speed at which it should, and I couldn't see this. Anyway, I asked one of the instructors and he said, "You got into a progressive high speed stall, Norm," he said, "Wirraways can do that." But that was the only alarming

24:00 situation I found myself in. I liked them really, day and night.

Your mate Jenkins who hit the powerlines, did you have any other close shaves yourself?

No, I don't think so. I got lost in the cross-country. Oh boy, yes. I don't know whether I've got it recorded, being lost, but we were to do a solo cross-country,

24:30 and we had an aeronautical map, but the destinations only were shown, and the tracks between the destinations were blocked off. I think the first – I wonder if this'll tell me? Yes, it will.

25:00 It was supposed to be a cross-country from Deniliquin to Benalla to Culcairn to Lake Urana to Deniliquin, and the last leg, Lake Urana to Deniliquin had to be done, well virtually at surface level I suppose, very low, it was the low level leg of the cross-country. So fine, I got to Benalla, no trouble, and at that time, when was it, August the 12th, all the

25:30 alps were snowed, and the sight of the Victorian alps, where there are snow-caps, I've never forgotten it, because we were flying at – what was I flying at? Probably 6000 to 8000 feet. Anyway, from Benalla to Culcairn, and then from Culcairn to Urana and the low level leg to Deniliquin. That's when I got lost, I had no idea where I was, not the

26:00 faintest. And the map couldn't help me because it was all blocked over. So after the allotted time I thought, "I should be getting near Deniliquin now or I'm going to run out of fuel." So I thought, "I'd better go and have a look." So I got up to about 3000 feet, nothing, no airfields, nothing. I thought, "Which way do I turn? I'll turn south." So I turned south, about five minutes later I spot an airfield, and I think, "Well, I'm going to have to land there anyway, because otherwise I'll run out of fuel."

26:30 As I got close I thought, "That's funny, that's Deniliquin." So I landed the aircraft, taxied back to the flight office, got out, my instructor came out to see me, he said, "You're a bit late Tims." I said, "Am I sir?" He said, "How did you get on?" "Oh," I said, "Piece of cake, no trouble at all." And I'd got hopelessly lost. So somebody was looking after me. "Yes," I thought, "There's an airfield, it'll have to do, I'll be scrubbed, because I've landed at the wrong

27:00 airfield, but that'll have to do." And it was Deniliquin.

It doesn't just show that your instincts were spot on, perhaps?

Yes, I thought, "Which way will I turn? I'll turn south." But it's no use being at low level, because I couldn't see anything, so I had to climb up. I don't know whether the instructor suspected anything, but anyway he didn't say anything. Otherwise, no, it was pretty plain sailing.

And you were doing night flying – well you told us about your

27:30 **covert aerobatics at night, I assume you hadn't done any night flying with the Tiger Moths?**

Oh yes, yes, we did.

You had?

Oh yes, we did. Not a lot, but we did …

That must have been – I mean your first solo night flight must have also been something of an experience?

It probably was, wait till I have a look at that.

Sure.

Day, night, day, night, day, night,

28:00 here we are, Sergeant Mason, night flying on the 9th of May, an hour, Sergeant Mason on the 12th, one hour, Sergeant Mason on the 16th, 25 minutes, the 16th of May, self, solo, 35 minutes. So I think that's about …

Would it all be instrument flying

28:30 **at night?**

No, no, visual, all visual. The Tiger Moth didn't really have enough instruments for night flying, so it had to be a good night and visual. So that's the only night trip I did solo, yes.

And then on the Wirraways the instruments would have come more into play, I take it?

Oh yes. The 16th of August, 55 minutes, oh no,

29:00 that's dual. Sergeant Mossop, who on earth was Sergeant Mossop?

So how long were you at Deniliquin all up?

Four months, I think it was. It'll tell you in there, but I think it's four months.

Right, so talking about the instrument flying, was that sort of

29:30 **more a thing with the Wirraways?**

Yes, it had a vertical climb indicator of course, and a compass and batten ball, it didn't have much else.

Now were you doing any sort of gunnery training or …?

Yes.

Yes? It's in there somewhere?

Yes.

What can you recall of that? What …?

Air to ground gunnery? I can't recall much of it at all in the

30:00 Wirraways. No, I think we did it only at Mildura, I don't think we did any armoured exercises at Deniliquin that I can remember, no. The aircraft wouldn't have been fitted with armament anyway.

And accidents? Were there many …?

On our course? No.

No?

No, except a slight miscue by probably one of our most talented

30:30 trainees, a fellow called Murphett. I think he came from Tasmania, and he was a natural pilot, and guess what he did one day? He landed with his undercarriage up. We couldn't believe it, because the Wirraway was fitted with a warning horn, and when you pulled the throttle off, the warning – if your undercarriage wasn't lowered, it let out a heck of a noise, this horn, warning horn. He must have been sitting there doing his final approach, and listening to

31:00 the warning horn as the aircraft touched down, belly landed. And yet he was the natural gifted pilot. And that's the only – apart from Jenks going through the powerlines, I think they were the only two incidents, that I can recall. But Murphett, I couldn't – he wouldn't shower, so one day we decided we'd shower him, and we whipped him out of bed and raced him into the ablution hut and put him under the shower, poor Murphett. We said, "Now you keep on having

31:30 showers." I can't think of his first name now.

Did he take heed?

He did. He didn't want it to happen again. Murphett, yes, that was his claim to fame, landing in the midst of a deafening horn. But I've got a great mate who – I saw his Tiger Moth instructor down at Mornington a few months ago, they were in a restaurant having lunch, and he – Alec Stephens is his name, and he came up to talk to Margot and

32:00 me, and he said, "I'll tell you something about your old mate Norm." I said, "Yeah?" He said, "He and I were flying and he was doing the landing in a Wirraway. He's on final approach, he's getting lower and lower, and pulls the throttle off, the horn starts screaming." And he said, "Nothing happened." So Alec said,

32:30 "In the end I pushed the throttle forward and we went round again. But," he said, "he would have landed, despite the horn and despite the fact that I was in the rear cockpit, he would have landed without undercarriage." So it can happen to anyone.

When you say he was a natural pilot …

This Murphett?

Yes. What do you mean? How do you define one?

Well, he seemed to do well at all aspects at Deniliquin, he was a very quick solo in a Wirraway, he just seemed to have a natural aptitude for it, and yet he

33:00 fell for the old pea and thimble trick. You couldn't credit that anyone listening to that noise, could not understand what it meant. A moment of mental aberration.

And I mean how readily did you take to flying? What was your aptitude? Would you consider yourself a natural?

No, it took me quite a while. Once I got the coordination right,

33:30 then yes, I guess I was a natural then, but not until then. And the number of hours before you got the coordination varied from person to person. No, I wouldn't say I was a natural. I don't know, I've never thought of myself as being a natural pilot, it's just I'm anxious to learn to fly, that's all.

So what happened at the end of – you said three or four months at

34:00 **Deniliquin, thereabouts?**

Yes, the graduation parade, wings pinned on by the commanding officer, Jerry Waters, the following day given the rank. I was a sergeant pilot the following day, and then posted to your next port of call. I enjoyed Deni [Deniliquin] except for the food, which was appalling, but however, it's the best we could expect. I had to be interviewed by the OC [officer commanding]

34:30 advanced training school at Deni to see where I was going to go. I think his name was Parry, Squadron Leader Parry. He said, "What do you want to do, Tims?" I said, "I want to do an OTU course on fighters, sir." "Oh, do you?" he says. He said, "You want to go to Mildura?" I said, "Yes, I do, I want to either fly Spitfires or Kittyhawks."

35:00 "Well," he said, "You're going to Tims, because I'm going to post you there." So he posted me to Number 2 OTU, I have him to thank for that. A lot of blokes went off to staff jobs, flying learner gunners around, but anyway he was kind enough to send me to 2 OTU Mildura.

And had that been the ambition from the start, to be a fighter pilot?

Yes, yes. I didn't want a crew, I just wanted to be

35:30 responsible for myself alone, I didn't really want to be in a heavy aircraft with a number of crew and be responsible for their lives. If I was going to get clobbered, okay, but I didn't want anyone else to go with me, and I just wanted to fly single engine nippy aircraft. So I was lucky, I got my wish. Most of the blokes who were posted overseas after Deni went on – very few of them went on to fighters,

36:00 they mostly went on to heavy aircraft, the Lincolns and – not Lincolns: Lancasters and other aircraft. But not what I wanted to do.

Do you think it took certain personality types to do, you know, to be a fighter pilot or to be a bomber?

Yes I do. Yes, I think the heavy aircraft pilots were much more

36:30 mature, a much quieter type, probably much more reliable even, but a different category. A lot of blokes who trained on singles would have done well on singles, but they didn't get the chance, and they were sent to fly heavy aircraft in the UK, with a dreadful casualty rate.

37:00 **So your next port of call was Mildura?**

Number 2 Operational Training Unit, yes, where you did a course – first of all you did a – I think it's about a four week course on Wirraways, to learn various aspects of operational flying. I had a very good instructor called Bob Crawford, and then after the month on Wirraways you were posted to the

37:30 Kittyhawk flight or the Spitfire flight. I didn't care which, but I went to fly Kittyhawks at Mildura. My flight commander was a wonderful man called Lou Spence, and Lou was very good to me, we had a squadron do on, he would often let me fly number two to him, which I found an honour indeed. But I loved the Kittyhawks, and

38:00 we lost two on our course. Billy King was one, I can't think of the other fellow's name now. We lost two, which was about par for the course. But they were a good aircraft, I did my first conversion flight on a Kittyhawk out at a satellite, Lake something-or-other, I can't think of the name of it now. I remember the feeling of exhilaration getting into the cockpit, in fact there's a photograph of me getting into the cockpit for my first flight in a

38:30 Kittyhawk. Oh, the power, oh dear, yes. Dialto I think was the name of the satellite. And that was the start of the Kittyhawk era of my life. Lou was killed later on, he was the commanding officer of 77 squadron in Korea, and he went in, in Korea and he was killed. But he was a very good man, he could see a sparrow at the

39:00 range of about two miles, his vision was extraordinary, he'd call out, "Aircraft 2000 feet above at 11 o'clock." And none of us could see it, but he could. Quite extraordinary. Lou Spence. So he was one of the reasons I enjoyed Mildura, one of them.

And had any of your mates from the previous units made it that far, made it to Kittyhawks with you?

Yes,

39:30 yes, Johnny Reed who – he got his wings at Uranquinty, Number 5 Service Flying Training School. Johnny and I went through Somers together, Benalla together, did we go through Somers together? But he was – yes, he was then posted to Uranquinty, and we met up again at

40:00 Mildura. So there were – my mates that were there were John, a fellow called Harpo Marx, his real name was Geoff, Rod Pike, Ray Phillips and myself, and we bought a little old car, I think it was a Morris, of pre-war vintage of course, as old as the hills, and we used to – we pushed it as far as we rode in it actually, and we sold it when we were

40:30 posted away. But I had great mates there, John and Rod and Geoff, Harpo.

Why was he known as Harpo?

After the Marx Brothers, you know, the …

But was it the way he did the hair, or …?

No, because of his name, that's all, being Marx. Ever heard of the Marx Brothers?

Yes.

Yes, well one of them was Harpo. Yes, used to play the harp, I guess. Anyway, we called Geoff Harpo.

Tape 5

00:30 Are we hot to trot?

Yeah, we're hot to trot. Okay, so where we left off …

We left Deniliquin and headed for Mildura, did we not?

Yes.

Number Two Operational Training Unit. An interesting man was the chief instructor there, ever heard of Clive Caldwell? He was Australia's leading World War II fighter ace, and he was the chief instructor, not the CO. The CO was a fellow called Rock Garden Reggie, but what was Reggie's surname?

01:00 I can't remember. He may have signed my log book, he may not have. Anyway, Clive Caldwell was the major bloke, gave us a lecture, his theme for the lecture on arrival was, "You must kill as many Japanese as you possibly can, and you're to learn how to do it." "Oh, very good sir."

This was on arrival in Mildura?

On arrival at

01:30 2 OTU, yes, our first lecture. Well he could talk, because he had about 16 victories or something like that.

So can you take us through the training that you got at Mildura?

At Mildura? Yes.

Yes, and what planes you were flying.

I think the first month, I think it was four weeks, my log books would tell me, we trained on Wirraways and we had an experienced operational pilot as

02:00 our instructor. I had Bob Crawford. Unfortunately I wasn't in – ever heard of Mick Grace? Grace Brothers Sydney? Well Mick Grace was the OC of one flight, but I wasn't in his, an extraordinary man. But anyway I was lucky with my instructor Bob, and he did his best to teach me how to do operational circuits and landings, and all the other things. Again I'd have to refer to my log book to tell you what actual manoeuvres we did.

02:30 And then after that we did our conversion on to P40 Curtiss Kittyhawks. P40Es the majority were, although there were a couple of 240 Ms which had slightly better performance. It was a great thrill to convert onto Kittyhawks.

So can you tell me something about the difference between a Wirraway and a Kittyhawk?

The power, the world of difference. The

03:00 Wirraway had a Pratt and Whitney Wasp engine, the Kittyhawk had a 12 cylinder gasoline engine which was very high powered, so that was the first impression when you opened the throttle for take off: "Boy, has this got some go in it." A bit like going from Tiger Moth to Wirraway, Wirraway to Kittyhawk, and just a beautiful feeling

03:30 to feel that power in front of you. And that was my big impression of it initially, the power. And I didn't find it difficult to fly, it was very responsive to controls and provided you'd read the pilots' notes, and they used to make us – before we flew them we had to sit in the cockpit, blindfolded, and the instructor would say, "Throttle," and "undercarriage lever," and

04:00 "Flap lever." And you had to know all these things blindfolded, so that you instinctively knew where they were. And then having passed that away you went. Not many people got into trouble on their first flight, or one bloke did, a bloke called Ron O'Donald, somehow or other got himself into an inverted spin, which you weren't supposed to do. We saw him disappearing behind the horizon, "Goodbye Ron," we said. He got out of it somehow. But that was a rarity.

What's an inverted

04:30 **spin?**

Well it's spinning upside down, instead of spinning that way, spinning that way. It's not recommended in any type of aircraft.

And was the training, blindfolds, learning where the controls were- -

Where all the instruments and the controls were; very effective, you never forgot.

Difficult?

Not really, because we spent a lot of time gazing into the cockpit, memorising where they all were so no, it wasn't difficult. I don't really know whether it achieved very much, because unless the cockpit was

05:00 blinded with smoke and we couldn't see, you wouldn't think you'd have to use the controls and instruments without seeing. However, that's what they did, so we knew exactly where everything was. Thorough, I suppose.

So there was never a situation where you needed to know – you weren't sort of kind of blind to where the controls were?

No, never occurred.

05:30 **Now with the power, the difference in power, what did that kind of translate as in terms of flying technique?**

Well, on take off of course, if it's full throttle you had a fair bit of yore caused by – what's the term for it? I'll think of it later, I can't think what it's called - torque, engine torque which tends to twist the air frame, so you had to trim it properly with, I don't know, 10 degrees of

06:00 starboard trim, or something like that, because it was a powerful engine. But you quickly adapted to that, I mean on your first flight you could feel it happening and you just reacted accordingly. It wasn't that exciting, it was just very pleasurable, really.

What about other things, like the way that it would take off? I mean you've got more power, you've got more

06:30 **speed, for take off.**

Oh yes, it would leave the ground at a much [greater] speed than the Wirraway of course, I can't remember – it probably would have left the ground at about 90 miles an hour, I think roughly, whereas the Wirraway would probably leave about 75, 80, something like that. It had a longer take off run.

So it needed a longer run?

It needed a bigger airfield than you would for a Wirraway, yes. Although if you get them down – yes, another story, but

07:00 you could get them down on a brick strip if you had to.

So what was the story that you just said?

Well we were at a place called Tadji, which was – do you remember when they had a big earthquake at Aitape and a tidal wave? Well Tadji was just inland from Aitape where that great tidal wave occurred, and we had a PSB, PSP strip, that's perforated

07:30 steel platform, American style, so you constructed your strip out of steel, steel matting, but it was a very short strip, and if we were taking off with a full bomb load and a belly tank, you had to start opening the throttle down the taxiway, because if you didn't do that you're going to go through the trees at the other end of the strip, which actually happened. But

08:00 it was rather breathtaking taking off and going over the trees at the other end of the strip. That was the worst strip we operated from. So yes, they took a fair bit of take off space with a full load, ammunition, bombs, belly tanks.

Well just tell me then what you had to do to make sure you did clear those trees? How did you …?

Well, as I say, you had to start the take off run

08:30 and you'd go screaming down the taxiway – what we made of the taxiway - a quick right turn, a quick left turn onto the strip itself, but by that time you were probably doing 20 or 30 miles an hour. Rather hair-raising, actually. Oh dear, it was such a bad strip. But one day a bloke came up from down south, he ferried a brand new P40 into Tadji airstrip, he took the radio aerial off one of our aircraft parked at the end

09:00 of the strip, he took the engine out of the next one, he landed in a heap down the runway, and the CO of the squadron that he was supposed to join, went screaming down in his Jeep, this poor bloke got out of the cockpit of what remained of this aircraft, and the CO was screaming and shouting, and this bloke could hardly scratch himself. And he put him on the next plane south, the next Dakota south, he was so angry. But I

09:30 mean the bloke just was so – he actually wrecked three aircraft. Well that was the sort of strip it was, it was so tight, can't think of – what was the name of that CO? Should know. So in a tight situation you had to be very careful.

Did you get …? Can you just say that again, because we didn't get that?

About his name?

Yes.

He was

10:00 CO of 75 squadron, and he was known – I don't know what his real name was, he was always known as Congo, Congo Kinninmonth; K-i-n-n-i-n-m-o-n-t-h, but everyone left the h out and they just called him Congo Kinninmonth. Some of his relatives I met at the golf club. But I suppose that was tough, but the poor bloke just misjudged, so he caused a lot of damage.

I know we'll get on to

10:30 **Tadji a bit later in more detail, but I'm just curious why if there were planes the size of Kittyhawks landing there and taking off from there …**

I saw a Liberator put down there one day, it had been shot up, and it was wrecked, but he had no choice but to put it down. He got it in, by some magic means, and Bristol Beauforts used to land there,

11:00 and other types of aircraft would land there, but you know, very tight. But they didn't have the bomb loads and the belly tanks that we had, so they were relatively light when they arrived there.

And they couldn't extend the strip?

Nope. No, nowhere to go, no. It was a favourite target of the Japanese at night, they used to bomb us at night, cause us sleepless nights and –

however, that didn't matter.

Now, we'll just go back to Mildura.

Mildura, yes.

Yes, back to your change over to the Kittyhawks …

Yes, and my flight commander Lou Spence, I mentioned him before, yes.

So how much training did you do with Lou, to learn how to fly the Kittyhawk?

Oh no, well of course we all flew solo, so he just led in formation, he led line to stern chasers, where we used to chase each

other round the sky, with a leader trying to shake you off his tail. Formation exercises, flying as a squadron, flying as a flight, flying as a section, air to ground gunnery, air to ground bombing, we did gunnery in Wirraways as well. All the armament exercises, air to air combat, everything to do with fighter aircraft,

we practiced there. We didn't have long on Kittyhawks, October, November, about two and a half months I think we did, roughly.

So where are the guns located on the Kittyhawks?

In the main plane, 6.5 calibre Browning machine-guns. Three nozzles on the leading edge of the main plane. The guns were in the wings, the ammunition belts for them

were in the wings. Pretty high powered armament actually, 6.5 calibres.

So I imagine when you fire, what impact does it have or vibration does it have on the plane?

It'd make the aircraft shudder a bit, yes. And slow it down of course, not by a lot, but it would slow it down, when you fired the whole lot, presuming the whole lot worked. They usually did.

So what was the duration, or how many rounds did you

shoot off?

Good question. I think you counted it in the number of firing seconds that you had to offload. I'm not sure Cath, I don't recall ever knowing that number. Many a time I used a whole lot, but I can't remember how long it took.

So coming back to the training, you were trained how to just fire those guns, but presumably in what

situations you needed to fire …?

Yes, could be aerial combat or doing air to ground gunnery, ground targets, which was what we mostly did on ops. And we learnt how to do them. Dive-bombing was part of it.

Okay, so can you tell me a bit about that, some of that specialist stuff, like dive-bombing?

Again I'd have to look at my log book. What did we do?

So this is carrying a bomb- -

Yes, under the main plane, they sat under the main plane, the bombs, yes. I think we used to carry – on operations we carried two 500 pound bombs, they were pretty big, we only practised at Mildura with practice bombs, pretty small, that's when that famous

instructor of mine dropped his on the poultry farm. My log book would tell you what- -

Okay, if you'd like to consult it.

- -what sort of exercises we did.

What I'm interested in is what you can remember in how you carried out those exercises, do you know what I mean, some of the details, for example …

From what height, to the ground targets?

Yes, heights, if you're shooting at a ground target, how do you actually do that? What angle does the plane need to be at, be on, and …?

15:30 Depended whether you were on operations, and sometimes we'd go in from a great height, drop our bombs I don't know, 500 feet, something like that. It's hard to remember the details, let's just have a quick look at –

16:00 here we are, Wirraway, Kittyhawk, familiarisation, chase, individual combat, battle climb, 22,000 feet, air to ground gunnery with our .5s, air to ground strafing, air to ground gunnery, battle climb to 24,000 feet, low flying,

16:30 pairs attacks, shadow shooting. Now they used to have a target aircraft that would fly across Lake Victoria leaving a shadow on the water, and then you'd attack that shadow with your armament. This would teach you how to do – how to really do air to air shooting.

So can you just tell me about that? What angle did the plane need to be on if you were shooting at the ground?

Well I'd be diving in at probably a 45 degree angle, something

17:00 like that. And you learnt deflecting, shooting that way, because you had to aim ahead of the target, if you aimed at the target your rounds would drop behind, so you had to – your target aircraft had to fly into your fire, and you had to learn how much in advance of the target aircraft you had to aim your guns. They were all harmonised, your 6.5 guns were harmonised at a

17:30 certain range, might have been 300 yards, something like that, where all the 6.5 rounds came in together.

So that's when you're shooting at another enemy aircraft that's in the sky?

Yes, you've got to shoot ahead of it. Skip-bombing, dive-bombing, belly tank landing, that was the first time we used the belly tank. Dive-bombing, live bombing, 250

18:00 pounds, 110 yards, low flying and interception, wing formation. And that's the end of it, 'Reached the required standard'.

Okay. So how long was all that training, Norm?

Yes, good point. My assessment was dated the 8th of December, '43, signed by a bloke called Dick Creswell, and Dick became my CO again, after the

18:30 war, of 21 Squadron. So we kicked off at Mildura, we started there in October, October 11th, and the last flight was December 7th. October 11th and December 7th, two months, roughly. And the Wirraway phase only took a month,

19:00 it finished on November 1st.

Okay. So what would be good to get is a real picture of – because you're going from the Wirraways to the Kittyhawks, you've been heading for the Kittyhawks throughout all that training, you knew that's what you wanted to fly, wasn't it?

Well, I wasn't fussed, no, I would have been happy on Spitfires, I would have liked to have flown them, but I didn't. Didn't matter, subsequently. I just thought I'd be flying Kittyhawks, I never

19:30 thought of – never thought I'd fly Spitfires for some reason.

So having a much more powerful plane to fly, how did it feel for you? I mean did it feel like you suddenly had reached that level of accomplishment, that you'd been seeking? Did you feel more confident or did you feel intimidated?

I felt quite confident, but only because of the wonderful

20:00 training we had, both on the ground and in the air, so even – well I wasn't complacent and I wasn't cocky, but I certainly wasn't under-confident. I think we were so young that we reckoned there was nothing we couldn't do, anyway. The delight of being young. No, amongst my mates and myself, we were all very confident that we would complete the course and be

20:30 passed to a squadron in due course, we never thought otherwise, really.

I get this sense, I could be wrong here, but I get the sense that you were just a little bit maverick in the way you …

A bit …?

A little bit maverick in the way that you flew, just a few of the things you've told us about – was that something – I don't mean irresponsibly- -

No, no, no.

- -I'm not implying that at all- -

Adventurous, do you mean?

Adventurous.

Well, I loved the pastime so much that

21:00 I – we used to talk amongst ourselves about all sorts of illegal things that we could do. As I said before, I was trying to do a loop in the Wirraway at the minimum speed. We were willing to try anything really, and felt whatever we tried we could succeed at, but that's just the way we were.

So you were pretty gung-ho once you got into the Kittyhawks?

Yes, I guess so.

So can you tell me about some of those experiences

21:30 **then? I'm talking about when you're- -**

In training?

- -in training, while you were in there.

I don't think we did anything particularly naughty that I can recall doing Kittyhawk training, no. No, it was all pretty serious stuff. But no, I don't think I broke any rules that I can remember. Not on Kittyhawks, anyway. No illegal low flying, although we always flew lower than we were supposed

22:00 to, but that was just natural.

What was your legal limit?

I don't think there was one really, just as long as you didn't hit anything. But these days it's 500 feet I think, some nonsense like that, that's not low flying, that's almost medium altitude. I don't think they stipulated if you went into the low flying area and low flew, that's what you did, and a matter of,

22:30 I don't know, 10, 12 feet above the ground, something like that. Just as long as you didn't hit your air screen or anything, or any part of the aircraft. Not hard to do, really.

So you did exercises in strafing?

Yep.

How do you practice that?

Well, you just – they set up a target for you, I forget what the target was actually, you just attack it at an angle, it's just air to ground

23:00 gunnery, that's all it is really, it's not much different, except on operations, strafing, you wouldn't call it air to ground gunnery, you'd call it strafing because you were strafing Japanese targets anyway, trucks and heaven knows what. It was a part of training, I think strafing and air to ground gunnery were basically the same thing.

But were you using live ammunition?

Yes.

In practice?

Not practice

23:30 bombing, but in air to ground gunnery yes, yes, live .5s. Must have been an awful lot of ammunition used.

And what was your skill like with the gun?

Just average, yes. Not below, not above, just average.

So how many hits is that out of 10. What percentage, just rough?

24:00 Golly, I couldn't really guess. I did enough to pass, whatever it was.

So with that, let's take that from air to gun, gunnery practice, there's a target, what sort of target would it be?

Yes, good question, I'm just trying to remember what we aimed at. No, I can't remember really. At the gunnery range, it might have been – I don't know.

Would it

24:30 **be a target on the ground, or ...?**

Yes, it was, yes.

Paper, you know, like a paper target?

Yes, I can't remember what object it was, 44-gallon drum? No, I can't really remember what we aimed at. They didn't have targets like you know, like the Target company, but I can't remember really what we aimed at. I should remember because I did enough of

25:00 it post-war.

Did you do training with drogues?

No. Not during the war, I did that post-war in 21 Squadron again with a Beaufighter towing a drogue, and that was practicing air to air gunnery, you know, shooting at another aircraft. But no, we didn't do that at Mildura.

25:30 We used to do it as I said before, on Lake Victoria with the target aircraft casting an image and that's much the same thing as firing at a drogue, because the drogue's moving like the aircraft is. The details of targets elude me entirely.

Do you remember the interior of the Kittyhawk?

26:00 **Do you remember the way it was built?**

Yes, yes.

Can you give me some details about it?

Well it was a big step up onto the main plane to get into the thing for a kick off, but of course we were young and agile then, so we'd just leap into the cockpit. There's a photograph there actually of me and the Kittyhawk at Mildura. What specifically do you mean?

Well, things that stand out for you, maybe the

26:30 **wing construction, or the cockpit construction, and was it comfortable and …?**

It was a big cockpit, heavily armed, you had armour plate behind you and a big cockpit, they used to say the best form of anti-aircraft evasion was to undo your straps and run around the cockpit. They were only kidding of course. No, a very roomy aircraft, very comfortable, but after you sat on a parachute with a dinghy bottle protruding from it for four and a half hours, you get a

27:00 bit twitchy. But that would have happened on operations, not in training of course. No, a comfortable aircraft, yes. You're reminding me of many things, but it's mostly operational, yes. We used to – we didn't need a hand to get into the cockpit, as I say, even with our parachute on, we could get on the wing and jump in.

27:30 For some reason or other I just remembered my armourer from 80 Squadron, I don't know what that came to me. He – at a place called Biak Island, he and some of our squadron men, ground staff blokes, went souveniring. The unfortunate part about it was they ran into a Japanese machine-gun there, and one of them got out of it, the other four were killed. And my armourer unfortunately was amongst those

28:00 killed. But you're reminding me of armament and guns and things, yes. It just came back to mind. A very nice young fellow he was, too.

So he was your armourer?

Armourer, he looked after my machine-guns and made sure they were working and made sure that the ammunition belts were all put in the right place, ready to go, that was his – I think he probably did other

28:30 things, but he was an armourer.

Did you have to handle the ammunition at all once you were on the plane?

No, not personally, no. I used to go and check occasionally, to make sure it was being done. No, I didn't have to really do that. I never had a misfire, I never had a gun jam on me and not work, never. They were very skilled at their jobs.

29:00 **Okay, we'll stick with Mildura just for a little bit longer, because there are a couple of things. Did you – were you trained in dog fights at Mildura?**

Did I what?

Did you train in dog fighting?

Yes, air to air combat they call it, yes. You go up and you know, you try to get on each other's tail, and if you went up with an instructor, he usually got on yours rather than the other way round. It was good training, you know, like a dog fight between you and another

29:30 Kittyhawk. Sometimes you got on the opponent's tail, sometimes you didn't.

Sometimes you got on …?

Well you know, you'd be manoeuvring around and you eventually jump on his tail and then theoretically you've just shot him down.

So it's pretty hard to do?

Depending how good the pilot of the other aircraft was, and if it was one of the instructors, yes it was hard to do. Sometimes you'd fluke it

30:00 really, rather than be skilful about it.

So I imagine with that air to air combat, the skill is manoeuvring and banking and rolling I suppose …

Lots of G forces. Yes, a rather tiring pastime. And other

30:30 times they called it, just in my log book there, 'line of stern chase', that meant the instructor would say, "Righto, see if you can [get] on my tail." And he'd start off leading you, and then he'd out-manoeuvre you and you wouldn't get on his tail at all, they were too experienced. But it taught you. Yes, we enjoyed our time in Mildura, a great patriotic town and the

31:00 locals were marvellous to us. I think they thought because we were going to go on operations after we'd leave there, they'd be kind, and they were, they were marvellous.

So was it just the one squadron based at Mildura?

No squadrons, no, just operational training units. No squadrons, no.

So how many people would have been there?

Must have been some hundreds, because they had the

31:30 P40s and the Spitfires, and then along came the Boomerang, ever heard of the Boomerangs? Heaven forbid, flying a Boomerang. However, they operated those three types there eventually. The Boomerang was used for army co-op. purposes, not for fighting, not a fighter aircraft, not in the real sense. A bit like a

32:00 Wirraway, a bit underpowered.

Were there Spitfires there when you were there?

Pardon?

Were there Spitfires there when you were there?

Yes indeed, oh yes, there was the Spitfire flight and the Kittyhawk flight, yes, they were operating. A couple of my friends went onto Spitfires. I think Harpo did, actually, yes. Can't remember.

32:30 But the majority of my friends went on to Kittyhawks. But the Spits were operating, yes.

Did you fly one?

No, no, it was always one of my slight regrets that I – I flew the P51D Mustang post-war which was a wonderful aeroplane, but I would have like to have flown the Spit but no, never did.

33:00 **Did you do any flight exercises with the Spits?**

No. No, we didn't get mixed up with them, no. No, they went their way, we went ours. I think they had a – they weren't exceptionally good for air to ground work, or ground attack, they were more air to air aircraft. I'm trying to remember who amongst my friends went onto them, I know a couple did. It's

33:30 gone now.

Well, it'll probably come back to you, the names will come back to you.

It might, yes.

So what marked the graduation from the OTU? How did you graduate?

I don't think we did, I think we were just posted away to personnel pool, I don't think there was any pomp and ceremony at the

34:00 end of our course, I don't remember any, anyway. No, it was a bit too serious for any gaiety at the end of the course. No, I can't remember any event that marked it, just that we were posted away.

So this was December '43, I think you said that you finished?

Yes, September, '43.

34:30 Yes, I spent Christmas Day '43 in Brisbane, on our way north. I think it was the YMCA ladies put on Christmas lunch for we pilots who were heading north.

Did you have some leave, home leave?

After Mildura?

35:00 I think we did, and I think we had a couple of weeks leave in the middle of the course, I think, from memory. In fact if I look at the flight entries I'll find there's a gap there of a couple of weeks where we got leave. And then we had leave at the end of the course. And I think I set sail for the north about 20th of December,

35:30 about five days before Christmas we got on the troop train. It took us a week to get to Townsville by train, would you believe?

Setting off from Melbourne?

From Melbourne, Melbourne to Townsville, yes, by troop train it took a week. We had to sleep in the damned thing most nights. Not every night, but most nights.

Well can you tell me how your posting came about? Like how you were informed of it?

36:00 **Were you told where you were going to? What squadron you were going to?**

No, no, not when I left Mildura, just that I was going to the personnel pool at Townsville to await appointment to a squadron. So we sat there sorting mail and doing all sorts of dull-looking things like that, that's when my friend Peter Hooks and I shot the 300 rounds of .303 ammunition off, and deafened ourselves.

36:30 We had – it was quite a busy town then Townsville, a lot of Americans about.

Had the Japanese done their raid on Townsville by that stage?

The Japanese had been over it I think, over Townsville and Jacky Jacky and parts north. I didn't encounter any Japanese bombers when I was up there, they'd been pushed further

37:00 north by then. But they did do over a few Queensland towns. Yes, I wasn't too impressed with Townsville, I have to say. We wanted to get into a squadron, we didn't want to be sitting there sorting mail.

Not doing any flying?

No, no, that was the thing we missed most. Anyway in due course I was posted to – John

37:30 Reed and I were posted to 84 Squadron, which was a P40 squadron at Horn Island, right opposite Thursday Island. Do you know Horn Island? At the very tip of Cape York, straight opposite Thursday Island. A dull existence there because the Japs had moved further north, and we flew occasionally, there'd be an unidentified aircraft come into the area, and we'd be shot up to

38:00 check it out, but more often than not it was a friendly aircraft that had failed to put its IFF on. Do you know what IFF is? Identification Friends and Foe.

How does that actually work, the IFF?

It's a radio broadcast, I gather, not to do with radar, it would just send some signal out, and so they knew that you

38:30 were friendly, and if this aircraft approaches and there was no IFF signal, they thought it was hostile. But it wasn't always, some blokes just forgot to put it on, for some reason or other. We used to intercept Liberators, not a Japanese aircraft in sight. So it was quite a dull existence there. Oh, except that there was a bit of a panic on

39:00 early in '44 when they thought a Japanese taskforce was approaching Perth, and the Spitfire squadron in Darwin was sent down to Perth, and we flew across from Horn Island to Darwin, it took us three attempts to get there. The first time we took off from Horn Island led by Sandy McCulloch, the CO, the weather was so shocking we couldn't fly for more than

39:30 half an hour and had to turn back. So we turned back and – I'll have to look at my book again. The second time we took off the weather was just about as bad, so we turned around again to come back to Horn Island and unfortunately the squadron was so low that Paddy Walsh, who was flying on the last section, went into the water, because he was so low, so that was the end of Paddy. Anyway, the third attempt, I think it was the third attempt, we took

40:00 off and we eventually got to Gove on the other side of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and from Gove we went to Livingstone Strip in Darwin, and lived there for, oh, not terribly long, but, where are we? Here we

40:30 are, Operational Scramble – when did we go to Darwin?

Tape 6

00:33 **Okay, so can you tell us why you were detailed to go – why you were sent to Darwin?**

Yes, because the Spitfires were sent down to near Perth, I forget the name of the field they went to, because they feared that this Japanese taskforce was approaching Perth and would unleash itself on Perth, you know, air raids and so forth, and they sent the Spits down there and

01:00 they sent us across to take their place in Darwin, to defend the Darwin area. As it turned out it was a false rumour and there was no Japanese taskforce approaching. There might have been one somewhere round the Indian Ocean, but it wasn't going to Perth. So they came back, after we'd been there 10 days and we went back to Horn Island, and unfortunately we climbed up through, I don't know how many thousand feet of cloud, and our P40 M5s had very little

01:30 flying instruments, blind-flying instruments. Fortunately I was in a section led by a man called Alan Walley who was to become lord mayor of Melbourne later on, but he was an expert pilot, and he took the four of us up through cloud and we didn't experience any difficulties. But others did, and poor old Jack Edmond spiralled out of a cloud in a spiral dive and that was the end of Jack. So we lost one going –

02:00 trying to go there and we lost another one coming back, but not through any fault of the enemy of course, just flying accidents really. So it wasn't a very happy trip and – I shared a tent with Paddy and Jack, and Paddy slept on my left and Jack slept on my right, and then there's only Norm left at the end of the Darwin trip.

Well that's a really sad thing, to lose two mates

02:30 **like that. Did it concern you? Did it unnerve you that accidents could happen so easily?**

No.

- that accidents could happen so easily?

No, it never did, because we – because it couldn't happen to us was our motto, couldn't possibly happen to us. And we really believed that, you know, others were unlucky and their time was up, and nothing could be done about it, but we never felt threatened ourselves, it's quite strange really, it's

03:00 hard to understand why we didn't, but we didn't. Indestructible.

But did you discuss, try and analyse what had happened to both Jack and Paddy and the nature of their accidents?

Well we were inclined to blame the CO a bit, especially in the second event when Jack went in, because he took us up to

03:30 so many thousands of feet of cloud, and if you lost formation you became disorientated, and if there's nobody to fly on, you didn't know where on earth you were, and you'd be doing a rate five turn thinking you were flying straight and level, or you'd be flying straight and level thinking you were doing a right hand turn or a left hand turn, completely disorientated. No horizon

04:00 and no instruments, all we had was a rate of climb indicator and a compass, virtually that's all we had. No artificial horizons, no complicated – they took all the instruments out of the MP40 M5s to lighten them up, they did that all right and they were a very fast version of the Kittyhawk, but no earthly good in cloud, because you didn't know where on earth you were. No, we missed Jack and Paddy of course, but you know, the indestructibility of

04:30 youth, I guess, we never felt threatened. I don't know why we didn't, but we didn't. We were sorry to lose them, of course.

Did you say that Paddy was at the tail?

Yes, he was in a squadron of 12 aircraft, as it turned like that he was on the inside section, and it was so low because of the shocking weather, that he just hit the water. Bad leadership, they shouldn't have been that low.

05:00 But that's what happened to Paddy.

But he would have had instruments telling him what height he was? An elevation instrument?

I guess so, but either he lost the plot or the section was just so low that as they turned he had to hit the water. I don't know, we never really ever found out why he went into the water, except he was too low. We wondered whether he'd

05:30 broken off from the formation and it was all his own work, we didn't really know.

Would there have been an inquiry at all?

No, I don't think so, just another casualty. No. I mean anything could have happened, it could have been

Paddy's fault, who knows? I didn't even know he was missing until the CO called up and said we've lost Green 4 or Blue 4, or whatever he was.

During the flight?

Yes.

06:00 But the weather was ghastly, it was right down onto the deck really, we had no manoeuvring room.

So once you landed, and you're short and Paddy's not there, what did the CO do? Did he call you together to …?

No, I don't recall that, I don't think so, no. No, there was no post mortem that I can remember. Just an unoccupied bed.

06:30 **Now just a little bit more about what you did in Darwin. Did you do very much?**

Not very much, no, not very much. We used to – what did we do, we used to practice a bit of this and that. I'm sorry to have to refer to this all the

07:00 time, but it jolts my memory. Where are we? Here's the great man's name on my assessment, C McCulloch, flight lieutenant. So what were you saying Cath?

What were you doing in Darwin?

Yes, good question.

I mean you were on stand by,

07:30 **well you were on alert I guess.**

Yes, for interception, yes.

Well can you describe what that actually means to be on alert for interception?

Well in the stand by tent with your aircraft parked in front of it, and if you were called to intercept you would just race to your aircraft, start it up, or get started, and off you go. "February, February, February!"

08:00 We packed the section attacks, we did a sector recce [reconnaissance], you know, we were standing patrol reconnoitring the area in case, and that's about all we did, I only flew once, twice, three times, four times, I only flew four times in Darwin, and the last time was to test an aircraft. So we did very little, as you can

08:30 tell.

Can you just give me an idea of what a sector patrol – what's involved in doing a sector patrol?

No, I can't, we didn't really – we just flew round in a formation, thinking maybe we'll see Japanese aircraft, maybe we won't, and we didn't. It was just a means of keeping your aircraft operational and flying.

09:00 It achieved nothing really, because there was nothing to achieve.

So then you went back to Horn Island?

Yep, back to Horn Island for a while, and for some reason or other, John and I were singled out to return to Townsville. Now don't ask me why we were picked out, we were sent back to Townsville to the personnel pool, and the next thing we

09:30 know, we've been posted to 80 Squadron, which was a P40 squadron with N models, based then at Cape Gloucester on the north-west tip of New Britain, and Johnny and I went through Port Moresby and Nadzab, we stayed overnight at both places. Actually he was a day ahead of me. And we got to Cape Gloucester and just in time for the squadron to be

10:00 sent to Tadji in New Guinea. So I didn't like Cape Gloucester at all, because their squadron took off a couple of days after I arrived there, so did dear old Glen Cooper my CO say to me? "Norm, I'm going to leave you behind here, to get all my ground staff on transport aircraft, to Tadji where we're going. Can you do that?" I had to drive a blessed truck around, dropping men off here and there,

10:30 and it had no synchro-mesh gears, it had what they called eight gears, and I'd never driven a car – a vehicle - with eight gears. Anyway, Glen asked me to do that, and I did it happily. So I didn't join the squadron until – I didn't start flying with the squadron till I got to Tadji. But I had a very adventurous trip there, because once I got rid of all the ground staff, I then had to get to Tadji myself. Anyway, the

11:00 transport officer organised me to go to Momote in the Admiralty Islands where – what was there, 79 Squadron Spitfires was there, and 76 Squadron Kittyhawks was there. So I stayed overnight on the Kittyhawk squadron, the 76 Squadron and next morning I'm a passenger on a Beaufort, a twin-engine

Beaufort aircraft to go to Tadji. So off we take and he climbs up to probably 6000, 7000, 8000 feet, and we're cruising over the

11:30 water and suddenly the nose goes down, and I thought, "What's he up to? Doesn't want to fly at this height?" And the aircraft's got a gentle dive. And then it's still in a very gentle dive, and then it's still in a dive. And I looked across at the captain of this Beaufort, and I can see the muscles on his arms standing out, and perspiration pouring down his face and forehead, because he can't get it out of the dive. So I thought, "This is not a

12:00 very good arrangement, you know, can't you do better than that?" And he could not get the aircraft out of the dive. And suddenly it came out of the dive. I said, "What did you do?" He said, "I didn't do anything, it just came out of dive itself." Now you may not know about this, but the Beaufort had an elevator trim tab defect, and the trimming mechanism and the elevators

12:30 were at fault, and that's why a lot of them went into water or ground, unexplained accidents, why did they dive into the ground? Why did they dive into the water? And the reason was that this tail trim mechanism was failing and causing the elevator to act incorrectly. And that's what happened to this bloke. But he didn't know why we got out of it, he couldn't tell me why the aircraft

13:00 suddenly came out of the dive, because he didn't know why it went into the dive in the first place. So I was very relieved to land at Tadji in one piece when I could see us all going into the water.

So the tail trim mechanism had got stuck?

Was faulty, it caused the trim tabs on the elevators to remain in a position which caused the dive, and there was no way you could pull – it had such an effect on the elevators there was no way you could pull the

13:30 aircraft out of it. In you went. And they didn't find that out for some considerable time. So I don't know whether it happened to that aircraft again, but I was glad to get out of it, I can tell. And by the way, not long after we took off from Momote, what did we see but a Japanese flying boat, and I said to Bill or whatever his name was, "Go and have a go at that." "No, no, no, we're on a ferry flight to Tadji Norm, sorry, forget it." So the Japanese flying boat whizzed off into

14:00 the bright blue yonder. So it was quite an eventful trip. I've never forgotten the sight of his bulging muscles on his forearms, trying to pull the aircraft out of its dive.

Was he saying anything?

No, he couldn't, no, I think he might have been swearing a bit. He didn't know what on earth was happening, nobody did. I'm standing behind his seat, watching all this. Very interesting.

And how

14:30 **close did you get to the water?**

I can't remember exactly, I think it probably wasn't any closer than about 500 feet, but if it had continued on much longer we would have got very wet indeed, and very dead as well.

Only a matter of seconds, isn't it?

Yes. He was running out of air very, very quickly. It wasn't flying at a tremendous rate because it was only a shallow dive, so it was a

15:00 question of how long it would take to hit the water. But funnily enough I had no feeling of apprehension at all, don't ask me why, I should have. But I had no – I don't know, I just had no fear about what was happening. Yet had I read then what I read later, I would have been scared to death. I don't know why I thought it would come out of the dive, but it did.

15:30 **So you trusted that it would come out?**

Well, it shouldn't have, actually, but it did. That reminds me of a funny little episode, getting back to 84 Squadron, when we went to go, this is how smart you can be, when we eventually arrived at Gove, and I'm on final approach, beautiful tail down wheeler I did, and all of a sudden there's no noise from the front of my aircraft, not a sound, dead silence. The

16:00 engine had stopped. And I thought, oh, and then I realised with horror that I'd failed to change from belly tank to wing tank, and my belly tank had emptied itself, but fortunately if it had emptied itself 15 seconds before, I could have been shocking trouble, but it emptied itself as I went rolling down the runway, and I thought, "Now let me see, what'll I do? I don't want the CO to know about this." So I switched to the wing tank,

16:30 and signalled a couple of Erks [ground crew] in a jeep to come and – we had what they called inertia starters, and you had to wind the inertia starter up and then the pilot connected the inertia starter with the engine. So along came the Erks and they wound me up and I started the aircraft and McCulloch said to me, "Do you have a bit of engine trouble Norm?" I said, "Not really sir, not really, no, no, it's just – for some reason or other it just conked out." So he never knew that I

17:00 actually had run out of fuel as I touched the runway. A bit of luck; a lot of luck.

But why is that something you could overlook? Wouldn't there be an indicator?

Oh yes, it was stupid of me, I should have been aware. Of course there's no gauge on a belly tank, so you've got to go on timing, and maybe the CO should have said, "Look, we've been airborne for two and a half hours, whatever, now switch over to your main tank."

17:30 But no, he left it to us, and I miscued by not switching over. I think all the other blokes either didn't run out of fuel, or they switched tanks, but I wasn't prepared to discuss the matter with anyone, having managed to salvage my reputation. Quite extraordinary. Those sort of things you can't explain. As I say, 10 seconds before it might have been a bit difficult; suddenly you've got no power.

18:00 **You tend not to forget them, once you've made mistakes like that.**

Didn't do it twice, whenever I flew with a belly tank from that point on, I made sure I knew exactly how long I'd been flying on it, and whether it's proper to switch to a wing tank.

How much flying time could you get out of the Kittyhawk with both the tanks?

I think four and a half hours was the major time,

18:30 and it's a long time to be sitting on a parachute and a dinghy bottle.

What's a dinghy bottle?

A dinghy bottle, you blow up your dinghy when you have to bail out, and you've got to inflate your dinghy. Four hours 35, patrol over Biak, nil sightings, nothing worth seeing, felt ill.

19:00 Yes, that was a long time, four hours 35, I think that was the longest.

So you felt ill? Do you think that was exhaustion?

I don't know, might have been food poisoning, something like that Cath, I can't remember why I felt ill, but I wouldn't have written that if I hadn't. Yes, I think four hours 35 was the longest. Four hours

19:30 1010, another Biak patrol. Four hours 10. Four hours 25, Hollandia patrol, no, Biak patrol. They were the longest. Four hours 30, bomb and strafe Kai Islands, four hours 30.

So do you

20:00 **feel that by checking your log book there you've actually reminded yourself well enough with some of the ops that you did?**

Yes.

Enough to talk about now, do you reckon?

Yes, yes.

Okay.

I remember some of them quite vividly.

All right, well the ones you remember most vividly first. Just locate us so – would this be from Horn Island that you commenced ops?

No, nothing from Horn Island, no all these

20:30 events occurred when we went from – when I started flying at Tadji with 80 squadron, Tadji to Hollandia where the Cyclops Mountains were, and our strip was called Cyclops Street, that was in Dutch New Guinea, the capital of Dutch New Guinea. From there I went to Biak Island with the squadron, from Biak Island I went to Numfor Island with the squadron, and then my operational tour was

21:00 finished, then I came home. So all the fun started from Tadji onwards.

So this is transferring to 80 squadron, or 84 squadron?

From 84 to 80, yes.

And were you told why you were being transferred to that squadron?

No. The only thing I often wondered, John Reed my mate, his father knew Air Marshal

21:30 Sir George Jones. They grew up together, I understood from Johnny, and I often wondered whether John might have written to his father and said, "Dad, Norm and I are bored stiff here, do you reckon you could approach the old guy to get him to get us moved?" I'm only guessing, because it seemed strange to me that John and I went from Townsville to Horn Island together to 80 Squadron together, it seems strange.

22:00 It didn't happen to any other pilots in 84 Squadron, just Johnny and me.

But did you know what work, what sort of ops they were doing there, were you briefed on that?

In 80 Squadron? Oh yes, we knew they were doing – basically air to ground attack, but with a bit of top cover for bombers, but basically the ground attack, yes we knew that. But I just suspect John might have sought help somewhere, I'm not sure. I've often wondered.

22:30 So he got us into the action in other words, whereas nothing was happening at Horn Island.

So Tadji is located near Aitape on the north coast of Papua New Guinea?

Yes, and in Dutch New Guinea, which is now called something else of course, and Hollandia is called something else. But yes, basically the north coast, yes. Aitape and Tadji is on the north coast, so is

23:00 Hollandia. Biak Island is a little island off the north coast, and Numfor is the same, getting well westwards with New Guinea. Do you want to hear about some of the operations?

Yes.

I'd have to refer to my log book again, and I won't put my glasses on. We used to write a bit of a comment about them, and then we found that perhaps it was a

23:30 bit childish and we gave up, but – my first flight with 80 Squadron was on May 8th, Hollandia patrol. First flip on Tadji strip, I say, swine of a strip, and it was, too.

Okay, well can you tell us – because reading from the

24:00 **book isn't as good as you telling us. Giving us a description of what actually happened – so you can you give me a description of the first flip on the strip?**

Well, it was – I suddenly discovered how short it was, or – when I took off. I got over the trees at the end all right, but it was – also there was at least a section of us, probably the whole squadron, took off. Hollandia patrol, nil sightings, but no, a

24:30 swine of a strip because we had to do the zigzag with our armament load to get off.

So do you actually remember the incident?

I can remember having to do the zigzag.

Can you picture it happening?

Yes, I can. But I cleared the trees comfortably actually, but only because of the use of the taxiway as well as – but Glen Cooper was smart enough to tell us that, "For God's sake Norm, when you hit the actual runway, be sure you're moving." And he was dead right.

25:00 **Yes, so that's why I thought if you, say you begin with the ones that are most vivid to you, and then just see how your memory warms up.**

Well, one that stands out in my mind and always will is when we went way down south of New Guinea on reconnaissance looking for shipping

25:30 to knock out of the water. And we got way down near, I think it was near Ceram, and lo and behold we discovered two Japanese patrol boats, tied up at a jetty. "So we've got to have these," we said. And so down we go and we hammer them, and according to Honey Fame who was my – I was flying number three, Honey was my section leader, according to him in later years, we sank them,

26:00 but they were heavily defended and I felt a thump on my aircraft and I knew I'd been hit by something, and then I felt another thump and I thought, "Something else has hit me, but we've got to get these boats." So we fired all our ammunition into their waterline, and then we took off for home. And I wondered why my tail wheel kept on dropping out of its housing. I thought, "That's funny, that's probably where I got clobbered."

26:30 So I was able to pump it up by hand, and when we got back to base at Numfor, back to base at Numfor, I had to pump it down to land, I lowered my undercarriage but the tail wheel was sort of not cooperating, so I pumped it down and held it down until I landed, and when I came to the end of my landing run I had to stop pumping and the tail wheel retracted itself. It didn't matter, it didn't do any

27:00 damage. So anyway, that was that. And back to our quarters, I went down to see how the aircraft was, and what had happened and what was that other thump? And the fitter 2E had something in his hand. He said, "Do you know what that is?" And I said, "Yes, that looks like a Japanese .30 calibre anti-aircraft round." He said, "Yes, it is actually," he said, "But do you know what sort of round it is?" And I

27:30 said, "No, no idea." He said, "Incendiary round." And I said, "Incendiary?" I went a bit pale at that thought. And he said, "Well why it didn't explode your tank, I can't tell you." And anyway, it transpired that I was lucky, my wing tank that it hit was full, there was no air space in it, had there been any air

space in the wing tank, the incendiary

28:00 would have blown it up, so luck was on my side.

So it had pierced the tank?

Oh yes, it had gone into the tank. Don't ask me why it didn't go up. That was the theory, that because there was no air in the tank, because it was chock-a-block full of petrol, it didn't ignite. That's one I remember.

So on that particular op, were you out with just a

28:30 **section or ...?**

Section four, yes, Honey was leading it, I was flying number three, my number four, I forget who it was, yes, just four of us. Unfortunately we'd dropped our bombs on some shipping which was pulled up on the beach, about 10 minutes before. I wish we'd kept them, because we would have really demolished those patrol boats with our bombs.

29:00 Anyway, according to history, we thanked them somehow. Well of course, we had 6.5 calibre machine guns that worked with armour-piercing rounds in them, so we were bound to do some damage. But according to Honey, I met him at a reunion not so many years ago, and I said, "Do you remember that episode Honey?" He said, "Yeah, I sure do." He said, "We sank them, you know?" I said, "No, I didn't know." And that was the one that was most outstanding in my

29:30 mind.

So at what point was your plane hit? Was it ...?

Well, we were taking – we were diving, making diving attacks on these ships, and firing at their waterline, and then of course we had to get up and over them, and it was when you got up and over them you were at your most vulnerable, because you had to turn somewhere. That's when they hit me. They didn't hit any of the other three though,

30:00 which was surprising, because we were all doing the same thing. They must have taken exception to me, for some reason, and I can't imagine why.

When you say you were firing at their waterline, is that like the target you aimed for?

Yes, where the water hits their hull, yes. Because we reckoned if we put enough holes in there, in their waterline, down they'd go, and apparently that's what we did.

And how close do

30:30 **you need to get?**

Oh, we would be firing from a range of 200 yards, 150 yards, as close as we could get without – but still able to pull up over the top of the ship, so we'd fire at the minimum possible range.

So it sounds like you were pretty lucky to escape something like that without getting hit really, if you're coming in that close, and flying out over the ship

31:00 **itself, over the guns?**

Yes. This was firing from not the ships, from the shore, they had their anti-aircraft guns set up on the shore. They couldn't fire at us from the ships anyway, they wouldn't have had the armament I don't think. But no, there was no return fire from the ships, but it was coming from inland, not far away.

Were you aware those gun

31:30 **positions were there on land?**

Yes, yes, in fact Honey spotted them first and said, "Just beware of that anti-aircraft fire coming from our right there." Beware, I don't know how you beware of them. You've got to do what you've got to do.

You said before that in the cockpit of the Kittyhawks that there's good armour plating in there.

Behind you.

Behind?

32:00 Yes, yes.

What about the rest of the plane, was it ...?

Now there was armour plates – where else was there? I think that was all, just the armour plate shields behind, I don't think there was any other that I can recall, no. But the Japs didn't even have that, they had no armour plate at all.

32:30 **So I've forgotten, was that when you were at Tadji, that you were based there?**

Numfor when that happened, the last port of call for me. We – another stroke of luck. About halfway or two-thirds of the way through our nine month operational tour, we were given

33:00 what they call short ops leave, they sent us home for a week or two for a bit of recuperation. So I went home about September '44 for a week or so, I had my own personal aircraft because I was a fairly senior pilot in the squadron at that stage, so I had my own Kittyhawk, A29 631. When I got back to the squadron after my short ops leave, A29 631 was no more,

33:30 neither was Don Wallace who was flying it in my place. Now if I hadn't been on short ops leave I would have been flying that mission instead of him. So perhaps I was lucky. We had two Wallace's, one who went to school with me, Ron Wallace, and the other one was Don Wallace, so one Wallace that went to school with me was christened Charlie, nicknamed Charlie, so that they'd know which Wallace we were referring to. Yes, Don was a nice quiet, pleasant sort

34:00 of bloke, but there but for the grace of God … He got hit by a 40 mil. canon shell, and that was the end of A29 631.

So you came back to this news, did you?

Yes.

When you got back?

Yes, yes. I had a special motive painted on the nose of A29 631, it was a baby in a nappy with a

34:30 bomb in its arms, one of my Erks insisted on putting it on. I thought "Okay." I don't think I had a name for it, it just had the baby bomber.

When you say Erk, what does that stand for?

The ground staff fitters who looked after the air frame, after the engines, and the ground staff

35:00 riggers who looked after the air frame, they were all known as Erks, I don't know why. E-R-K-S, yes, Erks. I don't know why, that was how you referred to them. A couple of Erks, yes. Probably not generally known that, I don't think. It's not meant to be derogatory, they're just generally known as Erks.

When you first arrived at Tadji, did you fly a Kittyhawk up there?

35:30 No, I was flown there on the dreaded Beaufort.

Oh, that's right, sorry, yes. So you arrived there and the squadron was there?

It was operational from there, and then I had my first flight with 80 Squadron, because I missed out because at Cape Gloucester they went to Tadji.

So this really was – this was where your first operation …?

First real ops, yes. I mean 84 Squadron I did

36:00 about, I don't know, 10 sorties there, but they were only intercepts of unidentified aircraft, no accidents whatsoever. So these were my first real operations, yes. I did 77 – I did 80 all together, I think 77 with 80 Squadron and three with 84 Squadron.

So how long did it take you to get used

36:30 **to the Tadji airstrip?**

Twenty seconds, I knew it was dicey before I even got in the aircraft, but Glen Cooper just said, "Just use the taxiway Norm, as much as you can." So I didn't really feel threatened, but I didn't like the strip.

37:00 **So what would happen? Like day one, your first day on ops, can you recall it? Can you give us a flavour of what …?**

No, without reference to my log book I can't tell you. We did -

Okay, have a look.

We – I think we did a patrol over Biak in case there were enemy aircraft operating there. But unless I use this, I'm quite useless really.

You've been doing very well, description of that op from

37:30 **Numfor is excellent.**

I'll never forget that – those two patrol boats, I've never forget the thump as my aircraft got – a lone air patrol, nil sightings, it was only an hour and 45 from Tadji to Hollandia and back. I don't remember

anything about it, we just went up with the squadron in case there were enemy aircraft to be intercepted,

38:00 but there weren't any.

So how would you be briefed? Were you – was this a scramble situation or …?

No, not scrambled, no, the group – we belonged to the First Tactical Air Force, and the First Tactical Air Force belonged to the United States 5th Air Force, so we were really part of the United States 5th Air Force. But who gave us our targets, I just forget, but we were told the night before what we'd

38:30 be doing the following day. So the poor old Erks had put on the belly tanks, and then the next thing they know, they're off with belly tanks and on with bombs, and the next thing I know – they worked like nobody's business. And it must have been very frustrating for them to have to be told to take the bombs off, put the belly tanks back on.

Did you have any American COs that were working …?

No, no. No, a wonderful man called – who eventually finished up Air Chief Marshal

39:00 Sir Frederick Scherger was our air officer commanding, until he got hit in a blessed jeep by an American vehicle. But I think the orders came through from the United States Air Force as to what we were going to do, and then we had to decide which squadron would do which – which one would do the air cover, which one would do the ground attack jobs, we had 75, 78

39:30 and 80 Squadron, we had three squadrons in our wing, and the targets were allocated by our wing commander, I guess, who was Harry Colley I think, for a while, I can't remember now. But the Yanks told us what we were doing.

So were you always carrying bombs, or did it vary?

No, not always. If we were

40:00 doing air cover over Liberators and bombers, no, we wouldn't carry bombs then, we'd carry belly tanks. If we were going out on an air to ground attack, we'd carry bombs then, but not for air cover, just in case we got into a dog fight and you don't want bombs on your wings then. You don't want belly tanks either.

Did you –

40:30 **were you ever in a dog fight?**

No, the only occasion the Japanese aircraft were sighted was on a patrol over Numfor I think it was, and we were supposed to do it. But the other job was air to ground that 78 Squadron was going to do, and our respective COs decided they'd swap paths because they reckoned it was a sheer waste of time, flying air cover over Numfor, and guess

41:00 what? 78 Squadron ran into a heap of Japanese Zeros and shot a number down, which we could have been doing instead, but we weren't. But that was the only time that any number of Japanese aircraft were sighted, in my time. They'd all gone north. But 78 Squadron had the time of their lives. I forget how many they knocked down, but they knocked down a lot. And we lost – I think we only lost one aircraft,

41:30 I remember a bloke called Geoff Giles, who became a member of parliament in Adelaide eventually, he was in that party that got stuck into the Japanese aircraft, and shot a couple down. He told me that he saw a Japanese pilot swinging in his harness, he couldn't make up his mind whether to kill him or not, so

42:00 decency prevailed and he didn't.

Tape 7

00:30 **We're back on, Norm.**

Right.

We were just out, we were having a cup of tea and you were talking about the issue of commissioning, or not being commissioned, what can you tell us about that?

Well the great majority of course weren't commissioned, and unless they'd had – held higher non-commissioned rank than sergeant, they graduated on wings presentation day, graduation day, whatever you want to call it, as sergeant pilots. And the

01:00 great majority of my course were sergeant pilots. I think we had – two or three, no more than that, were commissioned. I told you about my friend who spent a month in Geelong jail, and he was subsequently

commissioned off the next course? But they were very, very rare, commissions on graduation. Somebody said it's a Labour Party policy not to push too many people up the line too often, but I don't know,

01:30 whether it was political, what it was. It wouldn't have – I don't think it would have made any difference whether – if we'd been shot down, whether we were sergeant pilots or flying officers, we would have been killed anyway, so it didn't really matter in the long term.

Well what reputation did the Japanese have when it came to dealing with …?

Capturing pilots? Killed them. Executed them. We lost four in one hit. It was just – soon after I left the

02:00 squadron, and four of them took off for, I don't know, Labuan or somewhere, they got caught in bad weather, they ran out of fuel, and they had to land in the water, the natives dobbed them in, the local natives dobbed them in, and the Japanese got them and killed the four of them, so that was four we lost in one hit. I mean you've heard the story of Bill Newton VC [Victoria Cross]? He was captured by the Japanese and executed, they all were. Arthur Nelson, one of our chaps was shot down,

02:30 the natives dobbed him in, he got down all right, he bailed out and he went up a river, and they knew where he was, when they went to find him they couldn't, and the Japanese got him and killed him too. So they didn't allow pilots to survive. So as I say, I don't think your rank would have mattered very much.

Yes, but was it something that was discussed much amongst sergeant pilots of the day, was it an issue for you guys?

03:00 What, regarding commissions?

Yes.

I don't think we had any resentment for those who did get them, that I recall. We were just happy to graduate and have our wings and our sergeant stripes, and in due course we'd become flight sergeants and then warrant officers, or be commissioned. I went through all those, I was a warrant officer for a short time. No, whatever rank I was, I was happy because I always thought of my old man, he went from private

03:30 to lieutenant in World War I. No, it wasn't an issue with me, but it just seems strange that Johnny and I were mates, and he was an officer and I wasn't.

Yes. You were saying off camera, I think you were recommended for commission three times?

Three times, yes.

Do you know the background to that, and why that didn't come through, those first couple of times?

Because the first time was when I was at Horn Island, 84

04:00 Squadron, and we went down to Jacky Jacky to be interviewed by a wing commander, and we got out of our aircraft and promptly stepped in a great heap of mud, so I was interviewed by him with muddy boots, so I don't know that that went down too well. But anyway, he sent back – I think he said to try again in six month's time, but the trouble was that because I was posted to another unit, I had to start all over again,

04:30 and I don't think the last commanding officer, who was John Waddy in 80 Squadron had anything to do with any sort of recommendation. So then I went to central flying school to learn to be an instructor, and I got a glowing report from them, but then again nothing happened. And then I went to Uranquinty as an instructor and there was a chap

05:00 in – a chap who was in charge of ATS [Advanced Training School], can't think of his name now, said, "What on earth are Frank Bolson and Norm Tims doing in the sergeants' mess? Go into town, be interviewed by the AOC [air officer commanding]." And he arranged for that to happen, and the next thing my commission came through in the Commonwealth Gazette. But it took three attempts, yes.

So

05:30 **what's your theory as to why you were knocked back?**

Purely that I wasn't there long enough at the unit. The first was doing training at central flying school at Point Cook, I'd have to look up my record, it's on that record if you want to have a look.

06:00 This covers the whole lot, citizen air force as well. August, '45 I think it was.

06:30 Yes, 9th August, '45. Max Winton, he was the one that sent me to Mildura.

07:00 **Yes, well stay on that subject Norm, you were telling us that interesting story about meeting that Yank who expressed some surprise …**

Yes. He said, "You're not an officer …"

Can you sort of set that up again for us, that story?

Yes, it was called – we did a long mission and we had to refuel on the way back to Numfor Island, and at this American strip, its name just eludes me. Anyway I landed there with my section,

07:30 and this American airman leapt up onto the main plane and said, “Excuse me sir, what rank are you?” And I said, “I’m a flight sergeant pilot.” He said, “You’re not an officer?” I said, “No, non-commissioned officer.” “Good grief,” he said, “all our pilots who fly P40 Kittyhawks, are commissioned officers.” I said, “Well it’s not so in the RAAF.” He was very surprised.

08:00 **Okay, if we can go back a little bit – we definitely want to hear about some of the operations, and we’ll refer to the log book in a moment, just to get a picture of some of those. Obviously the time with 84 Squadron on Horn Island wasn’t the most stimulating experience- -**

Not really, unproductive.

Yes. Those few ops that you did, were they purely the …?

Purely intercepts of unidentified aircraft, that’s all.

08:30 **And there was not much enemy activity to speak of?**

No, they’d all gone north, the Japanese were retreating north and getting out of sight and out of range. I don’t think – I think one night we had a bomber come over Horn Island while I was there, maybe two nights, not dropping bombs, just flying over for some reason.

So at this stage, what did you feel was the – at what stage was the war at? I mean what was the status of things?

Well, this is the beginning of

09:00 1944, the Japanese were on the retreat everywhere, the Americans were taking over. When was the Battle of the Coral Sea? That was about 1943 or ‘42, the Japanese were well and truly in retreat, getting further and further north. All their efforts to land in New Guinea, Port Moresby and that area had failed, and so they withdrew their air force to safer areas, because the Americans had

09:30 Thunderbolts, P38s, you name it, Kittyhawks, they had the whole lot, outnumbering the Japanese. So there was no fighting to be done at Horn Island at all, nothing constructive at all.

Was there at all a risk there of becoming blasé, or …?

Yes, and if you do that, you become careless. I had a minor

10:00 accident there, two actually, the first one was when I was landing after an intercept of a Liberator, we were landing and the duty pilot was panicking because there was a Dakota in the area, waiting to land at Horn Island, and I wondered whether he thought General MacArthur might have been on board. Anyway, he panicked us and we landed, and I went screaming down the side of the runway, and my port wheel, landing wheel went into a runaway,

10:30 ‘boing!’ Down went the aircraft, engines stopped, a wreck. So the old CO Phil Ford wasn’t too impressed with that. The next thing I did wrong was when we were going to – we were going to go and have a – I think we were going to have an exercise in air to air combat, but I was so excited at the thought of flying that I leapt into the aircraft, started the engine, then instead of

11:00 pulling the flap lever up, pulled the undercarriage lever up and down went the tail, so he wasn’t too pleased with that either. I’ve never forgotten his speech about the runaway – the runway incident, he assembled all the pilots and he said, “Now I’m going to allot Tims 50% of the blame, and the runway the other 50%.” And I suppose that was fair enough. I didn’t see the wash out on the side of the strip. It was actually the duty

11:30 pilot who did the panicking. So that’s the result of not flying enough, you get careless, and pulling the undercarriage lever up instead of the flap lever’s a bit idiotic.

We’ve heard some other air force men say that sometimes less flying was more dangerous than a lot of flying.

Yes, definitely, yes.

And so, at that period between squadrons when you were in Townsville, how long was that?

Not long, I think we were only

12:00 there for probably a week or 10 days, we went to New Britain then.

So was that almost a leave time for you?

Yes, we didn’t have anything to do. Johnny and I used to go over to Magnetic Island to the rest and recreation camp over there. He discovered himself a nice lady friend.

Was she in one of the services?

She was a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force],

12:30 and worked in Townsville.

Did you have much to do with any of the WAAAFs, did you get to meet any of those girls?

I met a lot in my instructing days at Uranquinty later on in 1945, but they were there in the training establishments, time recorders, they did various jobs, yes, dental assistants, they were mostly very nice women.

13:00 **And you've mentioned that one American that you came across, what about – because there were quite a number based in Townsville, weren't there? Did you have much to do with Americans?**

No, no, we used to see them roaming the streets, that's all, and swimming where we were swimming. No, we had nothing to do with them. They were mostly – they weren't marines, they were American army, which were a notch or two below marine in standard.

And what did

13:30 **you make of them? What was your opinion of the Americans in general?**

I admired them hugely really for what they achieved, especially at Cape Gloucester; they captured Cape Gloucester amongst other parts of New Britain. Oh no, I liked the Americans, they were always good to us, they used to provide us with extra rations of this and that, when they got some good food in, otherwise our food was pretty mundane.

14:00 No, we got along fine with the Americans.

And how regularly were you keeping in touch with your folks and friends back …?

Regularly, I wrote a lot of letters to my Mother and my sister, and occasionally to other members of the family, but they were the main recipients, Mum and Dad and my sister Audrey. I wrote quite a lot, actually.

And what was your sister doing during those years, the war years?

14:30 She worked at the Shell Company, she was a secretary at the Shell Company.

Okay, so getting back to 80 Squadron, now you've mentioned you were at Tadji first?

Tadji.

Tadji and then- -

Hollandia.

- -and then Numfor?

Biak, no, went to Biak Island, and then

15:00 Numfor Island.

That's right, yes, okay, so the four.

And then I was finished at Numfor.

Okay. We haven't really talked much about New Guinea itself, I mean what you made of the people or the place itself, the conditions, the weather, the …

Yes, mostly being on the coast, as we were at Biak Island and at Numfor Island and not far from the coast at Tadji, we used to do a lot of swimming and

15:30 sunbaking, there was nothing much else to do. Occasionally we'd meet up with the Americans who would take us on tour and…

16:32 **So we were talking about the conditions in New Guinea, obviously rather different from down here in our temperate climes.**

Yes, I don't have many adverse recollections of the climate, it was mighty hot of course, and at times terribly humid.

17:00 At times the weather was very threatening from a flying point of view, but I didn't get really to know any New Guineans, I went out a couple of times with Americans in a jeep, they were going around the villages, they just took – I don't know whether it was Johnny or who else, me and somebody else for a ride, and I knew very little about the New Guinea people, we didn't come across them.

17:30 I don't have any really adverse feelings about the climate or the surroundings.

And what about, at those various bases or strips, what were your living quarters like?

Tents. Some people were lucky enough to have a folding bed, otherwise we slept on palliasses. Yes, oh well,

18:00 did we have cots? I can't remember. I think we did have cots actually in our tents, but we lived under canvas, yes.

Mosquito nets, that sort of thing?

Yes, I'll say, the old anopheles mosquito which gives you malaria if you're unlucky enough. But we used to take Atebrin pills to try and ward off the malaria. The funny part about it was that the blokes who got malaria seemed to be those who drank, I don't know whether it was coincidental, but

18:30 those who didn't drink didn't seem to get malaria, I don't know why. So I didn't get malaria, neither did my friends because they didn't drink either. And I also noticed that when the grog ration was handed around, which the Americans provided, combat rations, those who did the most drinking were the most likely to have a minor accident, you know, a taxiing accident or something careless and minor. But it always seemed to happen to those who liked the

19:00 drink, more than others. Might have been coincidence.

I daresay there's a connection. So you still weren't touching the – you weren't …?

No, no, I thought life was possibly dicey enough without making it worse by having a hangover or something like that.

But was there a sort of a culture of drinking?

No, not really, because the grog ration was so small. You

19:30 could have whisky and I think you had beer, but I used to give my ration to the drinking characters, so they did pretty well, because there was quite a lot of it handed to them, because of non-drinkers.

Did you use that as a bartering tool, or …?

No, no, nope.

Did you smoke?

I smoked, yes I did, oh yes, heavily. I think our ration of American cigarettes was either 20 or 40 a day, I fancy it was 40

20:00 a day we were issued with, and we used to do our best to smoke them, of course. Bit of a, you know, a soothing of the nerves, which we needed from time to time. In fact we were known to illegally, on the way home from a mission which had been a bit difficult, known to light up in the cockpit, which of course is not a good idea, but my section, one of the blokes in my

20:30 section, Eric Robinson, I used to fly number four, Eric was number three, he taught me that, I used to see him light up so I thought, "If Eric's going to light up, I will too." So I did. So that was my bad habit, smoking.

And when did most of the cigarettes get smoked, was it before an operation or coming back?

Usually after, yes. But we smoked fairly consistently throughout the day, it was too easy, if we weren't flying we'd still be smoking.

21:00 Johnny Reed didn't smoke, no. I don't know who he gave his cigarettes to.

And what was the food like?

There was one dish I didn't care for very much, we used to call them goldfish, it was tinned fish of some sort. Bully beef galore. One wonderful day at Hollandia, somebody turned up with either Vitabrits [breakfast cereal] or

21:30 Weetbix [breakfast cereal] or something, we thought we were in heaven. And sometimes the Americans on special occasions would share their chicken or something like that with us. But mostly it was pretty ghastly, the food. In fact one time at Tadji our supply ship was anchored out at Aitape, and the Japanese put a bomb down through the frontal of the supply ship, and sank it.

22:00 We lived on cigarettes and coffee for about a week, and we still had to fly every day. I don't know whether that was because we couldn't eat what the cooks had provided or what it was, but I seem to remember a period of smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee.

So how else was your time be spent when you were on the ground? I mean what would you get up to on a day when you weren't on operations?

Well,

22:30 we'd either go swimming, what else would we do? We'd play cards sometimes, we didn't have many avenues of – we used to go to the films at night occasionally. There wasn't much to do when you weren't flying. We were so keen on Glen Cooper our CO, we were very cross if we weren't put on tomorrow's flying program, we felt

23:00 discriminated against, but that was only because he was a wonderful leader and we just wanted to fly with him.

So he was squadron leader?

Yes, CO of 80 Squadron, he was my first CO in 80 Squadron.

And how often would he fly with you?

Oh, every time, every day, but then he was posted away and a fellow called Geoff Atherton took his place, and then a fellow called John Waddy was my third and last CO at

23:30 80 Squadron, but Geoff was a great bloke, John Waddy was an ace, shot down I don't know how many Jap - German aircraft, but he didn't have the likeable personality that Glen had, Glen was in a class of his own.

Can you talk a bit more about him, how he operated on an operation, what it was about him?

Well he had the wonderful knack of being able to manoeuvre the squadron round these giant

24:00 cloud systems which were – I can't think of the name of the cloud, thunder clouds, and he would always steer us round, he would get us home, he'd get us to the target, he'd get us home, unerringly, and we had absolute faith in him, and we did in Geoff and Waddy too I suppose, but Glen, we just had complete and utter confidence in him, we would go anywhere with him.

24:30 He started off life in the air force as an airman, and he was given a flying course and he was instructed by some famous names, if you look at his training log bok he was either above average or exceptional. And to have an exceptional rating as a trainee pilot is really something, but Glen achieved that. He must have had a – just an absolute talent for flying aircraft, a

25:00 very admirable man, I still see his widow, I saw her only a couple of months ago, Doreen Cooper, she was up here in Grant Street, East Brighton. So whenever I see Doreen we reminisce about old Glen, and she gets out the silver salver that we presented him with when he left 80 Squadron, and all our names are on it, Flight Sergeant Tims etcetera.

So he left the squadron while – before you

25:30 **did?**

Oh yes, he went to Numfor.

Why was that?

He was posted – where was he posted to? Well his operational tour had finished anyway, his time was up. Where on earth did Glen go? I can't remember where he went, he finished up at Williamtown, at the fighter base at Williamtown, eventually. He amongst his other jobs was air attaché in Paris, when

26:00 we were buying the Mirage, and he went over there as the air force representative, and yes, a very talented man, he was OC of Darwin at one stage , OC of the Woomera Rocket Range, he was promoted to air commodore, he retired as air commodore, which was pretty good for a man who started of as an aircraftsman.

So on those operations, generally how many planes would there be?

26:30 Yes, a squadron of 12, three sections of four. Sometimes a wing, three squadrons of 12 aircraft, mostly as a squadron, often as a section of four. Seldom did we fly in a flight, it was a section mostly and then squadron, the 12 aircraft we'd put in the sky.

So different kinds of operations for the different sizes of …?

Yes, yes. If

27:00 for example we were going out to destroy shipping that we thought the Japanese might use, we'd usually go out as a section, one section might go here and another section might go there. Not much use sending 12 aircraft to bomb and strafe three or four vessels.

So it was a large scale, if you were a full squadron of flight, what sort of operation would that be?

Usually air to ground – dive-bombing, usually. Sometimes we do it on a wing basis with three squadrons.

27:30 **And are you generally always in formation until you arrive at the target?**

Yes, the Yanks used to be amused by our, what they called, 'meticulous formation', but it was just a disciplinary thing, of course once you got over the target it was a different matter all together. But going and coming we flew pretty neat formations. Whereas the Americans, what did they call it? Just straggling along, they called their formations. I think that's what they called it.

28:00 **And what about communications, when you were up in the air? Was there radio silence or ...?**

No, no, we used to – the Americans were always chattering, but we had a form of silence yes, when we were approaching a target, dead silence. We all knew what we had to do, unless somebody got shot down, then there was a commotion.

28:30 **And what about before you'd reached the target, I mean were the lines open, were you sort of ...?**

Yes, we didn't have much to say in transit Col. Yes, I know we had to be very, very careful as to when we used the RT [radio telephone].

You mentioned some time ago that – I think it was when you first flew on the Beaufort to

29:00 **Tadji and you spotted that ...**

Japanese flying boat?

Yes. Other than that did you see anything, was there any – did you spot any enemy aircraft?

During the day?

Yes, not that day but during your time out there?

No, not one.

So the greatest threat was really the ground to air ack ack [anti aircraft]?

Yes, anti-aircraft was our enemy.

Okay, we might use that as our cue. You've mentioned some things here like Tadji, the swine of a strip.

Yes.

29:30 **I guess these are different operations, but there's one here, 'burnt a truck, stray for other trucks, villages, stores, hits everywhere'. Do you remember that operation, what that might have entailed?**

Not particularly, we would have been given a target and a Japanese – it'd be a Japanese unit of some sort - we would have been given the target and into it we'd fly, and if we spotted a

30:00 truck, we'd burn that up, yes.

It says here, Wakde, Wakde vicinity...?

W-a-k-d-e?

Yes, Wakde.

Wakde, that was an island, and we actually – it was invaded by an American taskforce, a fleet of American ships, and we used to fly protective cover over the ships. Is that what it says there?

Yes,

30:30 **'shipping patrol, Wakde vicinity'. Okay, so you're basically going with the convoy, the shipping convoy?**

Yes, keep any Japanese aircraft away from them.

Right. And it also mentions somewhere about flying top cover?

Top cover – that would be for Liberator bombers.

Right. So – do you want to have a look at that? I've a feeling that you do, you keep glancing down. What did that entail, those different operations,

31:00 **for example the ...?**

Top cover?

Yes.

Well just we'd fly as a squadron above the Liberators at their bombing height, just to ward off any Japanese intercepts, so that's when the 78 Squadron got lucky, on that sort of mission.

And when it came to, for example the one that mentioned the trucks, was it, when you get

there, open slather as to choose your own target or – how was it structured?

31:30 Well we'd be led in by our section leader or perhaps even a squadron commander would lead in, and you'd just pick your own target, yes. Usually you'd pick one out for yourself and fire at that.

So how did that work with assessing how much damage had been achieved? I mean would you make a claim and perhaps that'd be verified? How would that work?

No, you'd have to be debriefed by the intelligence officer, and you would just tell him what you

32:00 saw and what you saw happened when you fired your 6.5 Brownings. We always debriefed after every mission.

And how much of an idea would you have going in of what sort of targets, what sort of resistance you might encounter?

You'd usually know what damage, if any, you inflicted, you'd see it, you'd see smoke rising after you'd gone over the target. You

32:30 usually knew what had happened.

As you say, I mean the Japanese are clearly in retreat at that point, but how stiff was their resistance from the ground?

Well some of the hot spots, places like Manokwari and other places that I've mentioned, they were hot spots, and they were heavily defended. Franco Watts and I were sent

33:00 out one morning to check out one of the – Sorong I think it was, one of the hot spots, and we were supposed to report on any shipping in the harbour, but there wasn't any. But we carried bombs, Franco and I, and we dropped them, and he said, "I watched you fly across the harbour Norm, and you should have seen

33:30 the number of anti-aircraft rounds hitting the water behind you." He was amazed. And I didn't see them, they were behind me, not in front. At times there were hot spots, yes. Sorong, it was.

And those instances, were you able to take evasive action, or was it just a matter of got a job to do?

Well, if you're flying across a harbour, you know, looking for shipping, you fly pretty well in a straight line.

34:00 Evasive action, yes, after you drop your bombs you waffle around a bit trying to throw them off track. Once you've got out of range you're all right.

What sort of loads were you carrying with the bombs?

Usually either two 250s or two 500s, we could

34:30 carry two 500s, it was pretty heavy stuff, actually. But that morning Franco and I had to go and do this reccie of Sorong Harbour, he went unserviceable before we took off, we were taking off in the dark, just pre-dawn. So he said, "You go Norm and I'll pick you up in the air." So off goes Norm with his bombs on board, and I get a

35:00 call over the RT, "You've got to come back, I'm not going to be serviceable for some time." So then I had the unenviable task of bringing the aircraft back with a full load of petrol and two 500 pound bombs on board, and I realised on final approach how I was dropping out of the sky, but I gave it enough power to make it safe. But it was a rather dicey feeling having to bring those bombs back, I would have preferred to have jettisoned them and started again. However, I got it down all right.

35:30 Anyway Franco and I eventually took off.

Was it deemed not the correct thing to jettison …?

Waste bombs?

Yes. Well you couldn't claim that you'd actually had a hit on the target, could you?

No, no. I think you'd probably be forgiven if you did, because of the weight, but provided you had enough power on the final approach you'd be all right, you'd hit the deck with a bit of a thump of course, but I don't think I

36:00 did actually, I think I landed all right.

Can you list for us the different kinds – so we've got it concrete for the archives, and to do with your specific experience - what the different operations were? You know, be it bombing, strafing, be it patrol, reconnaissance, what were the different kinds of operations?

Well top cover, air to

36:30 air, in case of enemy attack, aircraft attack, specific targets, strafing, search for shipping, which you had to use your initiative to do, or your section leader did, basically air to ground attack. Dive-bombing,

37:00 skip-bombing where you dropped a bomb on the water, short of the target and it would skip into the target, that's if your target was big enough. Hard to remember actually all the different targets we attacked.

Tell us a little about the skip-bombing, you haven't really mentioned that yet. How did that work?

Well if you were going to attack a boat or a ship of reasonable size, the best way to do it was to drop your bomb on the water and

37:30 let it skip across the water, so you didn't have to go too close to the target before you pulled away. But I don't think we did very much of that, I'd have to again look at my log book. So that was a rarity the skip-bomb, we usually just dive-bombed.

So what was the difference in terms of how you flew the plane with skip-bombing …?

Well skip-bombing you just flew at the target straight and level, whereas with dive-bombing, well you dive. I can't

38:00 remember much about the skip-bombing.

So you mentioned those two patrol boats …

Patrol boats, yes.

Yes, someone, well, after the fact, said that he was quite sure that you'd sunk those.

According to Honey Fame, my section leader at the time, yes.

Do you recall other incidents, instances, where you attacked any shipping with success like that?

We didn't

38:30 in shipping have usually such an important target, naval vessels, they were mostly civilian vessels being used as barges, carrying Japanese troops and supplies around, so it was a rarity to find something as important as a patrol boat. The Japanese Navy of course, the main navy, was nowhere to be seen.

39:00 **And the ground targets, what did they mainly consist of?**

Japanese headquarter buildings, anti-aircraft gun emplacements, there were a couple of them, supply depots, targets like that, a

39:30 variety of them but I can't remember them.

And did you ever work in conjunction with – I mean you've told us how in a way you were really working ultimately for the Americans …

For the Americans.

The 4th or 5th?

The 5th Air Force; General Kenny was their commander.

Yes. Did you ever have anything to do with them in the sky? Were you actually working in tandem with the American Air Force at all?

No. Funny you should say that, because one day I was

40:00 doing an engine test at Hollandia, and I took off and I saw this P38, Lockheed Lightning, and I thought, "I'll jump on his tail without him even knowing it." We, how wrong was I, because when I got near him, he saw me and he climbed almost vertically, and there was no way known I could climb with him. Then he turned over on his back and came down, and got on my tail as much as to say, "That'll show you." Yes, he was a pretty good pilot, but no way the Kittyhawk could stay with the

40:30 rate of climb. Well they had twin Alison engines, and we only had one, it's a very nimble aircraft, the P38. I would have loved to have flown one actually.

Tape 8

00:31 **Okay, so what have you got?**

Well that's the final one when I was a flying instructor, it says, "His character and bearing are excellent, and it is especially recommended that he be appointed to a commission." But that wasn't until July, '45.

"This member is good commission material, and quiet, unassuming and reliable." And that

01:00 was another one. "It is considered that he will be an asset to any unit, and is well worthy of holding commissioned rank." And that was in March, '45.

So just for the record Norm, what are we looking at here?

We're looking at here what they

01:30 called a confidential report for the pilot, I guess. This is when I was an NCO. "Sincere type of NCO and of good appearance, and keen to remain in the service and should develop along sound lines. Recommended for a commission." That was the first one.

02:00 Anyway, there were three recommendations, yes. Finally the third one came off. I didn't mind, I was happy to be a warrant officer, the best rank of the service, actually.

Why do you say that?

Well, you know, you were amongst the elite in the sergeants' mess, you're king of the sergeants' mess, when you were a pilot officer you were the lowest rank in the officers' mess. The warrant officer was a great rank. I wasn't one for long.

02:30 **Okay, now we'll just wrap up a couple more questions about 80 Squadron operations, because you were obviously – 80, I think it was a total of 80 operations, so it's a fair number.**

In the two squadrons.

Yes, in the two combined. What for you were the most fearful moments when flying? What did you feel was the greatest threat to you when …?

Flying through a barrage of anti-

03:00 aircraft bursts, and wondering how on earth you got through them without being clobbered. Quite extraordinary, almost like a blanket. But you had no option; if you were dive-bombing you went through it. Miraculously you seldom – or seldom did anyone get hit, I don't know why they didn't, except my poor old mate Don Wallace in my aircraft, he got hit all right. I don't know, you just skulked and you lit a cigarette on the way home.

03:30 They were the most dicey moments, flying through the black clouds. But we weren't the only ones to do that of course.

A few times today you've said how lucky you were on a number of occasions. Then I was looking through your memoirs of your war experience, you talk about having a guardian angel. Do you feel that that's what you had?

I felt it was inexplicable that I'd survived some

04:00 episodes that really I shouldn't have. I mean I'm not a deeply religious person, but I am a believer of something, but I don't know what that something is.

Were you ever religious at all?

No, not really, probably irreligious describes me best. But no, there was some presence there, I felt, why I deserved it I do not know. But you know, just that simple little thing about running out of fuel as I

04:30 touched down at Gove, made me think of it, and the incendiary bullet in my wing tag made me think a bit. And then I had another episode of a guardian angel type post-war, where we had our camp at Tocumwal and I did a night cross-country in a Mustang, and I came back to Tocumwal airfield, and it was pitch black and we had a Toledo

05:00 flare flight path, and I came in and I hit the ground, the worst landing day or night I have ever done in my life, ever. And I thought, "What on earth have I done?" I gave it full throttle, whipped up the undercarriage, and then eventually whipped up the flaps and did another circuit. Around I went, this time, second attempt, perfect night

05:30 landing. I taxi back to the hangar and the truck drives up and out gets a warrant officer, an armourer actually, his face is the colour of your jacket, he leaps up onto my main plane and he said, "Thank God you saw it sir." I said, "What are you talking about?" "Well," he said, "We stalled our truck in the middle of the strip, we couldn't restart it and we couldn't move it before you touched down. You were smart to go over the top of us." I had no idea it was there,

06:00 not the faintest. I wondered what on earth he was jabbering about when he got up on my main plane. But that was the worst landing I think I have ever done. In fact it was so hard I thought, "They'd better check the undercarriage to make sure it's in tact." So that was why I went around. But he thought I was very clever going over the top of him.

Well you were, you were.

I was, yes, but it wasn't my cleverness, it was something else.

Did you ever carry a

06:30 **lucky charm or anything of that sort?**

No, not really, no.

Are there any rituals that you might have gone through before you took off on an op?

No.

I'm not saying that would have changed anything … What about other men in the squadron, did they have their little …?

I suppose they had their moments, they never really said much about it, no. I think we tended to keep these things to ourselves, and

07:00 our opinions as to how we could have got out of them, and why we did. So it didn't stop during the war, it's kept going for me for a while.

And from what do you derive your greatest satisfaction during the operational phase?

Doing operations? Those patrol boats, they were my greatest satisfaction. And there were other fires that started up,

07:30 ground strafing, but no, that was the most satisfying sortie I did, it was a long, long way, way down south.

That was – did you say Ambon or Ceram?

Ceram, it was near Ceram, the Tinnanbar Islands I think, round there somewhere, down the – what do they call them, the East Java Sea? What was it called? Anyway.

08:00 **A lot of islands out there.**

Yes, there are.

And so would you fly much further than that?

No, that was probably the greatest distance, that's when we had to refuel back at Middleburg Island, that's when the American got up on the wing.

So what, during your time what was the hottest area that you flew into?

I think it was one of two places, Sorong and – what was the other one? I mentioned it before. Manokwari, Sorong, and there was one other hot

08:30 spot, I can't think of it offhand, and they were heavily defended. They shot a few aircraft down actually, got in their dinghies, some got picked up, some didn't.

So when someone was lost on operation, what would be the repercussions back at base?

Well, first of all we would have to stay with them if they were in a dinghy for as long as we could without jeopardising

09:00 our getting back to base, and you'd call up the air sea rescue people and hope that they had a Catalina in the vicinity that could go and pick up the downed pilot. So there was always search procedures underway, but they weren't always on time, unfortunately. It depended really on how near to land the chap had to bail out.

09:30 **Okay, moving on, is there anything more that you wanted to cover in the operations period?**

No, I don't think so, no. It was always a relief to get back to base in one piece and swap notes with the boys. And don't think we didn't get frightened because we did, if you didn't get frightened you didn't have any

10:00 nervous system. But you just had to get over that and press on regardless, which everyone did. But we had an undying feeling that we were not going to die.

You mentioned earlier the – you told us that story about the chap who won't be named, who ended up LMF, I believe.

10:30 **Any cases of that …?**

That's the only one I ever heard of. There may have been others, but that's the only one that I ever heard of. I just can't remember who told me, he said, "That bloke, do you know what happened to him?"

So what was it like to come to the end of your tour?

A feeling of relief, that nobody's going to shoot at you, for a while at

11:00 least.

What about those last couple of sorties, knowing that the end was …?

Yes, I know what you mean. You mean a feeling of apprehension, will I complete my tour or will I not? No, we didn't really – I don't think we adopted that attitude. But we were glad to finish, of course.

11:30 **Where were we?**

We'd just left 80 Squadron, posted back sail.

Yes, so what was next? That brought you back to Point Cook, is that right?

I was posted to central flying school at Point Cook to do a service flying instructor's course on

12:00 Wirraways, so I spent early 1944 at Point Cook. First of all you do the Tiger Moth instructor's course and then you go from there to the Wirraway instructor's course. And when I completed that I was posted [to] Uranquinty, just near Wagga. And I instructed there for the remainder of the war, and finally discharged from there in about

12:30 April I think, '46; March or April, '46. So I spent virtually a year there, but the war was over, what, in August '45? Yes. So from then on it was recreation. But you had to take your turn, wait your turn to be discharged, and my turn came in March, I think it was, '46, March or April.

So they had you back on the Tiger Moths, the

13:00 **Wirraways, your old friends?**

Well yes, my service flying was of course on Wirraways, but as I say, we had to do the Tiger Moth instructor's course initially. One followed straight on from the other. I had very good instructors, and a flight commander called Harry Worth. John and I had an unusual episode, we were flying together one day in a Wirraway and what were we doing? We were doing

13:30 wing overs, I think, doing that, and each one got us nearer the ground, and down and round we went, and I said to John, "I don't think you'd better be doing many more of those John, had you?" And he said, "I'm not flying it, you are." If we had done one more wing over we would have done ourselves over. Yes, so he thought I was flying it and I thought he

14:00 was flying it, it was flying itself. Anyway, that was in the central flying school course.

So how long were those courses?

I think it was at least three months, I think. I think I went to Uranquinty about March '45.

And it's around this time that you're recommended again for commissioning?

Yes, from Point Cook, yes, I got a very dashing report

14:30 from Point Cook, but it had no immediate effect at all. But see, strangely enough the CO of 84 Squadron, Phil Ford, when I first went to 84, he was then at Point Cook, he didn't think much of me at 84 Squadron, but he thought a huge amount of me at Point Cook, for some reason. "He was one of my best pilots," he said. I'd hate to think what the worst one would be like. Phil Ford, yes. I enjoyed the course

15:00 at central flying school, that's why I was very sad when they were going to sell off Point Cook. Anyway, they haven't, they're going to keep it. Yes, so from there John and I went to Uranquinty.

So sorry, it was Phil Ford, who …?

He was the CO of 84 Squadron, and then he was – I think he was chief instructor at central flying school, something like that, well up in the staff.

15:30 And again I had [a] master from Caulfield Grammar at central flying school, he was a bloke called David Hughes, who became minister for public works. Did I tell you about him before? No.

You did mention him.

Did I? And he was public works, New South Wales, for the building of the Opera House. Anyway, he was chief ground instructor at central flying school, and who should I also meet there but my old Tiger Moth instructor

16:00 John, Johnny Mason. And John Reed for some reason or other bought himself a motorbike, so we used to choof up and down with me on the pillion seat, up and down when we went on weekend leave and so forth. I don't know what happened – what his father did about his motorbike when he died. Yes, Uranquinty was a good base.

But obviously you'd come away as a pilot in that year for Phil Ford to sort of give you a bit of a pasting back in 84 and then a

16:30 **year later to speak so highly of you. Did you personally feel that you'd come some way as a …?**

Oh yes, of course, but I don't think his memory served him very well. Never mind. What are you doing? Don't want you. That was when I learned to drink at Uranquinty, I was in the mess one night with a fellow called Frank Bolson, and Frank had been an instructor right throughout the war, never got on operations, just instructed and instructed. He said, "I'll buy you a drink,

17:00 Norm," I said, "Yes, thanks Frank, I'll have a lemon squash." He said, "You'll have what?" I said, "I'll have a lemon squash thanks." He said, "I see you don't drink." I said, "No Frank, flying and drinking don't belong to each other." "Well," he said, "I'll give you a piece of advice. In this instructional game, you've got a choice of drinking or going bonkers." So I said to him, "Well buy me a beer then." And so he bought me a beer and that was the beginning of my drinking career.

17:30 But he did me a great favour, because I'm sure he was right, you would go bonkers with some of the things that your pupils used to do.

How did that first beer go down?

Very well, yes.

So tell us about your exploits as – here we go – as an instructor. Why would you have gone bonkers?

Well it was more frightening than being on operations really.

18:00 It was more frightening than being on operations, some of things your pupils did. And one episode which is quite extraordinary, the flight commander used to allocate us aircraft first thing of a morning, I got into my aircraft with the pupil in the front seat, and I said, "You do the take off, you do the instrument check, check the controls and take off." So off we go. And we get up to about 400 feet, he said, "I can't stop the nose from coming up sir." I said, "What are you talking about, just push the control

18:30 column forward." He said, "I'm doing that with all my might and it still won't come up." I said, "Well trim it, use the elevator trim." He said, "I've already done that." I said, "Well, you'd better give the aircraft to me, I'll take it over." So I took it over, it took all my strength with both hands and arms, to hold the control column with fully forward elevator trim, to stop it from climbing and stalling. I got it around, and

19:00 went down wind onto final leg, and instead of pulling the control column back, all I had to do was just ease a little bit of pressure and the aircraft sat down. So we got it back all right, taxied up to dispersal and I couldn't figure it out, I said, "Did you check the controls?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well they don't seem to have proper movement." And we got out of the aircraft,

19:30 and somebody had stuck a length of broom handle between the elevators and the tail plane, a piece of broom handle about that long.

Sabotage?

Yes, sabotage. But it wasn't aimed at me, because the aircraft had only just been allocated to me about you know, 10 minutes before. So whoever was going to fly it was going to be in terrible trouble.

God. And did they investigate who did it?

Yes, they did but they never found out who did

20:00 it, some disgruntled ground staff character did it. God, and I'm saying to my pupil, "What's wrong with you, just push the stick forward." Yes.

I'm sure there would have been other instances where it was just as matter of the pupil's inexperience that could have sent you a bit bonkers, right?

Yes, night flying for example, we used to used Toledo flares, which are kerosene type flares to mark

20:30 the runway out. One of them one night, when he was in the front seat, ran through about eight flares, one after the other; it wasn't dangerous but it was a very poor performance. No, they were mostly pretty good, a lot of my pupils had been already trained in Calgary or Canada and had their wings, so they were not too bad. Some were better than others, but they weren't too

21:00 bad.

And were they subsequently being posted to squadrons, or was it during that stage …?

No, there was nowhere for them to go, that's why they sent them back from Canada because in 1945 there was little point in sending them – she's drinking her milk now – there was little point in sending them to the UK because things were virtually over then. They came back and did a refresher course and I don't know what happened to most of them then. Had a couple of good footballers, a fellow called Ralph

21:30 Challis, he played in the ruck for Hawthorn, and a chap called Bert Harper who played on the wing for Essendon, and they were pretty good. And although I was only a flight sergeant or a warrant officer, I had commissioned pupils, but they were very good you know, they didn't attempt to outrank me or anything.

But did you see yourself in some of the pupils? I mean you talked earlier about your penchant for aerobatics, that kind of thing, were there

22:00 **pupils who got a bit carried away as well?**

A couple of them used to get carried away low flying a bit, they went a little bit lower than I would have liked. Oh dear.

Okay, we'll stop. We're on? Okay. So you're instructing and how old are you at this point?

I was 21, yes, 21.

And the

22:30 **pupils were only a couple of years younger, I guess?**

Well probably no more than a year younger, I wouldn't think. Yes, probably a year younger, but they hadn't been on ops or anything like that, of course, they didn't have the opportunity.

And how would you describe your technique, your style as a …?

Of instructing? I tried not to be a screamer, because I always tried to be as calm and

23:00 affable as my Tiger Moth instructor Johnny Mason was. But it wasn't easy at times to be that forbearing and to forgive mistakes. But I suppose sometimes – I don't think I yelled very much at all, actually. Sometimes you got a bit fearful that you're going to drop a wing on landing, and have to do something about that. But no, I think I was a reasonable instructor.

23:30 I remembered my initial instructor at Benalla, and he was another example of why I should be a good instructor; don't do what he did.

And sometimes those sorts of stories can sound almost comical, but as you were saying earlier you know, there were so many accidents, so many casualties, just in training itself, you were saying in England how many were killed in training.

Yes, the casualty rate in training was awful, yes, to

24:00 say nothing of the night raids and daylight raids over Germany and so forth.

But with your pupils, I mean as you say, they were a bit more experienced, were there accidents at all, or was it …?

One of the flight commanders, Bruce Everett was killed whilst I was there, they thought it was me, actually. This Wirraway took off

24:30 with Bruce Everett in the rear seat and his pupil in the front, and his engine failed, and he'd been instructing pupils for years. In the event of engine failure after take off, do not try and turn back onto the airfield or airstrip, but land – raise the undercarriage and land straight ahead, because otherwise you'll stall. And what does Bruce do? He figures he's got enough to turn back onto the

25:00 airfield at Uranquinty, but he wasn't. So up in flames he and his pupil went, and when I landed they thought – I'd taken off at much the same time, they thought it was me, it couldn't possibly be Bruce Everett, not Flight Lieutenant Everett, who'd been so experienced over the years, but it was Bruce. And what made him try and turn back I'll never know. But otherwise Johnny of course was killed in his aircraft, but I can't remember any other fatality, if any other, there might have

25:30 been some but I can't remember them. I know we used to turn up at the Wagga cemetery with some regularity.

Off camera during a tea break you were talking about, I think it was Johnny and having to tell his girlfriend at the time …?

Yes.

That was after Johnny …?

Yes, the night after he was killed.

Yes, can you tell us, because we haven't got that one on the record, on camera, can you tell us about that again?

Yes, well it was a Friday afternoon and

26:00 I'd arranged with John to go into Wagga for a weekend's leave and to go and meet our girls, and I rang

the mess, the officers' mess to speak to him and they said, "I'm sorry, he's not here." With that a fellow called Clark came to the sergeants' mess and asked for me – Geoff Clark his name was – and I went, "Yes Geoff, what is it?" He said, "I'm sorry, your mate's dead."

26:30 So I said, "What happened?" And he said, "The aircraft just pranged." So I went into Wagga to see John's girl and to tell her, and she was only a very young, tiny thing, and I knocked on the door, or rang the doorbell, whatever, she came to the door, and I said, "I've got some bad news, I'm sorry." She said, "I can tell by your face that something's wrong." I said, "Yes, John was killed this afternoon,

27:00 and I'm so sorry that you won't see him again." And she said, "Well, I am very, very sorry for you." And this from you know, a young girl who thought of me in those terms, I thought it was very nice of her. I don't know what I did then, I must have gone off and – I don't know what I did then. But that was a fortnight before my 21st birthday. I'm not sure whether John was slightly younger or slightly older than I, no, he wasn't 21. So I've never forgotten that

27:30 girl, the compassion that she had.

Yes, I mean considering how old she was, and you not even being 21 and having the good grace to still go and let her know the day he's died, that's quite amazing.

Yes.

And was there a service held at Uranquinty or …?

At Wagga.

At Wagga?

Yes, his parents came up, they drove up to Wagga, and they

28:00 came to Uranquinty, and they asked would I drive their car in John's funeral procession. So I said, "Yes, of course I will." And so I did. But they were very upset. "What went wrong, Norm?" And I said, "I can't really tell you except something badly went wrong in the aircraft engine and they couldn't control it." Yes. I've been back to see his grave a couple of times, it's

28:30 in the war section of the Wagga cemetery.

So is that where you were still based when the war – when the Japanese surrendered on VJ [Victory over Japan] Day?

Yes.

And what can you recall of that period?

I was on leave actually, the weekend the peace – or the Armistice - was

29:00 signed, for the peace whatever it was, and I was actually out with a girlfriend and we'd just driven home and we were sitting in the front seat of the car and her father came racing out to tell me the news. He might have waited a little while but – so that's how I found out about the Japanese surrendering. So that was August, '45, yes.

And the news of the A-bombs being dropped earlier, had that come through as well?

29:30 Yes.

And what did you make of all that?

Well I was astounded that such a weapon could possibly be built and used. However, the theory was and I agree with it, that it saved millions of lives probably. Because had the Japanese mainland been invaded, I'd hate to think of the casualties on either side. As it was, Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered very severely but it certainly shortened the war.

30:00 So that's about my history of war in war time. Unless there's anything more you'd like?

Okay, well let's move on because I know there's a fair bit happened – there's been many years since the war. What happened, you were discharged early '46, so you had a good four, five, six months there still at Uranquinty?

Oh

30:30 dear me, this is ridiculous.

So when you were discharged from – you were still at Uranquinty?

From Uranquinty, yep.

So what did you do those – I mean the war finished, were you still training …?

We were doing a bit of flying, the bushfire patrols, and I was taking up the odd character for joy flights and that sort of thing, but did very little flying after

31:00 finishing the course for the pupils that I had. Yes, there wasn't much to do; bushfire patrol, I think that's recorded in the log book. So life wound down then, and off back to Melbourne, discharge depot; Melbourne Cricket Ground I think it was, pretty sure it was, where the discharge section was, my appointment finished and I was put on the

31:30 reserves.

So was there any sort of ceremony attached to that, or was it all …

No, no.

And were you able to sort of at any point reflect on what had happened, that tumultuous five years, and your involvement and what it all meant?

No, not really. It was part of my life, a compartment of my life that I enjoyed greatly, there was some sadness but a

32:00 lot of joy; the joy outweighed the sadness by a million to one. I felt very privileged that I was able to fly aircraft, and more particularly to meet the men I did, and to serve under some of the men I did, so it was a great experience for me, and lucky to come through, a bit lucky, as you can tell. But I'm sure I'm not the only one who could recount many stories like that. I've heard it mentioned

32:30 a few times from others, "Oh golly, I don't know how I got over that one"; I've heard that quite often.

So what was next for you after discharge?

I went back to the public service, to the flax production committee, I think I told you, did I tell you about being offered a job with TAA?

Yes.

I did, yes. And I went to work for my father. And then the next thing I know they're starting up the Citizen Air Force squadrons again as they

33:00 had pre-war, and number 21 City of Melbourne Squadron were looking for six citizen pilots. I don't know how many applied, I think a lot applied, but I was lucky, I was one of the six that were chosen to begin flying, which we did in January, 1949. Our squadron aircraft were P51 DE North American Mustangs, manufactured in Australia. And they were a beautiful aeroplane. One of our characters had three DSCs [Distinguished Service Cross], Tony Gaze, the DSC and two

33:30 bars, which was quite an achievement. When Lord Huntingfield came out to present us with our squadron crest, we were paraded in front of him, and he walked up to Tony Gaze and said, "You seem to have done quite well my boy." Yes, sporting three DSCs. It was a great time and we flew every second weekend, sometimes we did the slow flying on things like Anzac Day, Armistice Day, Grand Final at the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground], aerobatic

34:00 displays over Government House, formation flying, and all enjoyable and nobody shooting at you, very relaxed it was.

Had you managed to keep your hand in prior to that, between '46 and '49?

No, no, no, but it didn't take long to go – about an hour and a half to go solo in a Tiger Moth and about another hour to go solo in a Wirraway, so it hadn't left.

34:30 And then of course you don't have any dual instruction in a Mustang because there's only one seat.

And how did the Mustangs shape up? How did they compare to the Kittyhawk?

Much superior, hugely superior, a beautiful aeroplane. I almost enjoy the Mustang more than the Vampire, they had a Vampire which followed on the Mustang. No, I loved the Mustang, it was a beautiful gun platform for air to air shooting, and air to ground

35:00 gunnery, beautiful for rocket firing, just a magnificent aircraft.

How much of that sort of work or training were you doing? I mean you mentioned the ceremonial aspect, the fly-overs and that sort of thing, but what about – I mean how serious was the squadron in terms of, you know, being on a footing for potential action?

Yes, well we did army co-op, we used to go to

35:30 Seymour, to Puckapunyal on exercises with the army, dropping all sorts of things for the army. No, it was quite a serious squadron, but it was a delight to be in it.

And that was you were saying every second weekend?

Every second weekend was a flying weekend, but we did a lot of this other stuff during the week; my old man being a patriot, he didn't mind me taking time off work

36:00 to represent 21 Squadron, so I could do it whenever I wanted to.

And were those planes being flown outside of those weekends?

No, I don't think so. We had some permanent officers, the CO was permanent, we had a couple of other permanent officers and I guess they probably tested them, but basically the flying was done only at the weekends, when we flew.

And when did the Vampires come in?

They came in – I did my conversion to a Vampire

36:30 about 1951, I'm guessing, I think it was '51. Might have been in 1950 when we got them, and we had a mixture of Mustangs and Vampires for a while. Initially we had a couple of Tiger Moths, we had a Wirraway, might even be two Wirraways and the rest were RP51 B Mustangs. Very solid aircraft.

So am I right in

37:00 **saying that you were the first civilian air force man to …?**

Fly a Vampire?

Yes, is that right?

Yes, I was.

And how did that come about?

Well because Glen Cooper, being my CO, gave me the favour of doing it, that was the only reason. It wasn't that I was better than anyone else, he just thought it'd be nice if I got my picture in the paper, being Glen.

And you're saying that you rated the Mustang higher than the Vampire, is that right?

Well I enjoyed it

37:30 more because it was such a beautiful aircraft to fly in formation, very sensitive to throttle movements, whereas a jet engine is not as sensitive, you've got to really be on your toes for formation flying in a Vampire. It was achievable, but just the Mustang seemed to be easier, somehow. And the Mustang in my opinion was a better gun platform than the Vampire.

38:00 **And what about when the war in Korea came along? Any thoughts of joining permanent air force again, or …?**

Yes, well Glen Cooper had our call up papers in his office safe, and he was waiting for the word to call us up, but they were starting to wind down in Korea at that stage, and it became a bit of a political matter and they wouldn't take any citizen air force pilots up there, and they didn't. So we didn't get to serve

38:30 in 77 Squadron. One of our COs did, Dickie Creswell. I didn't feel we were missing very much actually, in Korea. I think I told you my flight commander at Mildura was killed there, Lou Spence.

So how long were you involved with the Citizen Air Force?

We were gazetted about

39:00 August, '48 and I finished my appointment in April '53. But we didn't start flying till January '49, so it was four years and a couple of months. It was supposed to be a two year appointment, and the AOC Wally Walters came down when my two years was finished, and he said, "Tims, you realise that your initial appointment is over, don't

39:30 you?" I said, "Yes, I do sir." He said, "How do you feel about that?" I said, "Extremely sad because I've had a wonderful time in 21 Squadron." He said, "Well how would you like another two years?" I said, "Very much, thank you sir." So he fixed that for me. But we all had four years, not just me. The best four years of my life, actually.

Well Norm, we've only got probably a couple of minutes left, two or three minutes left, so I'll just throw the floor open to you, I mean is there

40:00 **anything before we wrap up that you'd like to have recorded?**

I don't think so, I think I've told you about as much as I can, or certainly as much as I can remember. Just that I had a wonderful time in the air force, mainly because of the blokes I met and flew with, and who became my friends. I've got this birthday party on Wednesday, two of my friends from Number 21City of Melbourne

40:30 Squadron will be here, we were known as the Three Musketeers, because when there was formation flying to be done, frequently Bill and Wilkie and I were told to do it. But they've been great mates for 54 years, so that was a bonus from citizen days. I don't see any of my war time squadron mates now, I think they're mostly dead, actually.

Did 80 Squadron have – was there an association

41:00 **that you were part of, or …?**

Yes, they did, and a fellow called Jim – Jim, Jim – wrote a book, it was called, 'It Had To B U', because BU was our squadron insignia, and he wrote a book which is the history of 80 Squadron. Jim Harding his name is, and he still sends an occasional newsletter around. We had a reunion at Townsville where the squadron was formed, which was most successful, some years ago. Yes, 80 Squadron has a kind of,

41:30 what's the word, well it just has a collection of names really now, we don't do anything.

And do you march? Have you marched on …?

On Anzac Day? I have, yes. I haven't in the last couple of years, but I hope to again.

Under which banner?

80 Squadron. No, no, wrong. Fighter squadron branch,

42:00 which is the branch of the Air Force Association.

INTERVIEW ENDS