# Australians at War Film Archive

## Sydney Kay (Eric) - Transcript of interview

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## Tape 1

00:35 **Alright, Eric, we'll start with that life overview and we'll start with when and where you were born maybe?**

Okay if I can start, right at the start if you like, I was born in Rockhampton which is a central Queensland city. The youngest son of English emigrants if you like who came out to Australia in 1913, the youngest of eight.

01:00 And we lived in Rockhampton on what was called the Emu Park Road, we had a farm there, well my parents had a farm there. Basically because of my age I wouldn't remember much about Rockhampton whatsoever. At a very early age for me anyhow, I with my family, naturally moved to Mackay, where

01:30 we lived in Kenworth Street for a little while and then my father purchased some land, at all places in Cemetery Road, and the reason it was called Cemetery Road was because it was opposite the cemetery in Mackay. And he built a shed with windows with push up shutters so that we could live until he got his farm organised. He was basically an

02:00 architect but he was doing building as a trade thing. At that stage when he was building the farm up he happen to get a job at the Mackay Base Hospital where the resident doctor's residence, which was a huge building with high ceilings and that pressed work on the ceilings,

02:30 he purchased the old building which had been pulled down. And he put that up bit by bit until we had a home to live in and we did have a big home to live in. I went, originally when I first went to Mackay I went to school in the Central School. The only thing I can remember about that is I cut my hand on a piece of tin and had to be taken to hospital in the ambulance and get it stitched up, and that's all I remember about the

03:00 Central School. I walked to school from the Cemetery Road property which was about four miles, roughly six kilometres from home. I used to walk through the cane fields to go to school. I wasn't a real good scholar; I stopped there for sometime because it was an awful damn school anyhow with probably second or third grade teachers.

03:30 They'd all be dead so you can put that in. As an example my schooling the headmaster one day got up at assembly and said he just read the best composition that he'd ever seen written by a student. But he'd given the marks minus thirty two because of all the other mistakes that were made. So that finished me with schooling, that finished me with the headmaster; that finished me

04:00 with all the teachers, I was a poor student. I went to school there, I had a number of accidents which meant hospitalisation, like broken arms etc, etc. And the last one before going to what they called Intermediate State School then, was I had a diving accident when I was swimming and was in hospital for a little time. And then I went back to school and I had delayed concussion

04:30 and I had a long time off schoolwork. Consequently I left school when I turned thirteen in grade six. My first job of all things was on the baker's cart. I lasted a week. You know why I got sacked? The reason I got sacked was very simple - I couldn't keep up with the horse. The horse was trained to keep moving

05:00 from one stop to the next stop and if you couldn't keep up it kept going anyhow, so that was me. Then I went on a fruit cart for a little while and then I went to what was called a drapery shop, Lamberts and I became, after a little while a shop assistant behind the manchester and later on the shop assistant behind the men's counter. I stopped there for some time and at thirteen –

05:30 of course, before I went to Lamberts I met a very nice girl, because that was, if you work the timing out and the dates out that was very hard times. And we had a rough time because my father had an accident in working for the quarry for the state government, just to

06:00 get a job. And he was in hospital for some considerable time and my mother ran the farm with the

assistance of those boys that were left home, which were three of us. My oldest brother Roland had shifted to Sydney for work, he was married. And we kept the farm going for some time, I'll tell you about that some time. But we kept the farm going,

06:30 my mother kept it going we were the assistants. Anyhow whenever I got six pence, which is five cents to spare I used to go to the pictures on a Saturday night and that's where I met a very fine girl called Dorothy, you met her this morning, because we got married after the war. Anyhow working through the system I was at Lamberts behind the counter

07:00 and I also worked delivering newspapers to get a few dollars, two hundred and forty newspapers a day which was delivered before work, naturally. I used to get up at two o'clock and do that work, do the deliveries, get home and shower etc and go to work in Lamberts. The war clouds were then coming onto the horizon, my two brothers, Jim and Alf, who are both in the CMF [Citizens Military Force] at the beginning of the war

07:30 enlisted. And their first posting was to Darwin, in Darwin one became a corporal and then sergeant. The older brother James became the warrant officer which was a company sergeant major. And I was still at Lamberts and I joined the boy scouts at that time. Through the system became a

08:00 troop leader and a king scout and later on when the ATC [Air Training Corps] came, if I'm going too fast just tell me. They came to Mackay and I joined the ATC with the intention of joining air crew in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] on a formation as I said with ATC, I joined there and I became a corporal and done all the exams and passed all the qualifications.

08:30 And my two brothers in the meantime were posted to overseas to the Middle East. My oldest brother was commissioned in the field in Tobruk therefore he became a 'Rat of Tobruk', naturally. My other brother who was a little younger was wounded reasonably badly in the Middle East and he spent quite a bit of time in hospital there. And

09:00 if we can go through in the quick steps to my enlistment in the RAF [Royal Air Force]. I went down to Brisbane for the interview, I spent a night in Brisbane, I had the medical and interview and I spent one day in Brisbane. I done all the medical and interview and was decided at the interview that my qualifications would be better suited

09:30 to being a technical person rather than the air crew, because I hadn't done enough schooling. Even with my night school etc, etc I'd done afterwards. My next posting the next night was to the personnel depot at Sandgate and next day we went to Amberley to do our recruit training. We'd done three nights and three days in three different places. The recruit training, we started

10:00 our recruit training in the morning and at ten o'clock they called us together and said, "Your recruit training is completed, you are all posted," all twenty three of us, Queenslanders were posted to Sydney to do technical training. In Sydney we were posted to Coogee Bay Hotel, sounds glamorous but we slept on the floor on straw palliasses. And we trained in

10:30 Ultimo at the Ultimo College as it was called then, and probably still is now, I don't know. We done our basic training, the top five percent which were extremely good people went as instrument makers in the air force. And the next five percent below that went as the more skilled electrical trade etc. And I was one of those five percent.

11:00 And the rest went to other trades and other disciplines. So I duly done about three weeks of electrical training and because I was basically topping the courses in electrical training I got posted as a radio technical trainee if you like. A posting I didn't enjoy because I enjoyed the electrical stuff.

11:30 I got reposted for accommodation to the Pacific Hotel, Bondi, again it sounded glamorous but it wasn't really. We used to commute by tram once again to Ultimo for training and I went through the different steps in the technical training of radio if you like. The pass marks were seventy five percent in radio, you were allowed one failure if you got two failures in that particular time

12:00 you were out. Fortunately I never had a failure, I didn't do marvellously well I averaged about seventy percent, which is just about five percent above the pass mark. From there I fully expected as a Queenslander at the completion of my training to get posted to Queenslander and I was the one Queenslander, anyhow there was no Queenslander in the rest of the course, I was the one person posted to Richmond

12:30 which was outside of Sydney. And we were posted there to do a specific job and that was to assemble the last Hudson bomber that was bought into the RAAF. I spent about, almost three months in Sydney, one of the very long postings I had in Richmond. And then I got a posting to, of all places

13:00 to Queensland to Townsville in the fighter sector which was the fighter aircraft control centre for the north Queensland area. It was a good posting, I'll give you the reason, it might be interesting. There was one hundred and fifty-four WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] there, there was about fifty AAMWS [Australian Army Medical Women's Service] there and there was about fifty AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] there, which were all ladies and there was eight of us men, not counting officers.

13:30 Who were to carry out the duties of the place if you like. There was three technical people, I was one of those and the rest were either cleaners or guards. And that was a good posting, that's where I learnt to play poker, I wasn't interested in the girls 'cause I had one. That lasted a few months and I was called to go away and do

14:00 air crew training and the interview panel decided because of technical skills, if you'd like to call it that way, that I would go to Melbourne to do a very advanced course in radio, so that killed that one, so I was almost immediately posted to Melbourne to do this course. And I might add here that my first posting to Sydney I was on

14:30 six shillings a day and three shillings of that six shillings was allocated to my mother so that she could manage alright, helped her manage. So I was constantly broke in Sydney naturally. My wife to be helped me out financially because she had a good position at that stage. Anyhow I was posted to Melbourne, the interesting part of that, which would probably come out in detail later, was it rained and rained and all the rivers

15:00 were overflowing, including the Burdekin which was this side of Townsville. So we duly got in the troop train in Townsville and went to the Burdekin, got in a boat which went across the river. All nine at a time and we transferred to a troop train on this side of the river, the south side of the river and after fourteen hours the completion was done and we duly

15:30 went off on our merry way with numerous stops. Arrived in Melbourne about four or five days later where I went to work doing another course, which I didn't particularly want to do, I would have preferred to have gone through air crew. I was doing as I was told. That was a long course; it was a very technical course

16:00 and when I completed that course I was told I would be going overseas. And I was then on the handsome sum of twelve shillings a day, which by the way was some one shilling and six pence which is fifteen cents a day more than a sergeant in the army used to get. So I still would have preferred to be in the air crew but that was one of the things that happened.

16:30 I went back to Townsville to the personnel depot after having pre-embarkation leave of six days I think in Mackay. There's a story to that but we'll tell you that. Remember at this time I didn't do any recruit training. When I went to Townsville the personnel depot they used to pick those people on posting out to do the duties round the camp if you like to

17:00 call it that. And I got posted to the main gate at that time as a guard, and one beep of the horn and you had to do a butt salute, which was easy, anybody could do that. Two beeps of the horn and you had to do a present arms. I was there about an hour and this car came towards the gate and there was two beeps of the horn and I done a present arms. And about five minutes later the warrant officer disciplinary marched down the road with two service policemen and said, "You're under arrest." I said, "Why?" he said,

17:30 "You didn't present arms to the camp commandant." I said, "Yes I did," he said, "You might have done something but you didn't present arms," I said, "Well that's the problem you see, I didn't do recruit course." And he said, "And you are posted overseas tomorrow morning!" He said. "Piss off, go away!" In very short words. And he gave the rifle to one of the SPs [service policemen] and he said, "You remain on guard."

18:00 I flew out the next morning by Sunderland to my first overseas posting which was Port Moresby. I stopped in the personnel depot one night and went to Jackson's Strip which was the main base in Port Moresby. This was in 1944 by the way - I'll give you the dates as I go through on the more detailed – I stopped there for about six or seven weeks then I done a –

18:30 I was seconded to the Sunderland Squadron which was in Port Moresby Harbour to set up their radar equipment in the headquarters. And from there I completed that job in say three or four weeks and I went back to Jackson's Strip. I was recommended for promotion to corporal of all things, which didn't enthral me a great deal anyhow.

19:00 I was posted out before then; I was posted to Lae which was another depot area. I was there about three or four days roughly, and I was called in and said, "You and another person have to go to Wewak to find some equipment of the Japanese and post it back here because we can't trust the army to do it because we're trying to get hold of some equipment to find out how much advances had

19:30 been made in the technical fields by the Japanese in the period of time that the war had been going on." This of course was in 1945 so the war had been going on a little time and they wanted to know the technical ability of the Japanese at that time. They said, "You'll take your own weapon which will be a Thompson sub machine gun and you've got to take the ammunition because the army don't have 45 ammunition for the Thompson sub machine gun."

20:00 Remembering that I hadn't done a recruit course. So we arrive at Wewak after two or three days, different flights etc and I found out that my companion who was to help me with the technical side didn't know anything about the Thompson sub machine gun anyhow, so here we were. Within a week or two we'd found some equipment, we'd found an aircraft equipment dump.

20:30 We'd sent the equipment back to base and the other air force fellow went back to base with it and I received orders to proceed to some fifteen kilometres away from Wewak to a 2/9th Cav Commandos on posting to carry on the work that I'd been doing with the due

21:00 Thompson sub machine gun. In the first three days there, which I didn't get my orders and instructions of what I was supposed to do, I taught myself how to clean and load and fire with some skill, some skill, the Thompson sub machine gun. I needn't have worried the first patrol I went out with the 2/9th Cav Commandos the second scout said, "Gee sir," remember that I

21:30 at that stage wasn't a sir, "Do you mind if I swap you my rifle for that sub machine gun? That will stop those bloody Japs." So I needn't have worried about the Thompson sub machine gun anyhow, every patrol I went on somebody else wanted to carry it and it was a heavy great thing anyhow, so I carried a rifle. I had some four or five, might have been more with the commando unit as

22:00 and air force personnel. When an officer called me in and said, "Do you know that you go out on all the patrols," he said, "You shouldn't be going on those patrols everyday because our personnel wouldn't do a patrol a week because we spread it round. You're the only personnel here." I said, "I've got my orders," he said, "We've been thinking of putting you in for a medal and at the moment

22:30 we would prefer you to drop out of some of the patrols." Anyhow he must have got in touch with our headquarters because I got information within two or three days that I was posted back to the headquarters. And the next day a Wirraway dropped in and dropped off my replacement and I went off in the back seat of a Wirraway. I needn't have worried about the machine gun in the Wirraway; they were all jammed when he landed to pick me up.

23:00 So in due course within two days I arrived back at my base to find that one of the patrols had been, that I would have been going out with had been ambushed and had some problems. And I was posted immediately, really the recall was probably, or possibly due to the fact that I was posted to Morotai. That was then the advanced base for operations in Balikpapan and Labuan,

23:30 the advanced base for the RAF. I joined my unit in Morotai via Biak, which was an American base. Probably dates something, I hadn't written down and there from memory probably late June, July 1945. I joined the unit there which was a newly formed unit called the

24:00 number 1 FRU, which was Number 1 Forward Recovery Unit, there was one in the RAF. I'll give you the details later on, if there's any chance I'll give you the instructions of what should happen to that particular units. There was a number of very skilled personnel and the unit was structured around those skilled personnel, there was about five or six skilled personnel of which

24:30 I was supposed to be one. There was only twenty, either twenty or twenty one plus an officer, so it was a good unit on the shores of Morotai in amongst the coconut plantation which was a good area. But I'd been overseas long enough I thought. Anyhow we were given our details a little later which were a bit hairy,

25:00 very hairy as a matter of fact. But somebody dropped the nuclear bomb and somebody dropped another one, which happen to be the Americans and the war ended. At this stage, remembering I still hadn't reached the age of twenty-one, I was twenty year old. And the war finished and I thought, "Well this is great, I'll go home." But I never got home until early March the next year. From there I

25:30 went back into the work force at a place called Fields as a radio technician, radio mechanic if you like. I lasted there for, Fields happen to be a relation of mine, and you should never work with relations, I lasted there for some time, probably a little over twelve months and somebody asked me if I'd join what was then called the PMG [Postmaster General], which later became Telecom Australia.

26:00 So I joined the PMG as a telephone technician after passing the due technical exams. But before I done that I went on a course to Rockhampton to do what they called was a linesman course. I studied for the technical side of the exams while I was doing my course, so during the day I used to duly do the

26:30 lines course and during the day and at night study for technical course. At the end of the course the chief instructor called me in and he said, "You topped the course; I want you to take this posting that I've got for you. I've rung around Australia, rung around Queensland and I've got a posting, you're going to miss out the first grade as a linesman and you're going to go to St George as a

27:00 linesman and higher grade." And I said, knowing where it was of course I said, "Can you see the sea from St George?" and he said, "Don't be silly," he said, "You can't see the sea from St George; it's out the west." I said, "I don't want to go." Except the fact that I'd done the technician's exam quietly and I believed I'd passed, which I did of course, and I went back to Mackay as a technician with Telecom.

27:30 To skip through a few things, in 1948 the CMF was formed and the formation people happen to be a friend of our family's who was a Charles Barton, who later became Sir Charles. My oldest brother who joined, I mentioned him joining the army as a private had risen through the ranks and was a company commander at the end of the war, when he was discharged

28:00 after three overseas stints. My second oldest brother who had been wounded joined what we called then the CMF as a company sergeant major and I joined as a private just to get the thing off the ground.

Remembering I was constantly on the move, single, and I never enjoyed my RAF service anyhow. So

28:30 I enjoyed joining the CMF and the comradeship. The first camp was in 1949 I went to that camp as a corporal, at the end of the camp I was promoted sergeant. The second camp was in 1950 I went as a sergeant and the third camp I'd qualified and I went as a lieutenant, as a platoon commander. I stopped in the CMF and duly rose to the rank of major, skipping along

29:00 time of course. And that time I was offered to go to Malaysia for a short visit, I've got a photograph there of when I was a reasonably young person in Malaya, and that was in 1962, '63. When I came back I filled in the job as company commander, detachment

29:30 commander in Mackay which was a fairly strong detachment. Towards the end of that year I was offered and given a short service commission in the regular army and I went to Townsville firstly as a G2 of the task force in Townsville, the CMF Task Force, which is a regular army posting. And I was,

30:00 done about two months in that job and was seconded, might have been a little over two months in early '64 to Kashmir to United Nations to go to Kashmir by the 2nd of February in 1964 and I duly arrived in mission in 1964. Spent the first week

30:30 being briefed in Kashmir, or I can skip that and fill in more details later. I spent two years in Kashmir, the first fourteen or fifteen months with UNMOGIP [United Nations Military Observer Group] on the second part of my time in India Pakistan with UNIPOM [United Nations India-Pakistan Observation Mission] which was the new mission. It was formed at the end

31:00 of the Indian Pakistan war on the ceasefire line, and I'll give you a lot of detail of that at a later stage. In 1966 the war was in '65 my family was with me, late '65 came back to Australia. In February 1966 I came back to Australia and

31:30 because of the postings offered I took my discharge in the regular army and rejoined the CMF. I spent some time as detachment commander in the CMF and in 1970, '71 I went to Vietnam for a short tour. And in 1973 I

32:00 took my discharge from the CMF and that's basically roughly where we'd finish I suppose. Except now I'm here in Brisbane after going through a fairly good number of events. So that took you through from 1942 when I enlisted, or before that to

32:30 1973 when I took my discharge from the army, thank you.

**Excellent, Eric, great that was a good overview. So we'll go right back to the beginning and we'll talk about in detail your family for example, tell us about your father. What was he like?**

My father was a big strong muscular type and he was

33:00 fairly, how shall I put it, the discipline was carried out, except we lived in reasonable trepidation of our father if ever he got angry. I can't ever remember him getting angry. My mother used to do the disciplinary and also the lovely person in the family. My father as I said before came out, he was

33:30 I suppose upper middle class in England, he was an architect, his two brothers were doctors in England at that time. He came out in 1913 because he had the audacity to marry a factory girl, which was my Mum, who's a marvellous person. She, when she came out, or when they came out in 1913 my oldest brother Roland was, and my oldest sister Ada came with

34:00 them from England. Six more children was born after that, goodness gracious. If I can go through it my oldest brother Roland went to Sydney to find work in the Depression time, he was still in Sydney when I was posted there in the air force and he left Sydney and went back to Mackay at that time.

34:30 And he died about six weeks later, kidney trouble. He had had a wife, he married, this is an interesting point of view, he married a girl called Anne Wehmier, remember the name and they had a boy and a girl. And she continued living in Mackay. My older sister Ada who

35:00 came out from England married a chap called Charlie Wehmier from Rockhampton. And my older sister was born in Australia, Nell, she married a Fields that I mentioned earlier as the firm I went to after the war. My next older sister

35:30 Alice married a Tom Wehmier, that's three Kays married three Wehmiers. And then came my brother Jim and Alf and then Hanna who was born, at the time with a measles problem and they had difficulties when she was born and she lived for two years. By that time

36:00 I had arrived and soon after apparently she died, so that was my family.

**What it's like growing up with so many brothers and sisters?**

Remember I was the youngest and some of my eldest brothers and sisters had left home before. But Nell Down, if you like,

36:30 except for Ellis who had found work during the Depression time stopped with that work, so she didn't

live in what originally was the shed that Dad built and we all lived in. Remember there was no Hanna at that time, so it was quite an experience having brothers and sisters. I suppose

37:00 they classed me as a loner because basically that's what I was, I used to look after myself, I used to wander, when I was old enough, wander the scrub areas and the bush areas with a sling shot. Or later on a .22 rifle, which I didn't have the heart to kill anything with. Anyhow I was a bit of a softie, but that was me I was

37:30 much of a loner. My two brothers who had been in the CMF went in the army early and basically from the time they went to Darwin until the end of the war I never saw them. Because when I happen to be on leave they were overseas or off somewhere. And when they were on leave I was away. So that was the family; that was the spooling.

38:00 **Well you mentioned that your father was kind of upper middle class and that your mother was a factory worker, how did they meet?**

That was one of the things in the system years ago. My father was never a high class person but I suppose they classed themselves, their name was Whittle-Kay; they classed themselves, the family

38:30 as a little bit higher than some people. I never ever wanted to go back to England and meet my relations, my mother of course never wanted to go back to England. My father died before going back to England anyhow, he died at the age of sixty five, he was a heavy smoker. By the way, of the eight children

39:00 I'm the only one left, my eldest sister Ada died last year, so there was the oldest, second oldest and the youngest were left. That was the family; that was the spooling.

**Did your mother any say anything about, no actually I'm interested to know why did they want to come to Australia?**

I think the,

39:30 my father was, had a problem with TB [tuberculosis], with that sort of problem in England with the moist temperate and it was thought to be a bit better if he came to a hot climate was Australia. He found it pretty hard I think in Australia, he wanted to be a farmer and being a farmer wasn't easy. He had, he bought a farm in Rockhampton first

40:00 on the land where the university is now, it used to be land on the right hand side of the road going out to Yeppoon. So he sold that at ten shillings an acre, which was a dollar an acre. And up till some years back I had the deeds of sale so I could have proved that to you, goodness knows what's happened to that.

40:30 But that was his farming experience in Rockhampton if you like to put it that way.

**Just before we moved on I'd better be careful because we're at the end of the tape, so I might just pause –**

# Tape 2

00:38 **Your Dad having come from being an architect in England, what did he know about farm life?**

Possibly nothing because his first farm I don't think was very successful, I don't know I'm just guessing. Because he

01:00 shifted to Mackay after selling the farm but because of the, if you like the farm in Mackay which was a poultry farm, and I'd better enlarge on that a little. It was a poultry farm where my father who was an architect built magnificent pens and runs that you could just about live in. Just to make sure that everything was perfectly alright, it wasn't

01:30 one of these modern day one WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , or a number of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s if you like in a small cage. At that time he decided after speaking to people that he'd go into Angora wool from rabbit's angora rabbits. Now he built a shed if you like but certainly

02:00 had to be built to specifications because the confines of the shed had to be dug into the ground, a wire mesh into the ground to hold these angora wool rabbits. And the first clipping of those first angora wool rabbits was just before the Depression and it sold magnificently, that was it. Then the Depression came along and there was no sale so we had these angora rabbits, which guess who had to get the feed

02:30 for them, was the youngest child in the family who ever afternoon after school had to go and collect what we used to call was green feed, which was grass etc, from around in the cemetery, which was across the road. So we used to feed the rabbits this green feed. And this, remember this is before the war,

03:00 the start of the Depression. The Depression years to use some of this angora wool my brother Alf who'd at that time got an apprenticeship as a saddler made some magnificent dining room chairs and you needed probably eight to seat everybody around the dining room table, which Dad had made. He had

03:30 these chairs stuffed with angora wool and they were the dining room chairs. And he used as much wool as possible because there was no sale for it; he managed that for the family assistance if you like. And that was very early in the piece. My oldest brother Jim always wanted to be a carpenter and he followed

04:00 through originally apprenticed to Dad before the Depression started. And as an apprentice he carried through the apprenticeship so basically had a job through the Depression years because he was an apprentice, and he was a good tradesman.

**And what sort of things did your father build around the farm with his architectural background?**

Well

04:30 my father, not only with an architectural background had to invent things and everything had to be different. Now I'll give you an idea, one of my chores was to collect the eggs, now all the pens were line up side by side about five runs and you used to have to go through a number of gates, through one and then through to the next one, through to the next one right through. Now the first one you'd come to just for example

05:00 his magnificent gate opened thing you used to put your forehead against the gate and push and the gate would automatically swing open. And when you closed the gate you might have used your right elbow to close it because you had a basket in each arm. The next gate you come to was entirely different, you might have pushed it with your left foot and it would open automatically. You'd go through the next pen and it would close automatically.

05:30 The next gate, which would be the third gate in the row, would open in an entirely different way. And part of my memory testing must have been round about a hundred gates on the farm, all I believed opened individually and differently and closed differently, was memorising how all these gates worked. Now not only did he do it with the gates

06:00 he had a wire netting under all the perches so that all the dropping used to go through the wire netting and wouldn't get in his magnificent runs. And you used to open a shutter at the back to take the droppings away, which used to go into the garden, a magnificent garden naturally. He then started on automatic watering troughs and a little later when my brothers got more involved I had

06:30 to learn how to clean all these watering troughs, which are all different. One was, the foul used to peck at it and a drop of water would come out. The next one would be a tray which worked on weight business and the next one would be something else. So it was good learning curve for memorising how things were done. Fortunately he was half way through doing all the automatic feeding for the,

07:00 when I went away, that was enough thanks.

**Did his inventions help or hinder?**

Oh I think once you learnt the things they were a help, and not only that on the farm, as a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK farm if you'd like to call it, he had a magnificent batch of fruit trees and they all grew very well. They were set out nicely and a lot of them were different too,

07:30 but he had all the different sort of fruits. And some of the vegetables he grew, because he grew it in almost WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK shit were magnificent, they grew very well.

**And when the Depression hit what sort of memories do you have of how your mother, or how the family in general had to – ?**

Well my father was probably sixty or seventy percent with his inventive work

08:00 on the farm and his building work on the farm. On the side he used to go out, on the building trade before the Depression hit, now when the Depression hit naturally carpenters, that builders if there was a Depression they were the first off and the last on. Now he got a job in the quarry and he got caught in a rock fall which put him in hospital for some time. Mum just simply, my mother just simply took over all the

08:30 running of the farm, I think she was more comfortable outside running the farm anyhow. Remember not only was the farm and collecting eggs and feeding and watering and that we had incubators for rearing our own chickens. And one of those incubators held two thousand eggs so all that had to be kept up and kept going. And it was done by my mother

09:00 with the assistance of us three boys could give. 'Cause when we could get a job we got it, so that was basically the Depression years.

**What sort of ways did your mother try and save money through food or clothes or anything?**

Well look, she was never a good cook, we always reckon she was a good cook, but never a good cook,

she used to cook eggs, dozen of eggs.

09:30 We managed and I'll say this we might not have had any money but we were never hungry, never ever. And nobody who came to the door, whether they were swaggies, because the railway line was a little to the rear of the farm went without. There was always something for anybody who had a need. But just to give an example of how

10:00 quick in the farm was, and this mightn't be a good example that you want to keep on tape or anything, but somebody came in to buy a rooster or a fowl for the table and they'd say to my mother, "What would you charge to kill it and clean it?" and that's pluck it and kill it and clean it. She used to be able to kill that bird, pluck it and clean it and show you

10:30 the heart in the palm of her hand still beating. In other words, she'd do it in an extremely short period of time. I got the job, after the war when Dot's aunt used to have Christmas lunch for everybody, of doing all the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, I used to hate it, because I could never do that, it used to take me forever, I thought forever anyhow, to clean all these darn WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

11:00 So that was my mother, she was a down to earth lovely person.

**And you mentioned to Keirnan [interviewer] earlier that you were a bit of a loner. How do you become a loner with six, or five brothers and sisters?**

Well remember some of them were, by the time I'd grown to any sort of an age, like five or more some of those older

11:30 ones had left home. So there was never eight at home at one time, except at a family gathering or something, except that Hanna had died. So, but there was always the three boys and there was always Nell. And Nell during the Depression time got a job in a restaurant as a waitress and

12:00 when she worked night shift, one of my brothers used to ride a pushbike in, and that would be six or seven or eight kilometres, to pick her up and bring her home every night, that's Jim or Alf. So we were a close-knit family but I had these tasks to do and I basically grew up wandering

12:30 through the cemetery and the bush behind it and I was fairly much of a loner until I turned thirteen and then I went to the picture theatre and a little voice said, "I'll sit beside that curly headed fellow, that blonde curly headed bloke," that was me see. And we've been together ever since, that was Dorothy.

**Tell me what she**

13:00 **was like then?**

She was in my eyes a lovely person then and when I went to work, which was not long afterwards, around about the same time I used to manage to squeeze fifteen minutes of an afternoon to pick her up from high school and carry her books home. It was, she was a nice person, remember my skills

13:30 with the male population were probably fairly reasonable because I had a few friends at that stage, thirteen and fourteen. My social skills with the female class were non existent at that stage.

**Well what made you comfortable being with Dorothy?**

I don't know, just one of those things, it was just a click.

14:00 I've got a photograph somewhere it was a patrol leader in the scouts and one Anzac Day we were walking down the street Dorothy and myself and a patrol leader who was about that high, little fellow in size only, with another girl and she was in school uniform, both of them were in school uniform and we were in scout uniform. We've been together ever since

14:30 and we'll remain that way, until I'm gone anyway.

**And when did that sort of friendship develop from a friendship into a romance?**

Oh probably certainly before I went away in the services, that would have been, she would have been sixteen and I would have been seventeen. So it might have even been before that, puppy love

15:00 if you like that had grown into true love. She was a good letter writer by the way when I was away in the air force and I was fair to mediocre, I used to write once a week and I'd get a letter from her written everyday sort of, no it was great. And it blossomed through, I don't think she wanted me to go in the air force and she didn't want me to go away

15:30 but she knew I was going to go. I mentioned before that both my brothers were serving overseas at that time, one had already been wounded and one had already been promoted in the field. So the oldest brother became a Rat of Tobruk and there's a little story attached to that if I may tell it. My brother had already been wounded and was in an aeroplane sling,

16:00 because he was shot through the right shoulder and he hadn't heard from Jim for sometime. So he duly left the hospital, got on a ship and went to Tobruk to find out how he was. He was arrested on the wharf

in Tobruk and sent back again because he stood out like a sore toe; he was a soldier, a sergeant with his arm on a sling, a wire sling,

16:30 what they called an aeroplane sling because you had your arm up in the air sort of. And he was taken back to his hospital, unit etc and he was court martialled and he was reduced to the rank of private and twenty four hours his CO [commanding officer] promoted him to corporal and two days after that he promoted him back to sergeant. So that was Alf, they were both in the same battalion by the way, it was always

17:00 in any fighting battalion in places like the Middle East and certainly New Guinea there was always a group of people left out of battle, so that if the fighting was fierce and intense and there was a lot of casualties there was always a nuclear of the battalion who could help form the battalion after the battle if you like. So, and

17:30 quite often the CO used to look around and say, “Make sure that two brothers didn’t go, if possible, didn’t go into battle together.” But the very first operation Alf went on he got hit, that was just one of the things that happen.

**And just before we talk about the war a bit more, what was your first job that you had in Mackay?**

Well I mentioned this in passing early I left

18:00 school at thirteen because any money I could earn would have been an assistance one, two I’d had some illnesses mainly the delayed concussion which kept me out of school for sometime so I’d left when I turned thirteen. And the first job I had was on a

18:30 bread cart, which was a horse drawn cart. Not only that it used to open at the back and you got your bread out the back and if you wanted to sit and guide the cart on a horse you climbed up over the big tall wheel and you sat on the top of it. Anyhow the horse was well trained, it was a darn sight better trained than I was because it used to do, you, the

19:00 deliverer of bread, used to do say four houses, he’d stop at the first house for instance and you’d get the bread out and you’d disappear into the front gate of that particular house and he’d walk off to the fourth house and he’d wait for you there. Now that might have worked alright for four houses and twelve houses and extra houses after that. After that well you turned up or not, if you were delayed

19:30 he just used to walk on and he used to leave me behind everyday. So at the end of a week that was it. The next job I got was another dead end job, I always put it as this, which was on a fruit cart and I delivered fruit for probably six or eight weeks until I got this job at the, with the

20:00 Lamberts Proprietary Limited Drapery Store. And I worked there for some time, worked there for six month before I went away in the air force anyhow. I decided that once I’d got behind a counter that I wasn’t educated so I went back to night school, that’s when I started night school to try and educate myself

20:30 so when the Air Training Corps was formed in Mackay I thought I had some sort of a chance except that I was pushing the breeze sort of to try and catch up. Maths was no trouble, I don’t understand how anybody had any trouble in maths or logs or anything like that, but all the other sort of stuff was problems.

**And when did you become involved in the scouts?**

21:00 Right from the start, remembering that probably before I met Dorothy, so probably from about twelve year old, it was a church group, I was along with this very short, I was a fairly tall boy, and my friend Charlie Pen who was a short person, again I’ll say in stature only. He was older than I was; we were older boys at the church

21:30 and when they formed the scout group we joined that scout group. And a little later when we were in the scout group moved to what was called West Mackay Church and the scout master was a guy by the name of Gamage. And we in that general area formed the scout group there with Charlie as the troop leader, which was the top scout in the troop

22:00 and I was the patrol leader which was somewhere in there anyhow. And I remained in the scouts for sometime and I’d better tell the story fully because I remained with the scouts and when the troop in West Mackay, because Gamage went away, became defunct I joined one of the older scout groups as a

22:30 patrol leader and then troop leader and then I became a king scout, which was the top scout. And later on somebody came to see me when the war started, I was seventeen at the time, I’d just turned seventeen and said, “Would I become a scout master, an assistant scout master with the C scouts.” It was a chap by the name of Hodges, he was a First World War

23:00 officer in the navy and he’d formed the Sea Scouts and was looking around for assistants and I became the youngest scout master, or assistant scout master every because I got a special warrant at the age of seventeen. You couldn’t at that stage get a warrant until you were eighteen. Now I hung on even during

the ATC time until I was eighteen and went into the air force

23:30 as a assistant scout master, and of course all that went by the way when I went away in the air force. So that was basically my scout career except after the war they asked me if I'd become scout master of the Mackay group that I'd been with for a short period of time, probably eighteen months, I was scout master

24:00 of that particular group. And when the CMF formed, or started I gave everything away to become a member of what was called the Commonwealth Military Forces, the CMF, which later on of course became the army reserve.

**And did your time in the scouts do anything to help you or prepare you at all for some of the time you spent during the war?**

It

24:30 probably did because looking back on it a lot of the people I served with were from some of the big cities who had never been active if you like in walking through scrubs or being in the scouts or anything like that. I was always self sufficient, I could always manage and I could always make sure that I moved quickly, maybe that was a mistake, maybe one of the reasons why I moved so often.

25:00 In less than four years with the air force I moved forty-four times, you can work that out as sometimes, a number of times, quite a few times one night stands if you like. Especially when you think that some of the postings were three months or more. I was pretty reliable that way, I always classed myself as a

25:30 country boy who wasn't skilled in the city if you like, but in a way I was pleased to be a country boy and pleased to have had an upbringing in the boy scouts and pleased to have been on the edges if you like, 'cause I wasn't long in the ATC before I went into the air force, it was a help.

26:00 But only a help you had to really find your footing because after a short period of time, after the initial basic training in Sydney I was the only Queenslander in any operations, any unit, training unit I was with. Except when I was in Melbourne and I happen to run into a fellow from Mackay who had been the,

26:30 a senior scout master, so he and I were friends in Melbourne. We were in different courses; he was in a course behind me, but same course but different numbers if you like. And then through the operational period in places like Port Moresby in both the units I was there, in Lae, certainly in

27:00 Wewak. But when I went to the 2/9th Cav Commandos with an attachment I, one of the first chaps I met was one of my old friends from Mackay, a chap by the name of George Fleming, he was with the commandos. And then when I left them and went back to Lae of course I was only there a few days and off I went to

27:30 Morotai and there was one Queenslander in that very small unit and he was from Ayr, he was one of the specialists. So you learnt in the air force to rely on yourself, you had to, in the types of units I was with anyhow.

**And leading up to the outbreak of World War II, what sort of**

28:00 **news did you hear about the sort of turmoil that was going on in Europe?**

Well we heard mainly because we had a radio, remember it was before TV times and we had a radio and there was no hesitation, certainly from my brother's part, he was already in the CMF, that when the call came they were going to be in it. There was,

28:30 it was a foregone conclusion that when I reached the right age that I would go, it was just one of the things that happened in that time. There wasn't the thinking in Australia at that time about whether the war with this country or that country was warranted. There certainly is now and that's, let me be frank about it, that's a healthy thinking,

29:00 and I'll put it on tape here, we should never have gone to Iraq without going under the control of the United Nations group. I believe that Iraq, some sort of assistance was required over there but under the control of the United Nations. Now with them there now, I'm being serious, now we're there now we should stop until the job is done,

29:30 if it's ever done, until the job is done. That's just my personal feelings, I've given them to you and that's what I believe. Actually we shouldn't have gone to Vietnam either.

**What was it that you were going away to fight for in World War II?**

Basically because Great Britain was, we were part of Great Britain and we were a colony

30:00 if you like, it was then 1939, but we were basically part of Great Britain and if you look at the system then, the system was if Great Britain went to war you went to war as Australia or Canada or New Zealand, that was it. Since then things have changed, probably for the better, probably

30:30 for the better, yeah.

**Well what – ?**

But it was a foregone conclusion people of that age who were fit went away.

**How did you hear the news of the actual outbreak?**

Again by the radio, it was announced the outbreak, some of the Churchill's famous statements

31:00 some of our prime minister's statements, remember I was only reasonably young in '39, it was before I turned eighteen. And I listened as much as the others, I didn't take it as seriously as the others because at that stage of course, two of the sons were in the CMF and my mother knew that those two boys would be going fairly quickly. And

31:30 nobody will ever know how a mother feels, so that was it. And of course I wanted to go into the army as I got older and older, but the letters from my both brothers who were with the army said, "Make sure Eric doesn't go in the army," and my father wouldn't give approval,

32:00 my mother wouldn't give approval. Actually there's an incident, there was a recruit train in town and at the age of sixteen I joined the navy at the recruit train but my father worked out where I was, he came and got me. So that was it, so I waited then till seventeen, eighteen before I put my name forward

32:30 to go in the air force.

**And those first sort of two years of war, before you were eighteen, how did they affect life in Mackay?**

We used to read about rationing in Great Britain and we had a rationing system in Australia. The rationing system was – because we were on a farm was fairly easy but it became hard to get and a few other things.

33:00 Compared to what we read about the rationing system in Great Britain what we had in Australia was more than ample, as a matter of fact every now and then my mother and father used to make up a parcel and send it to England, to help out the Brits. If you read the system you would have read that they got a fairly rough,

33:30 remember when the Japanese come to the war, what, we thought we'd be in the same boat. And we had to dig little slit trenches in the backyard and all that sort of stuff. I couldn't see any point in it but when an aircraft flew over Mackay my father herded us all together and made sure we were in the slit trench, Japanese aircraft was on a survey sort of thing. We were in Mackay when

34:00 there was a few bombs dropped in Townsville.

**Well how did I guess the war coming so close to home as Townsville, how did it effect?**

Well it didn't affect us but it affected some of the people from further north sold out for what they could get and left the area. Some of the people in Mackay sold out for what they could get and went down to Brisbane or the other side of Brisbane

34:30 because there was that big rumour that there was a Brisbane line. We stopped in Mackay, lots of our neighbours and friends did, because when you sold out for what you could get, that's what you got, not very much. So if you had a few thousands pounds then, dollars then, you could have bought a number of houses, but we didn't have it anyhow.

35:00 We didn't buy anything; we just kept the farm going.

**And you mentioned this recruiting train that came through for the navy?**

Yeah well that was something I'd hope you'd forget about. Yeah there was a recruiting train and I was a big robust looking boy and I turned up and put my name down, as it turned out the navy because you could get into the navy apparently a little earlier at seventeen,

35:30 remember I was sixteen. And I put my name down for a stoker thinking it would be shovelling coal, of course the navy ships never had, I didn't know anything about navy ships. And my father said, "Eric hasn't collected the eggs etc, etc," now he'd worked out where I'd gone. So he came down and had a few words to say and I disappeared.

36:00 That's all, that's all the story was; it was nothing, probably some of the people in the area, an odd one or two went in at that age because there wasn't a huge check.

**What was?**

Remember at sixteen that would have been 1940.

**Were the different forces advertising in any way, were there posters?**

They used to have during the war, as I

36:30 mentioned the recruit train used to go through the north area. Remember this would be before the Japanese come into the war because the railway line after the Japanese came into the war was prioritised to move troops and gear. And it was only a single track line, same size it is now, same gauge as it is now and a single track line so

37:00 there used to be train after train going past. Our back section you could see them but they were far enough away that you couldn't hear them. But before the Japanese come in there'd be a regular troop train to the areas and not only north Queensland, out to the west areas, along all the railway lines. And it was set up to recruit people for the army, navy and air force and

37:30 that was one of the things that occurred during the war. They used to shunt in at every town of any size and advertise in the local newspapers and idiots like myself used to turn up to try and get away. When I finally enlisted, remember I was in the ATC, so I put my name through the ATC to the air force

38:00 for enlistment. And shortly after I turned eighteen I was called to go to Brisbane.

**When did the ATC come to town?**

Not, it was formed but it was certainly formed in the capital cities first, not long, less than six months before I went in the air force which was early October, well I put in from the

38:30 14th of September which is my birthday, I'd already applied to go in the air force. So let's say four or five months at the most on the formation of that ATC Squadron, which existed right through the war and after the war and to my knowledge could be still there as an ATC Squadron, the Air Training Corps. And

39:00 some of the fellows that enlisted with me, those who were older didn't get much time in the ATC because they went away and became whatever in the air force. But it was, mainly because they were trying to get air crew at that time it was mainly a theory type study, certainly done parade ground work.

39:30 Certainly I didn't know anything about rifle drill, but I did know a little bit about marching, I think our first weapons that we were given to us were broom sticks for the first parade we went on just to allegedly learn how to present arms, which I never learnt.

**We'll just pause there 'cause we're at the end of this tape.**

# Tape 3

00:36 **Why were you so keen to get involved?**

That was the trend in those days, the friends that I had made, I mentioned a couple, they were all off, if I went through them, Charlie Pinder who was

01:00 the troop leader in the boy scouts joined the army. He became, a little later anyhow, remember I said he was big, but small in stature, big in heart, he became a sergeant. George Fleming who was one of the few friends I had, I met him in Wewak and he was in the 9th Commandos.

01:30 The Moffatt brothers, they were in the army somewhere, one stopped in the army after the war and became a warrant officer, a regular and there was another one that enlisted the same time in the army. They all went in the army and because of the pressures if you like from my older brothers who knew the problems and the

02:00 risks. Remember my eldest brother had three overseas postings, he hadn't at this stage, he was still in the Middle East when he wrote to my parents and suggested, I think fairly strongly, that if they were going to let me go, and they wouldn't have stopped me anyhow, they couldn't have stopped me, that I go in the air force. So romantic wise air force sounded good so I went in the air force, I didn't do what I wanted to do but

02:30 I went in the air force.

**How did your parents feel about signing the papers?**

I don't think they were happy but they signed which was one of the things; remember my second brother had been wounded. My eldest brother at that stage was ill, living in Sydney but they knew that sooner or later he'd

03:00 have to come back to Mackay and sooner or later there'd be a problem. So that was a fairly difficult time for my oldies if you'd like to put it that way.

**And at this stage what was happening in the war at this stage?**

Well let's say in, let's take it from the early part –

03:30 **I mean just for you, just as you signed up had Japan entered the war?**

Oh just as I'd, well Japan had entered the war before I signed up because I was still at home and I hadn't turned eighteen. And remember I mentioned the train line that we could see that was chock a block with the rail personnel and equipment going north, which was where the main American bases were going

04:00 to be and where the air force strike force would be, both American and Australian. So they had to be equipped and it was being supplied by train. And by the way that was probably the only year, that Christmas right through there that the Burdekin River hadn't flooded and stopped the trains going through, and the road traffic of course. Because

04:30 the bridge then used to go basically to the banks of the river and down the banks through a cutting to cross the bridge and come up the other side. And each flood used to go over both bridges. So that was a good year for transportation of the equipment north. And we saw all that movement going on. Mackay where we lived never

05:00 became an army, or an American base or any sort of base but it was the leave centre for Americans at that time, that's after the Japanese came in. Rockhampton, I mentioned earlier I was born in Rockhampton, that became a huge base and there was lots of troops there, that was this side of course of the Burdekin. The other side was where the air force bases had formed and formed and spreading

05:30 out right through to Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands, which became a big training area for both Americans and Australians, the Atherton Tableland. That was all further north, but we used to see the operations of the trains, moving forward all this equipment and all the Americans who were going off to war. Some of them probably never went overseas, possibly,

06:00 some of them did and didn't come back.

**What affect did this have on you?**

Well very little because remember I said it was a leave area so the only personnel you saw was those persons, old friends if you like or army personnel who came home, who were residents of the area who came home on leave, and the three or four hundred,

06:30 maybe a thousand at the most, Americans who flew in as a leave centre. Spent say a week there, being looked after and then flew out. A lot of Americans married a lot of Mackay girls by the way because it was a leave centre and so that was one of the things that happened. Some very successfully of course

07:00 and some not so successfully. But we were wrapped up in ourselves in making sure we reached the right age and went away.

**What kind of expectations did you have of joining up in the air force?**

Oh I was healthy and strong, I realised I would get in. My expectations that I had done enough through night schools and through the ATC that

07:30 I would be accepted for air crew in some way and I still think, pity I hadn't reached the right standard in their eyes. I had certainly reached a good standard and I certainly finished up becoming what was classed a highly skilled and technical person, but I didn't want that. As it happened thinking about it

08:00 and thinking about after the war and going through and following through it was probably better I became a technical person rather than become somebody in the air crew, probably better. I didn't see it at the time.

**Why is it better?**

Well I was trained; I was allegedly and feel that I was very skilled. And

08:30 as things picked up after the war I never had any trouble finding positions, never had any trouble advancing through the system. And because of my technical skills, which frankly if I'd have just gone into the air force and flown about, I would never have got because it's not,

09:00 unless you went into Qantas or one of those airlines being air crew didn't help. And a lot of air crew people of course were in the wrong mustering to get into places like Qantas.

**And so tell us also did you want to be a pilot like?**

Every young fellow wants to be a pilot, there are. I probably might have been a good pilot,

09:30 might, I didn't, I flew, I flew a lot on the technical side but as a matter of fact on odd occasions when I was flying I used to fly the aircraft, mainly because the damn pilot was too lazy, the pilot I used to have when I was doing technical type work. He'd say, "You're sitting in the seat there, you can fly the thing,"

10:00 and he'd go to sleep, and he said, "And wake me up before we get anywhere near where we're going." And I said, "Well how long is that going to be?" And to keep an aircraft flying straight in reasonably good weather, that's no trouble, it's taking off and landing that's the trouble. But I used to fly the

aircraft, only after he'd taken off and before he landed. And probably one of hundreds

10:30 who done that sort of thing, but that's, the skill is doing the job when you might be attacked or something and taking off and landing it.

**So tell us about those first days or so joining up?**

Well I mentioned earlier I always thought I was a bit of a country boy, a bumpkin if you like

11:00 and when I came to Brisbane which was the big smoke I came with a warrant to turn up at the air force depot as such and such a base, recruitment depot and the first night I was to be accommodated, and I forget where it was, somewhere in the Quay here in Brisbane. The second night I found my way to the air force recruit depot

11:30 and the only argument I had all day, or there was went on all day was one of the medical officers said, "Can I enlist that man because he's got a finger short?" And the senior medical officer said, "Of course you can," so that was the only thing. I done a medical then I done aptitude tests and written tests, and that was when the board, the same day by the way

12:00 decided that I'd be better doing the technical side, they told me. I accepted it as fact; I was down from the country. When that was over all twenty three as I said, Queenslanders that were processed that day went to the personnel depot which was at Sandgate, which is now the Eventide Home.

12:30 And we were there for all of one night, and again next day we were put on a whatever bus you might, it was, I forget now but it was a bus and we went to Amberley. And that was our recruit training, all one day.

**What did you do for that one day?**

Next to nothing, the first thing you done was you marched in and you got your gear and equipment

13:00 and you can imagine that. They threw a stack of gear at you and you had to try it on for size. The air force equipment was suppose to be better than the army, I don't know whether it was or not but it was supposed to be. The next morning we were allocated, given all our equipment of course, and that took the afternoon and we were allocated to a hut, sleeping quarters. And the next morning

13:30 we had to be on parade early and we learnt how to stand easy and stand at ease and stand to attention. And I done that in the ATC so that was okay, some of the others hadn't but I'd done it. And that was it about ten o'clock they said, "You're going off to Sydney to do your training." So technically the first four nights were spent in four different locations,

14:00 that's in the air force. So all twenty-three Queenslanders duly got on the train and went to, were put on the train and went to Sydney.

**Do you know why they kind of skipped through recruit training?**

Because the skilled personnel, see at that stage in 1942 when I enlisted, they were cutting down on the air crew

14:30 training, which almost anybody got into air crew training and the skilled personnel were the ones that were required, required in numbers. And that was one of the reasons why there was loading in that particular direction, I wasn't the only one that hoped, or enlisted to get into the air crew. A friend of mine from Mackay had enlisted three months before and he'd enlisted in

15:00 air crew and his whole batch enlisted in air crew but they were formed into guards. They done their training in guards in different air force bases, three months after that he and others because they were guards and they were butting their heads up against a wall trying to get into air crew, applied

15:30 for a re-muster. He became an air sea rescue, he was on one of the crash boats, I met him when I was going through to Wewak at Aitape I think it was, he was overseas at that stage. But that was one of the things that was happening, you know six months beforehand I probably would have had no trouble,

16:00 or any of the people that wanted to be in air crew may not have had any trouble getting into air crew, it's just one of those things. They'd finally realised really to keep up with things they were going to have lots of technical people and train lots of technical people. The higher skilled and the higher trained the better.

**So tell us about getting to Sydney and arriving there?**

Yeah well we arrived in Sydney

16:30 and as I said there were twenty three Queenslanders then and we were allocated to what they called the Coogee Bay Hotel, and in the Coogee Bay Hotel because it was, it was either two or four to a room. And if you were first in you got a mattress from the old hotel, if you were later in you got a palliasse which you put in straw so you slept on the floor.

17:00 There was always guards on the gate, I remember I was put on guard one night, probably two or three

weeks after I got there. It was reasonably cold that night so I sat back in the corner shivering like mad in a great coat and these two figures crawled past the end here, breaking into the quarters so I let them go. The same as probably people when I snuck in let me

17:30 go; people going in at all hours of the night, day and night. You're only suppose to have one night's leave a week, we broke out I suppose, we went out and had a look at the place; with spending money of three shillings a day you couldn't do much anyhow.

**So what would you do?**

Hey?

**What would you do?**

Well you'd go and get a meal away from the standard air force meal; you'd probably spend two bob for that, maybe three

18:00 or maybe four which meant that you couldn't go out everyday. And there was tram fares and things like that. That was normal air force procedure, you got caught you went on a charge, fortunately I never got caught as most of the fellows in Coogee Bay did. And each morning the group of people who were in Coogee Bay used to line up in, if you like tram

18:30 lots because you got in the tram, you went in the tram to Ultimo which was the training area and you, whatever numbers there were, and I think there was probably about two hundred in our group, all together. So you went to Ultimo and you started your training, which they called basic training, basic technical training where you learn how to saw and file,

19:00 anybody can do that surely. How to put things together and how to take them apart, they were very pedantic about everything being exact and all your measurements, how you done that. So after whatever the basic training was, three or four weeks, you were assessed on that to where you went. Anybody could have passed that, some of them didn't by the way. As I said before they had a system

19:30 and the highest technical people in the air force were instrument makers, they looked after all the instruments on the aircraft, all on the ground but mainly aircraft. The next highest trained and highest sort of technical group were radio. Then there was the electrical people that looked after the electrical side of aircraft and the bases.

20:00 Then there was fitters, engine fitters and air frame fitters and if you didn't fit into that block you fitted into something. And as I said some of them didn't pass the basic training anyhow, they might have finished up as guards in the canteens, something. The five percent that we had automatically went into instrument

20:30 making training. The next five percent, because they didn't start the radio training straight away went into electrical then it went down to ten or fifteen or twenty percent, whatever the case maybe, that's the way they allocated them. I happen to be good enough to be in, fortunately the electrical side and later on the radio side.

**How were you taking, you hadn't gone through that basic**

21:00 **kind of recruit training, but how were you taking to the discipline of the – ?**

Ah well I think you done as you were told and that was about it. There was no, in the hotels, the accommodation there was a flight lieutenant in charge of the establishment, sometimes an older fellow who'd been in the First World War

21:30 and he might have had a corporal or a sergeant or two or three other people on the admin side, looking after the administration of the recruits. Then of course you ate in Coogee Bay there was the cooks and the stewards and things like that. And they were mainly the WAAAF girls, some of the admin persons of course were WAAAF.

22:00 But both the establishment the Coogee Bay Hotel and the, what did I say earlier on Bondi, the hotel we went to on Bondi anyhow they were flight lieutenants in charge of them. And when we went to Melbourne; it was the Exhibition Building

22:30 and there wasn't two hundred there, there was well over two thousand people in the training establishment. They weren't all doing radio of course. But in that establishment there was a lot of people yeah.

**And so tell us about the electrics course, where was that?**

That again the electrical course I was still stopping at Coogee Bay, it didn't last long because we were just basically got into it and we done our first exam

23:00 and they picked up the top of the electrical course to go to radio. And there was, I think about twenty in the radio course, getting old. And when we were picked for radio course we transferred to new sleeping quarters, new accommodation and I've remembered—

23:30 at the Pacific Hotel Bondi. Again the transportation to the training area, which was still Ultimo, was by tram so each morning you'd troop out and you'd line up at the appropriate places outside where the trams stopped and you'd get on the tram. In the winter time you tried to get inside and if you were unlucky you were in the open part, in the summer time you'd try to sit out. But that's basically,

24:00 it was the training, you were like, I suppose you were like cattle, the more like cattle you were the better as long as you learnt and that was our training.

**What were you learning, what specific things were you learning?**

Well remember I done the basic training, I done some of the electrical training which I didn't want to leave because it was easy, I was now in radio, I was finding that a little difficult.

24:30 Fortunately my maths held me in good stead; I managed to keep up with the training in radio, all the way through. It was the longest course and it was also the most complex course and most of us got to the far end of it. Some didn't some fell by the wayside, I don't know what happened to them; they may have gone back to

25:00 do engine frame fitting or something like that, I don't know, that was part of air force training. I wasn't with, by the way I mentioned earlier I think by the time I got into electrical I was the only Queenslander left in that group, the rest had gone into air frame or engine fitting or something like that.

25:30 I was one of the unlucky ones, or lucky ones as they said, so fortunately I was used to looking after myself because I was then, either friends with no one or friends with New South Welshman or Victorians or whatever, so I was friends with New South Welshman or Victorians or whatever, they were a good group. I showed you a photograph of them, of the group earlier.

26:00 **Well what techniques were you learning in radio?**

Well it was aimed at air crew, not air crew it was aimed at aircraft; you were trained in the transcending procedures and the receiving procedures, the technical side of operations of transmitters or radio

26:30 receivers. The repair of transmitters and the repair of receivers, of many different types, mainly aircraft types, we did do some time on ground transmitters and ground receivers and a later posting stood me in good stead because that's what I was doing. But it was mainly

27:00 radio and we worked through in fortnightly blocks, as I mentioned earlier the pass mark was seventy five, in other words that was the figure you had to reach in your pass. And you had to stop above that, you were allowed one failure, and I wasn't game to have a failure so I kept up there somewhere. And it was

27:30 interesting and it was hard training and that was the training. Remember that the aim at the end of it was that you got a reasonable pay per day, because we were reasonably well paid, at the end of that period, at the end of the training period we were on ten shillings and six pence a day. When I say it like that

28:00 it was nothing of course, but it was a bit different to six shillings a day. We were well paid because an army sergeant's pay at that time was ten shillings and six pence a day. And later on when, I had mentioned, later on I done more advanced training I was on more than ten shillings and six pence a day as a lowly air force sprog [junior/novice].

28:30 But that was Sydney and we tried to get out on the weekends because once you'd started your advance training you done five days a week and if you weren't called for some sort of duty you got your weekends off, you could go out, you could make friends with the locals. And quite often through top H or something you were invited to

29:00 families residents for a period of time, a couple of days. At that time, in the early stages the first couple of months my brother was in Sydney and I used to go out to where he lived to visit him until he got ill and he was ill, and he came back to Mackay. So that was

29:30 how we filled our time and our weekends in. And some of us, occasionally we got to study on the weekend to keep up; it was just one of those things.

**And was there any parade at the end of it?**

No the only time you had any sort of a parade was to form up to get on darn tram. I can only remember going on one parade all the time I was in

30:00 Sydney and I was there a few months. Air force wasn't, in my time anyhow, in the specialist role, wasn't parade oriented.

**So how did you feel at the end of the radio course?**

Well I felt that I was overdue to get some leave and that I would get a posting to Queensland. But unfortunately

30:30 they were trying to get the last Hudson bomber assembled in the RAAF in Richmond, which wasn't far out of Sydney, and that's where I got a posting to. And just to give you some of the highlight of our Richmond posting the sleeping quarters used to be at the end of the air strip. Posted

31:00 off the end of the air strip and each morning at dawn, don't know what time dawn was, some aircraft used to take off and I reckon they used to roll those wheels along the top of that roof because nobody stopped asleep. I've got to say this about Richmond, just on the side, that in Richmond it was one of the coldest places ever in my life and you learnt how to fold your blankets so that you got the greatest use out of your sleeping

31:30 equipment. And mind you, you didn't move at night 'cause otherwise something would have poked out in the cold weather, but it was a cold hole.

**And tell us about this work on the Hudson bomber, what exactly were you doing?**

Oh my job was the radio of course and I was to assemble and put the radio in the aircraft. I was only there a few weeks because it was well on

32:00 the way, and I don't know what happened to the fellow before me 'cause I took over the radio job. And I assembled this and you had to make sure it went and repaired okay, and the only trouble I had after putting the radio in and testing it was that the transmitting site from the observer's position in the nose of the aircraft was faulty. And when they test flew that aircraft I was one of the ones chosen to go up and

32:30 test flight in the plastic nose cone. There was nothing between you and Mother Earth except a bit of plastic. And I was suppose to find what was wrong with the radio, wasn't the radio at all it was a broken wire in what the headset plugged into, that was all. So when I'd finished that, which was some weeks, they decided

33:00 that they didn't want us there at Richmond, I got a posting to Number 3 Fighter Section in Townsville, which was Queensland. By the way on the side, it might interest people because I'd been away for x number of months, which is quite a few months that I was due to take four days of leave. And I said, "I'll never get back to Mackay in four days," they said, "Your four day leave commences from the time you

33:30 arrive in Mackay till the time you leave Mackay." So I spent more time travelling than I did the four days I had in Mackay, that was just one of the things, the sillies of wartime service. After a certain period of time I was entitled to a certain amount of home leave so that was the first home leave I had. By the way, when I was in Sydney when I was

34:00 doing my training at Bondi Beach Pacific Hotel my brothers arrived back from the Middle East and they came through Sydney of all places, but I didn't know and they went home to Mackay and my mother wrote of course. So I went to see the flight lieutenant in command of the station to

34:30 see if I could have some leave to go home and see my brothers 'cause I hadn't seen them since 1940. And the answer of course was "No," absolutely, so I missed them that time and I missed them all through the war, that was one of the things that happened. But I can understand looking back, later on becoming an officer myself, why that fellow in charge of Pacific Hotel

35:00 said "No." I was a bit upset at the time.

**You might not have seen them but you have any contact with them through letters or anything like that?**

Very rarely, I wrote and they wrote back rarely, my sisters kept in contact with us all, they wrote to both Jim and Alf and myself and they, when they wrote to one explained what happened with the others

35:30 and they'd been writing to one another, that was the contact sort of. I wasn't much on letter writing but my brother Alf, once he sent a toilet roll home to our sister Nell and there was one word on each leaf of the toilet roll, so you had to unwind it to read it.

36:00 **That's a good story. So tell us about your posting to Townsville?**

Oh posting to Townsville was, I thought one of the good ones. Not only was it Queensland but it was only a train journey from Mackay to Townsville, which meant when I went on leave that I could do down and

36:30 it was a good unit I was with. Occasionally, either once or twice I went off for two or three days and somebody could cover for you. We went to Number 3 Fighter Sector, the Fighter Sector at that stage was going to be repositioned into Mount Spec and it was going to be dug into the hill, and they shifted later after I left.

37:00 But the fighter sector was then located at the girls grammar school, the quarters for the girls, which is over two hundred were hut type accommodation and the quarters for the men, and there was eight of us, was the one and only dormitory which was in the main building which was upstairs. There were three technical people,

37:30 a corporal and two others, of which I was one and we maintained not only the transmitters, they had big transmitters, and the receivers, but all the listening points around the plotting tables for the girls. Making sure that they all functioned properly, otherwise the officers, who were additional to

38:00 the eight of course, and there was some WAAAF officers and some AWAS officers and some AAMWS officers and there were a few air force officers, naturally. The CO was a Wing Commander Cox who had flown in the First World War and if my memory serves me correctly had a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] from the First World War. He was the commanding officer and we had it pretty good, the meals

38:30 were extremely good, at least once a week a three ton truck, maybe two used to roll through the gates from the American bases full of food. Because the unit was full of girls, we used to eat very well. One fad they had the, and all the kitchen staff were girls and all the

39:00 serving staff were girls, each meal, each meal you got a spoon full of baked beans, 'cause the Americans must have had a lot and didn't like them. And each meal after about three days everybody put in the rubbish bin anyhow, so it went on your plate, you carried it out to the bins and you scrapped it into the bin after about three days. Three meals a day and you got baked beans, that was one way of disposing of them, slowly

39:30 from the cooking to the plate to the rubbish bins.

**We'll just pause there 'cause I got the tap for the end of the tape so –**

# Tape 4

00:36 **In Townsville given that there were so many Americans around the place what was the atmosphere like between?**

Well we didn't get the full feeling of the town because the unit we were with was a fighter sector; it was so self contained that very few

01:00 of us wanted to leave the area, very few. There was a bit of feeling in the town apparently but we allegedly had a guard on a gate. We had an open, what they call leave pass because, the unit we were in, as long as we flashed the pass

01:30 when we went in or out, if there was a guard on, we had free access to go to town if we wanted to. But we didn't really need to or want to, we weren't like some of the units that were badly fed and wanted to try and get a meal or something. We did, in the months I was there apart from the short period of time that Dorothy came up

02:00 from Mackay to stop down the road with a family apart from that I didn't go out very much. Now I remember, I might have mentioned earlier I learnt how to play poker pretty well there because the eight men that were in the unit, used to

02:30 fill your time in that way. It made, as long as everybody played cards, and there was only a couple on duty at a time, it made a good poker hand, good poker game. But once at least two or three of us went into town to play behind the Chinese shop, mah-jong or something and that's about the only time

03:00 we went into town for, honest. Except when we used to go out for a swim or something but that's the way it used to be. Our routine was that two of us used to go to the top of Castle Hill to check the transmitters and the land lines every morning, used to go up in the vehicle, two of us used to check that, one used to be in what they called the radio hut,

03:30 which was a workshop, so he was on call if something went wrong in the fighter sector. And we used to go up by transport winding around through the hills, or around the hill and we used to make sure the transmitters were alright and make sure it was all, naturally locked up. I don't suppose you could leave them now, the vandals would be at them, but then you could.

04:00 But that was our basic work, and three of us we done our work, if nothing went wrong, as long as somebody was on duty and had to be on duty twenty-four hours a day, they couldn't care less where we went. It was great you could walk in and out any time you liked, never happened before, never happened since either, but it was, it was good.

04:30 **And just describe the different equipment you would have to check every morning?**

First of all the large transmitters including the standby transmitter, then the large radio, receivers including the standby receivers. That was from aircraft to base, an aircraft could contact us from a fairly lengthy range to report their position,

05:00 because any aircraft in the area, and Townsville was the only fighter sector in that general area, right through had to be plotted on the map. So they had to be in contact with radio and the position of that aircraft had to be plotted and placed on the map. There was a large map, probably bigger than this room with all the girls sitting

05:30 around it and above, at a higher level the officers used to look down on it to make sure the plotting was being done properly. And all movements of aircraft in the general area, either enemy or friendly were plotted. And we plotted all aircraft American as well as Australian because as I said before it was the only fighter sector there and

06:00 there was a lot of airstrips and we had to make sure it kept going, and that's all our job was really. But if it stopped going goodness knows what would have happened, but fortunately all the time we were there we never had any major breakdowns. We had breakdowns, but never any major breakdowns.

**And how would you run your checks, how would you run all your**

06:30 **checks on all the different equipment?**

Well as I said before the transmitters and the radios you'd make sure they were working, you check out your instruments to make sure the signal was going out at the right levels and coming in through the receiver. Certainly the transmitter it had a level that you sent out on and that level was checked everyday and

07:00 it should have been right everyday, that was the level of check that was done on the particular radios. Now it was land line from the top of Castle Hill down to the Grammar School, to the fighter sector, work was received in the different headphones of who was going to receive it, where it was plotted on the map. And regularly the plot had to change

07:30 naturally, because if the aircraft was put there half an hour later it would be over there somewhere. That was one of the things that had to be. The main trouble we used to have, and it was only minor trouble, was the constant use of the headsets into the plugs that the girls used to plug them into, round the table, there used to be occasionally a wire

08:00 break or there was wear and tear on the plugs and they had to be repaired as we went. But again I'd say it was a great unit. There really wasn't enough work for three people, but remembering somebody had to be on duty twenty four hours a day, so three people was the logically number, from the technical side

08:30 to do the work. But it was a good unit, I enjoyed it.

**And whereabouts were you sent after Townsville?**

Well you see I was called before a board after some months in the fighter sector because my application to go into the air crew was still on record, and I was called before the

09:00 board, which was senior high ranking people. And the position in the air crew offered was WOM which is wireless operator mechanic, which is the flying mechanic on aircraft that flew for long lengths of time; mainly the Catalinas which flew out of Townsville. To do that I had to do air crew and advance training

09:30 for this particular job, now that's why I went for the interview. Now I had no trouble with that interview except that there was a few people applying and they wanted somebody with obviously – to do this advance course on radio maintenance and they decided it would be better if I went on the advance course,

10:00 it would be more advantageous to them, and as it turned out later of course, later, much later, to me. So instead of going to do the course to enter the air crew I was posted away to Melbourne to do the advance course. And I duly went to Melbourne, now as I mentioned earlier the postings

10:30 always went through the personnel depot. So I arrive in the personnel depot amidst Townsville weather, lots and lots of rain where the Burdekin was flooded and after a couple of days they decided that they had to move. So they loaded a troop train from the personnel depot, we went to one side of the Burdekin River, there was a troop train on the other side, both of them full. Because troops had to move

11:00 and there was two boats and they carried nine passengers each, a slow tedious job. And we got in this boat and we went from one side of the Burdekin to the other side of the Burdekin, loaded onto the train. The two trains were eventually filled after fourteen hours, if my recollection is correct, and they would be on that one, fourteen hours a long time. Then we

11:30 duly went to Melbourne, via Mackay because I happen to see Dorothy in Mackay on the way through, to say hello. And we went via Sydney, via Brisbane first, stopped one day in Brisbane and I'll tell you about the Townsville thing. In Brisbane I lost my

12:00 dog tags, they used to call them, they had your number on them, which I still remember is 79244, I lost them, when I got to Sydney and stopped –

**How did you lose them?**

I left them where the accommodation was that night, I took them off in other words, they were around my neck. And I got to Sydney and got on the train and went to Melbourne and when I'd arrived in Melbourne I'd left my movement order in Sydney and

12:30 when I arrived in Melbourne I was allocated accommodation and I decided I'd go in an visit Melbourne, I'd never been to Melbourne before. So a friend and I went in, and I'll tell you his number shortly to, a friend who I met and had seen him before, but I met him that day, we went into Melbourne and we got pulled over by what they called the service policeman and he said, "Where's your leave

13:00 pass?" "I haven't got one, I've just come down from Townsville." He said, "Where's your movement order?" And I said, "I left that in Sydney. I lost it." He said, "Where's your dog tags?" I said, "Well I happened to take them off in Brisbane and I left them in Brisbane." And he looked at me and he said, "You're unreal," and he said to my friend, he said, "What's your number?" And he said, "123456 Mickey Rooney," and he said, "Oh now I've got two of

13:30 them." And this bloke had his leave pass and he produced it and showed it and sure enough his number was '123456 Mickey Rooney'. And he said, "Look, go away. Go away." So that was our first night in Melbourne. We had marched, and I marched into the exhibition building in Melbourne, which, by the way, is huge,

14:00 and all they had on the floor level was partitions with a number of beds in each section. And everything was in the floor, about two thousand odd people; everything was in the exhibition building, so there wasn't only our course, there were other different types of courses going. And including the kitchens and the dining room, by the way the meals were

14:30 dreadful especially after coming from Townsville fighter sector, the meals were really dreadful.

**What were they?**

Oh anything that they could cook up, I think mainly because they were male cooks and couldn't care less. But anyhow we duly done our course in Melbourne, and I don't suppose there was anything else to report except that we had leave a few times. The accommodation

15:00 was boring and dreadful and you daren't leave anything on your bed or it will get stolen and the meals were dreadful. So after a period of time I, a fellow by the name of Cedric Crane who lived in Brisbane and I finished the course, along with a few others who went different ways, but we were allocated to go overseas from Townsville, and our first stop

15:30 was suppose to be Brisbane. So we arrived in Brisbane and not far from the personnel depot was where Cedric Crane's parents lived, where we were duly given leave, now you've got to be back here at such and such a time on such and such a day, so you can go. We arrived back and we showed our leave pass and we missed an overseas draft because neither of us read our leave pass properly, we were twenty four hours late,

16:00 and the first time in my air force career I got charged, both of us got charged. And fortunately the commander of the unit had a sense of humour and he laughed at us, he said, "Fancy being late for an overseas draft," he said, "You know you should have been court martialled," and he said, "Instead of that I'm going to fine you a day's pay." And he said to the adjutant, he said, "Give

16:30 these two boys a twenty-four-hour leave pass and make sure they report to the train at such and such a time." So we got fined a day's pay and given a day's leave, so that was our punishment.

**And what was the overseas draft?**

Overseas draft meant that you were posted overseas, it didn't matter, we didn't know where. So we had to go through, back to Ayr. This fellow Crane had never had a

17:00 northern posting, we had to go back through to the personnel depot in Townsville for the overseas draft, and we didn't know where we were posted, as a matter of fact Crane left two days before I did and went somewhere else. I never, any friends I made I never stopped with anyhow. From there I got bored stiff

17:30 I put my gear down in the hut that was allocated to me and walked out and went back to Mackay for a few days.

**Were you allowed to?**

No.

**Did they catch you?**

So I went back, no and the reason they didn't catch me was simply it was December in 1944 and the fellows, a couple others left the personnel depot and said,

18:00 "We're going home for Christmas," and I said, "Well, that's weeks off." And they said, "Well so what, they won't send us overseas before Christmas." And I had about a week at home and I thought, something told me so I left, I got on the train and I went back to the personnel depot and I marched in and next morning I was on parade and I got my name called out and they said, "We've been calling your name for a couple of days, where have you been?" I said, "I've been here."

18:30 And I got allocated guard duty, which I might have mentioned before, remembering earlier I told you I had no training at all. Well as I mentioned before I was given a rifle with a bayonet on of all things and I had to do guard duty; that was my allocated duty in the personnel depot. They had thousands of people

19:00 to pick from so if you got a duty you were a bit unlucky, I was very unlucky to get guard duty, but seeing I'd been off somewhere I didn't complain. And one beep of the horn you done a butt salute, that was easy, two beeps of the horn you had to present arms, that was one of the things. So I was on the gate for about an hour, had a two-hour stint and two beeps on the horn and this

19:30 sedan car went past and I done what I thought was a reasonable present arms. And a warrant officer disciplinary who was in the warrant officer in charge of the discipline on the camp marched down with his SPs and was going to arrest me. And he said, "You didn't present arms," and I said, "Yes, I did," and he said, "You might have done something but you didn't present arms." I said, "Well I didn't do any recruit training so I suppose I done a reasonable job." That was when he

20:00 looked at me and he shook his head and he said, "You're due to go overseas in the morning," so lucky I went back.

**Well, how do you present arms?**

How do you present arms, it was an old – .303 days, remember – and you used to have to go through the movements and hold your rifle out the front, in front of you, until the vehicle, the personnel went past. And I must have had the rifle at an angle or

20:30 wrong way or done the movements wrong or something, anyhow I got out of that. I thought I really cooked my goose, I thought, "This bloke is going to send me off somewhere and I'm going to have to stop in Australia." Maybe later on in hindsight it would have been a good thing if he had.

**Well how did you feel when he told you that you'd be going overseas in the morning?**

Oh I felt really that that's what I'd been training for and I was finally

21:00 going to get a posting that was somewhere what I wanted to do. Because, sorry to interrupt because the business of enlisting was to go overseas to serve your country, that was the kind of feeling in those particular days. And I was going overseas, where I don't know, as it happened I was

21:30 shaken rudely the next morning about three o'clock in the morning to get on this aircraft, which happen to be a Sunderland Flying Boat, which flew from Townsville to Port Moresby. And there was a squadron in Port Moresby, squadron of Sunderland Flying Boats. And then I found out my posting was Port Moresby, and remember this was December '44,

22:00 the actions and fighting was, generally speaking, over in that area. So I got posted to Jackson's Strip where there was some challenges to our group of people, because we had to maintain all the aircraft in the area. There was a flight lieutenant and a number of technical people and we maintained the aircraft, radios

22:30 in that area. Except that after a period of time I got a secondment to the Sunderland Flying Boat Squadron to set up their radar equipment in the base area, that was a good posting by the way because they used to fly their own food in from Townsville. Sunderland they used to fly in everyday. However that didn't last long after a few weeks I got posted back to Jackson's Strip

23:00 which was a few kilometres out of Port Moresby.

**Well just before we talk a bit more about New Guinea tell me about the Sunderland Flying boat what it was like to leave on?**

Big, noisy aircraft, that didn't take a huge number of people but it certainly took enough to move the numbers the air force wanted move. But the Sutherlands idea, and their main task was to fly

23:30 missions round New Guinea, observation missions or whatever. Apparently sometimes bombing missions which I wasn't privy to, but they used to be a fighting squadron and part of their duties of course happen to be bringing in personnel and bringing in equipment. And it was a full squadron, 'cause it was a good landing area,

24:00 within Port Moresby, you had to avoid the ship that was sunk in the middle of the harbour that was all, which was sunk by the Japanese in one of their early air raids. But it wasn't a bad squadron to be with.

**Well what were your first impressions of Port Moresby?**

It was very similar to north Queensland, actually Port Moresby in my opinion was very similar to Townsville,

24:30 fairly dry area and fairly similar climate. The locals used to grow the same sort of crops, except they lived differently, it was, whenever we could we used to get out of the base at Jackson's Strip and we'd go round somewhere or rather to have a look. 'Cause you could get

25:00 a vehicle of some sort to go somewhere and some of us used to go and have a look. And we used to

regularly go down to a banana plantation that had been deserted but still had bananas in it so we could always get a few bananas. And while we were still there we arrived at the banana plantation and we found some, under the supervision of a white person, there was some New Guineans

25:30 cleaning up the banana plantation to get it back on the go again. So it was obviously considered a reasonably safe area. There were a few scares while we were in Port Moresby, but the fighting had long since left there. We were at the picture theatre sitting on our boxes one day when they said there was some Japanese watching the film from up at the back, that could have been a lot of baloney of course.

26:00 But we felt, some of us felt anyhow, quite a few of us felt that we were in a dead end posting in Port Moresby. I was lucky enough to get singled out again after I'd been recommended for promotion to go from Port Moresby to Lae.

**Well before we got to Lae tell me about the type of work you were doing around Port Moresby?**

Well in

26:30 the Sunderland Squadron I was setting up their radar equipment, their ground radar.

**Can you describe that equipment for me?**

That equipment was to do with the earlier models of radio detection, in other words to be able to look out and see aircraft approaching on the screens, similar to a TV screen only much more back in the dark ages of course.

27:00 You could see blips on the screen about aircraft approaching and of course we had special type signals that let people know that they were the good aircraft, they were our own aircraft. You could always tell which was an unfriendly aircraft because it didn't have that radar, the signal that was sent out couldn't detect the, would not detect

27:30 Japanese because they didn't have a signal to send out. So that's how you knew it was Japanese. It was the radio signals that were sent from the friendly aircraft that identified them, so you were always able to identify the friendly aircraft. Except the bloody Americans they occasionally fired on us, that happened. But that was the task, to look after mainly aircraft

28:00 no ground transmitters or receivers, aircraft transmitters or receivers in Port Moresby area and we done that from Jackson's Strip outside of Port Moresby. There was about eight in the radio section.

**And was your job just setting up or were you monitoring as well?**

No we were mainly a maintenance – certainly the people on Jackson's Strip were

28:30 all maintenance, occasionally they may have had to do something in the control tower, but it was all aircraft maintenance except for a little bit of other stuff.

**And what was the general sort of buildings or infrastructure that you had to set up the equipment in?**

At that stage they were wooden huts and even our accommodation, in our particular group, the radio people

29:00 we had a small hut which would house four beds with a table in the middle made out of pressed cardboard, it was compressed cardboard. Which meant it would probably last for two or three years, after that it would probably deteriorate. But we had a hut of

29:30 our own and we planted some banana trees which we'd stolen of course, and we had a nice little set up. But there was still people who had been there eight or nine months, ten months living in the larger accommodation quarters which were about thirty to a block, which was little difficult. Because we were specialists I suppose we had

30:00 good accommodation and good quarters if you like.

**And why did you feel this was a dead end posting?**

Because we felt that the war had passed us by. We were doing a good job, we were servicing all the aircraft in the area, we were obviously doing a job the air force wanted us to do. But when the work started to taper off, being the first to arrive,

30:30 or the last to arrive if you like I was the first out and I got posted to a very similar type unit in Lae. I caught the Sunderland aircraft across to Salamaua, from Salamaua to Lae we moved by landing barge to Lae and when I arrived in Lae they were setting up the unit. Our accommodation there was

31:00 pretty good except that we had the accommodation itself for the troops, for the air force people, personnel, was bell type tents, the American tents and we had four beds to a tent and there was a bit of room, there was a table. So we had better accommodation than we did in Port Moresby. But we were setting up and

31:30 after a few days I was called in and told that I was going to be sent to a unit, they didn't tell me what type of unit, an army unit in Wewak, remember this was very early in 1945, the Wewak campaign was over but it was still very much being fought and very dangerous there.

32:00 And our job as detailed to us, because the army when they found this equipment used to look at it and then souvenir it and then decided it was too heavy and throw it away, was to find this equipment and send it back to base for analysis. That was basically the equipment and as I mentioned before we were given our weapon, which between two of us, I don't know if we ever got into trouble how we were going to manage

32:30 one weapon between two. It was a Thompson sub machine gun which as it turned out, neither of us had anything to do with before.

**Just going back to Lae for a moment, what type of equipment was it that you were working on there?**

I didn't work on any equipment because they were just forming the unit up, it would have been exactly the same aircraft equipment as was Port Moresby, it was more advanced base that's all in Lae. It meant that Lae was starting to take

33:00 over in a more advanced area the job that was being done in Port Moresby. But I didn't have the privilege of serving in Lae for any length of time.

**Well what did you do while you were there?**

While I was there I was helping to set up the unit, in other words put tents up and shift things and

33:30 I ceased on the job I was given, with the equipment job in Wewak with great eagerness, I was very happy about that. Because it meant that I was getting back to my work rather than put up tents or something.

**Just to clarify what exactly was your, I guess qualification at this stage?**

My

34:00 qualifications were the highest you could get in radio in the air force, it was what they called a group one posting, it meant that you had done all your courses and you became the highest qualified people in the air force to work on any sort of radio equipment.

**So in terms of the work you were going**

34:30 **to be doing in Wewak, looking for this equipment, or analysing this equipment, how was that going to relate to your radio?**

Well the equipment we wanted to find, or were told to find was radio equipment. Because the specialists in Port Moresby, the officers of our sections wanted to look at that equipment and the RAAF generally, the Australian

35:00 RAAF wanted to know whether the Japanese over the period of time since the war had commenced had improved their equipment. Wewak was the last campaign that the Australian Army had fought in therefore, and there was many, many aircraft, Japanese aircraft destroyed there. They knew there'd be a base somewhere in Wewak and they wanted the air force in there to find that base

35:30 and to send some of that equipment, not all of it naturally, but a cross section of that equipment back to the base in Lae so they could analyse it and they could advise the powers that be the type of equipment or whether there'd been any improvement. Now as it turned out the Japanese because of their isolation hadn't improved their equipment since the war, or they commenced the war

36:00 in December '41 therefore the vast improvements made by the Australian manufacturing section and certainly the American manufacturing section had left them for dead. In other words the equipment and the improvements that we had in our equipment, especially radio, was really outstripping the Japanese.

**And when did you find out what kind of unit it was that you were posted to at Wewak?**

At Wewak,

36:30 when I arrived there. We first of all marched, now this is quite a funny one, I first of all marched through the gate of this depot unit, if you'd like to call it that. And as we went through the gate, the two of us, lugging between us a box of ammunition and one of us carrying a Thompson sub machine gun and the little bit of clothing we had. We all,

37:00 we both of us still had our respirator, gas mask and tin hat with us which I for sure hadn't used all the time I'd been in the air force, especially through Port Moresby and Lae. And as we came through the gate there was a pile of tin hats first, or respirators, anyway doesn't matter, there was a pile of tin hats say, let's say first

37:30 that was huge, there was literally many, many hundreds of tin hats there and a little bit further on there

was a pile of respirators there, a great pile, just thrown in. So the fellow that was with me looked at me and I looked at him and we took our tin helmet off and we threw it on that pile and we went to the next step and threw our respirators on that pile.

38:00 And then we reported in and nobody ever said a word to us about our tin hat or our respirators for the whole of the time we were there, or anywhere in the islands, for the whole period of time. By the way I should go back, talking about equipment and talking about parades. In Port Moresby one night I went into Port Moresby to a showing of the pictures or something and my hat blew off, do you want to

38:30 know when I got a new hat, well over twelve months later when I got back to Australia, I never had a hat the whole time I was in the islands, of any description. That's the way, never went on parade, you done your job, especially in the work we were doing.

**You never went on parade?**

Never.

**Why?**

The whole of the time, there was only one parade held at the time, and I didn't have a hat anyhow, held in Port Moresby and I happen to be on duty,

39:00 so I didn't go on parade. I never went on parade in Lae because I was only there a few days at a time, never went on parade with the army because they were there to do a job and they didn't go on parade. And when I finished up on Morotai my little unit certainly never went on parade. When we were swallowed up by a bigger unit

39:30 the only parade we went on was when we revolted about going home, but that's another story, at the moment we're in Wewak.

**Well just before we start on Wewak we're going to reach the end of this tape –**

# Tape 5

00:36 **Right so you were just about to tell us you were getting to Wewak?**

Well we went into this establishment if you'd like to call it that way, it was really a depot. They naturally, as is normal hadn't been briefed, we knew what we had to do but the hardest part there was getting some infantry soldiers

01:00 to look after us, in other words it was their territory they didn't want us walking all over the place. And anyhow we didn't know much what was going on and we didn't want to walk all over the place. So after a couple of days we managed to get a few soldiers and do a couple of patrols. And two or three days later we happened to be going past a creek

01:30 and we saw some radio valves popping down the creek. So we followed the creek up and we found a Japanese – how shall I put it – depot, and seeing the radio naturally it was a radio depot. So we bundled all that, what we could, especially a cross section of equipment up, and we duly managed to get it a despatch back to headquarters.

02:00 This is all pretty mundane sort of stuff. And the word came through was the other chap who was with me, there was two of us, was posted back to the headquarters and I was to go to join this unit which was about fifteen kilometres from Wewak. It was actually at Dagua, which is a little place on the coast, it was where

02:30 an Australian soldier had earned the VC, Victoria Cross, some time beforehand naturally, in the landings etc. So I turned up at this particular area having been given a job to do and reported in and as it was nothing to do for a couple of days until everything was sorted out I went down on the

03:00 beach area and taught myself how to clean and load and fire, shoot properly with the Thompson sub machine gun. I wasted a few rounds of ammunition, there's probably a few things buried in the sand on that beach. Then my task was commenced basically and that was to have a look through the area behind Dagua.

03:30 Actually there was nothing as it turned out, it was very rough country, very difficult to climb in mountains and they were good soldiers, they were a commando unit, the 2/9th Cav Commandos and I done my job with them. And the first fighting patrol I went out with the second scout approached me with a proposition that he carry the Thompson sub

04:00 machine gun because it would stop any Japanese that might appear. So I needn't have worried about learning to fire the thing anyhow because I knew how to fire a rifle coming from a country type setting. And after some weeks one of the officers said, "You shouldn't have to go out every time," and I said, "Well I've got my order so that's basically it," and he said, "Well I think your going far too much and

04:30 actually we've been talking over about recommending you for a medal." And instead of a medal I got recalled out of it, I got a message to say I was going back to Lae. I hadn't got into any trouble but apparently by the time I got back to Lae, which was two days later, one of the patrols had been ambushed and had got into trouble. So it was just one of the things that happened. When I got back to Lae I was

05:00 informed I was going to Morotai, this would be about, remembering I haven't copied any dates down, probably sometime into July '45. I mention that date because it's getting on towards the VP Day and I have

05:30 to come back to it. I had VE Day when I was in Port Moresby. And so duly I got on the aircraft and we landed at Biak and then onto Morotai.

**Before we go on with Morotai I've got a few more questions about your time at Wewak. Just tell us about how when you first got there how you organised army protection to go out for the job?**

Well

06:00 it was reasonably simple, they were very cooperative, they weren't used to dealing with technical people from the air force and they thought we were poofters I suppose. However we were there to do a job and we approached whatever people had rank there to see if we could get some assistance. And really they found some assistance, remembering where we were at that time was really only

06:30 a depot it wasn't a fighting unit. Naturally they found some fighting soldiers to escort us. And by the way there is probably no record of either of us going to Wewak, or Dagua, the only record that I really have is the fact that I ran out of money while I was in Dagua and I had to draw ten pounds, that's twenty dollars out of the army

07:00 pay section. And that's probably the only record of the fact that we went to Wewak and then onto Dagua, or I went onto Dagua anyhow.

**Why would there be no record?**

Well obviously there wasn't much liaison with our depot back to the army units in Wewak. When we arrived we had to make our own going, which is probably fairly normal.

07:30 And all we could do later on was say thank you to the army for the cooperation we got, it was great because we couldn't have gone out on our own, we weren't good enough to start with, we weren't trained enough at all. And we knew what we were looking for and eventually we found it.

**Were you carrying weapons?**

The Thompson sub machine gun

08:00 which neither of us could fire, at that time.

**And tell us you said there was a bit of a kind of difference between you and the army men, how would they express this?**

Well I suppose it was a bit of a rivalry thing and they were all having a bit of a dig, when we were there they were having a little bit of a dig about the blue orchids, although we wore green because we were,

08:30 we didn't want to be conspicuous, we wore the same clothing as the army did. The difference myself might have been the fact that I might have been the only one wandering around with no hat on, of any description, that was basically the difference in appearance. In training it was probably a vast difference because we weren't trained for

09:00 real combat, we were trained to do a job technical wise, which we were able to do.

**What would they say, what kind of comments would they say?**

Oh a blue orchid, you wouldn't know where you were and all that sort of stuff. That's part of the system, that's something you accept. It was basically the first army unit that either of us had gone to, because the norm was that air force during the war looked after

09:30 their own except when there was some very close cooperation between the close support aircraft and close fighting troops. I'm talking about the Australian designed Boomerang and the Wirraway, which was the aircraft that picked me up to bring me out anyhow.

10:00 That was real close liaison. There would have been somewhere in Wewak and air force officer, a ground control officer that would of controlled the fire of the Boomerangs and the Wirraways and the close support aircraft, whether they be Australian or American onto the Japanese positions etc. We never met him,

10:30 or them, we didn't run into them at all. So that was Wewak, we got through that in a hurry.

**Well tell us, not so fast, well tell us about the crash sites or the Japanese planes that you**

**found, what did it look like, what was the scene like?**

Well when we came into land we came in on aircraft naturally and either side of the strip

11:00 there was lots of Japanese aircraft which hadn't been cleared away and probably weren't cleared away till the war was ended. The, you see the Japanese as they did at that time never expected that the allied forces would be able to come in, in the strength they did, and strafe the area they did and Wewak was one of them, they caught a lot of Japanese aircraft on the ground.

11:30 And an odd one or two, or few in the air, but they certainly knocked out a lot of aircraft on the ground. And it was very apparent when you first came in at Wewak, yep.

**And so, and when you were going on these patrols looking for Japanese crashed aircraft?**

Well you knew we weren't looking for,

12:00 you knew it wouldn't be near the strip, it would be somewhere within a distance of the strip so that the aircraft could be refurbished or the radios etc changed on that particular aircraft. So there would have had to been a track, probably a proper road from the air strip to the, how shall I put it,

12:30 the depot if you like. And if we'd have found that we'd have possibly walked along the road into it, but we didn't find it. We found it in that unique manner of seeing little bits of equipment, radio valves etc. coming down this flooded creek. So we just followed through and found it. But as I mentioned before the equipment hadn't changed and thank goodness I wasn't working with it

13:00 in our aircraft.

**What was it like?**

Probably at that particular time third rate, but when the war started it was probably pretty reasonable, they just hadn't kept up with the technology, that's all.

**And what did their depots, so to speak, look like?**

It was well camouflaged, it was in amongst the trees there and it was in a

13:30 nun, in a fairly dry condition because it was kept in building of sorts, because they'd been there a reasonable length of time. And it was protected from the elements and it was reasonably large, not huge but reasonably large, because they didn't need the equipment at that time, or right from the start that we finished up

14:00 having to use and having to refurbish. As I said before technology from our point of view kept up with all the fighting that was going on, or kept up with the times. Remember there was not only Australia, there was American and there was Great Britain and America working together over in Europe area, they would have all been working towards

14:30 improving the equipment. Especially in Europe because most of the, how shall I put it, the effort went into Europe to start with until they finished that particular operation.

**And when you're moving through say this area, were you concerned of snipers or booby traps?**

No well you're mainly concerned about ambush type arrangement because the Japanese that were

15:00 still left in the area were very active, but they weren't in a position to remain in any one position for any length of time, otherwise they would have been harassed and found. So they were pretty mobile, so you might have been able to wander around with your hands in your pockets, if you'd like to put it that way, for a week and not run into anything, might have been able to do it for a fortnight, but there was no guarantees. You might have walked

15:30 outside of the area we were in and gone through the gate and there they were, there might have been an ambush, that was just one of those things.

**And what was it like for you having been a technician so to speak and now suddenly you're in a war zone?**

Well strangely enough I didn't mind, it didn't worry me one little bit, it was just one of those things, I'd been

16:00 listening and reading and I learnt the main thing to do is to make sure you kept your head down and listened and done as you were told if you were people with superior knowledge. And at that stage of course, where we were, the army on that particular type operation had the superior knowledge so you listened and you done as you were told.

**I was going to ask actually how**

16:30 **were you learning some of the techniques of patrolling, like forward scout and positions?**

Well forward scout, you didn't put yourself in that position, they wouldn't allow you to be in that

position anyhow, and the second scout, you were always in the main body, which was a group of people behind. In other words some of the patrols we were done on, probably all the patrols we were on or I was on, we were protected; that was their job and they'd done it,

17:00 they'd done it well.

**What about the time when you swapped with the second scout?**

Oh well that was before the start of the patrol, I could shoot a rifle alright, I was a reasonable shot, but I was very pleased that somebody would enjoy have a go at the Thompson sub machine gun. By the way when I left Dagua I left the Thompson sub machine gun behind and I carried back to Lae

17:30 a rifle, that Thompson sub machine could be somewhere around in Dagua now, I don't know, I really don't know.

**Well how did you feel about taking on this second scout role?**

I didn't, I was back behind the second scout, he had the Thompson sub machine gun in that position of the second scout, not I thank you.

**Okay I got that. And you were talking about learning on the beach the**

18:00 **Thompson machine gun, what kind of things did you have to learn about?**

First of all you've got to learn with the magazine type operation, you've got to learn to load it properly, because if you put the ammunition in the magazine incorrectly there will be a jam and a jam probably at the wrong time. Secondly you've got to keep your weapon clean so you had to learn how to clean it and oil it and make sure it was right. And then you had to learn how to fire it,

18:30 and if there was any stoppages how to free that stoppage and basically that's all there was to it. Having said that in a few words it took a bit, from scratch, learning all those procedures; it was a big clumsy weapon anyhow.

**Was anyone teaching you?**

No.

**How do you learn something like that by yourself?**

Well you look at it, if you load

19:00 the magazine incorrectly it would jam so you had to make sure you take it out and say, "Righto, that must be in the incorrect load." So you load it that way and you work it out, so that's your magazine. Cleaning and oiling and all that sort of stuff that's very similar to what we'd been taught, or what we'd learnt when we were kids to do your own rifle. And learning how to shoot it, fire it if you like, not shoot it, fire it,

19:30 was just one of the things you had to learn. 'Cause different type weapons do different type things, it jumps to the left or the right or up in the air, so you, with a bit of practice you work that one out. And after a while you could hit a reasonable target, certainly because the noise it made you would have scared anybody, but that's just one of the things. Yeah

20:00 it was alright.

**Were any of the other blokes making a joke about you training yourself?**

They knew what I was doing, 'cause they would have to know where the noise was coming from and what was going on. You see the Dagua, which was the landing place for an operation was a coconut plantation and because the bombardment, which is mainly American type bombardment before the

20:30 landing there was all these coconut trees but there was no tops on them, they were all chopped off with artillery or naval fire. Now the 2/9th Cav Commandos were in an encampment area, which was a controlled area and well secured, in from the beach just a little. So you could get onto the beach and be assured of being in a protected area while you taught yourself

21:00 what to do. They knew, they knew.

**Did they say anything to you?**

Oh they had a little dig, they were army, they were the elitist of the army because they were a commando unit and they thought they were an elite commando unit because they were cavalry. All they had with them was a few jeeps because the cavalry had been withdrawn because of where they were operating.

21:30 So they had a few jeeps which couldn't move about a great deal. There was an airstrip there and this commando unit, I think, when you read military history, really the operations of going to places like Wewak and Dagua, waste of time and a waste of life, good lives.

22:00 But these things you find out in hindsight, you read about them in hindsight and that was basically it.

**Well what were the commandos doing out there, what kind of work?**

Their job same as, actually where they were they would have been doing exactly the same job as an infantry company would have been doing, in other words they were patrolling and trying to find the Japanese, when they found them to annihilate them, destroy them.

22:30 You see the feelings because it had been done that way, because it had been engineered in that particular way was all completely anti Japanese. The idea was to build up a hatred to the Japanese and there was, there was a hatred amongst the soldiers of

23:00 the nation against the Japanese, and that was part of propaganda, the propaganda war. And that existed, and existed right through, because that part of having an enemy if you like is to make sure your soldiers wanted to kill an enemy. 'Cause there was a lot, especially early in the war time services, that

23:30 people didn't fire at specific targets because they were like you and I, they didn't want to specifically want to kill anybody, and there was a lot of that. So the propaganda machine had to find a way round that and the way round it was to make sure that the soldiers hated the Japanese.

**Did you hate them yourself?**

I don't think I'd been instilled with

24:00 the, or the air force ground crew that normally, under normal circumstances wouldn't have had contact with them, I don't think there was any, there was an obvious dislike because they had threatened our country but there wasn't the hatred in their minds if they might have been front line troops.

**One these fighting patrols were fired upon ever?**

24:30 Not in my time, can I cross those fingers, because I could have been at anytime but never once.

**Did you feel scared on these patrols?**

I felt apprehensive to be honest; I don't think I was ever scared. There's been a few times I've been scared by the way but I don't think I was on that particular. I was just watchful,

25:00 apprehensive and that's about it.

**And did you find anything interesting with the commandos on any of those patrols?**

No, the most interesting part was that they played a good hand of poker at night.

**You lose some money?**

I lost some money I had to draw some out of the bank, out of the army pay section.

**What did you tell them the reason you were getting the money for?**

Well they didn't make an enquiry, I had

25:30 to do it through the unit, done through the unit to the pay section which was in Wewak, I got my money. I did notice, I was hoping that they wouldn't find that and it wouldn't come out of me pay book but it did.

**Okay tell us where you went to next after this period if Wewak?**

Well I was picked up by the most crazy pilot that you'd ever believe possible. And as the –

26:00 on his way in he done a strafing job and the guns had jammed, he had no fire power on board, not that we had much, or couldn't afford it, the Japanese aircraft anyhow, they could shoot us down easily. The only time we got more than about a metre and a half off the ground was when he took off and when he went up to land. 'Cause he took off from that air strip and he went around and onto the beach and that's about as

26:30 high as he went all the way back to his place anyhow. And he was so crazy that he was singing, and I had headphones on, and he'd be singing away and he'd come to a river and he'd be flying along and he'd go into the river like that and out the other side, he kept about that height all the time. I think I was more scared there than I was of any Jap that might have been around. I could see him

27:00 nose diving in anytime.

**Did you try to tell him to stop it?**

No, all he wanted to do was sing, no.

**What was he singing?**

Hey?

**Do you remember what he was singing?**

Oh no I can't remember what he was singing; it was some unmelodious type song of some sort. I told you he was crazy.

**Can you describe him for us; can you remember the look on his face?**

Oh he was

27:30 an officer, he was the pilot and he had unusual people on the back seat instead of his usual machine gunner if you like, it was a two seater aircraft, that was probably his way of settling his nerves or something, he might have been happy to be going home. I can assure you nobody was going to have a go at him,

28:00 that was just one of the experiences.

**And then now, where did you return to after that?**

I, via a couple of small bases I went to, one was Finschhafen and then from Finschhafen I went by DC3 back to Lae. And as I said before I arrived at Lae in time for them to tell me that one of the patrols had been ambushed and

28:30 that I was posted away immediately.

**How did you feel about hearing that news that that man had replaced you?**

Well they couldn't find out the exact information, but what they told me that he'd been killed and I haven't heard from any information to say different. But I couldn't confirm that and I wouldn't like it to be on record that that was it; that was some of the things that you didn't hear about when you were in the services.

29:00 **Well how did you feel generally just yourself being away from that potential ambush?**

Reasonably happy, it was somebody else's turn so away I went. I done my job when I went back, to my base, which at that time was Lae, which was getting ready at that time to come into full

29:30 operation. They'd been doing a little bit naturally but they were building up their strength and their camp, encampment area at that time. I should imagine as the war finished within weeks that they never ever finished that camp anyhow.

**And tell us about going to Morotai?**

Well Morotai, we went to Morotai and the aircraft landed at Biak which was

30:00 one of the hottest and dustiest places I've ever been to in my life, but we only had a very short time there. We stopped a night and most of the next day and went onto Morotai. Morotai by the way was Japanese occupied, but the Americans had a division of black troops on the perimeter and it was only after the war finished

30:30 that they found instead of thousands of Japanese on the island there was probably hundreds, and they had a division of about fifteen thousand people guarding the encampment and the supply area because that was the jumping off spot for the invasion of Tarakan and Balikpapan and those places. My brother had arrived on the island about the same time as I did,

31:00 but his battalion in the division that he was in, which was the 9th Division, they camped outside the perimeter because there wasn't room inside the perimeter. So his battalion was outside the perimeter, they couldn't have cared less because they were a well seasoned battalion, they just went outside and set up and they had no problems while they were there, and they done the invasion of Balikpapan.

**Did**

31:30 **you see your brother during this time?**

No never saw him all the time that the war was on.

**And what was your role to be here?**

Hmmm?

**What was your role to be?**

Well we joined, or I joined because the other unit members were there, they'd come from Australia, and I was the one that had already served some of 1944 and that part of

32:00 1945 in the islands and I joined them there. I mentioned that for a reason, it will come up later on. The unit was specially formed and it was called the Number 1 FRU, which was Forward Recovery Unit. And as I mentioned earlier it was very few in the unit, it was four very specialists people and a

32:30 couple of specialists to assist them and the rest were the support, in other words they might have been truck drivers, one was a cook and there was an admin person and was commanded by a flight

lieutenant. Who called us in the specialists and told us we were the elite specialists in the air force

33:00 and we'd been gathered together because we were the best that they could find. The truth of the matter was we were all young and we were all expendable, and I said that for the camera and I'll say it again, we were all young and we were expendable. The job of the unit was to recover what equipment they could from crashed allied aircraft. In other words the war had been going a long while and money was starting, or finances

33:30 must of been starting to get tight and no matter where our aircraft had crashed we were to go in and locate the aircraft and get the equipment out. My job for instance was the radio, but my secondary job was the assist the armourer because the two of us worked together. I could get my equipment out much quicker than anybody else so I was assisting the armourer. There was

34:00 an engine fitter, his job was a difficult one, he was assisted by the rigger, which was a fitter rigger and they had the job of getting the engine out, or vital part of the engine. And the other two more or less specialist people, were people who manned

34:30 the cranes and the very special truck we had and when I said we were to find this equipment and get it out it didn't matter where it was, if it was behind Japanese lines that was it. The silliest thing they'd ever thought of, that's why I said we were young and expendable because it would have been a difficult job. The war finished.

**Did you think this at the time that, about this**

35:00 **sense that you were being – ?**

Oh yes I think the people who had been briefed by this flight lieutenant everybody was aware and everybody came out shaking their heads realising that the task we were suppose to be going to do was an absolute impossibility, in our own minds, not one of those people refused of course, it was our job we were going to go in and do as we were told. Just one

35:30 of those things, we were just pleased that somebody dropped the nuclear devices and let it go at that, the war finished, I was still twenty year old.

**Did you talk about this situation with each other?**

Occasionally, occasionally but very rarely because we were just

36:00 hoping the job wouldn't come up, and it was going to come up, it would have naturally. And as I said before, the war finished so we were most relieved people, our tasks, the units name didn't change; our tasks changed. We done the same job to the aircraft that were on the island, on the island of Morotai. In other words we stripped the aircraft of radios and engines and instruments and

36:30 then our specialists, drivers and crane drivers and along with anybody else in the unit we could get to help, pushed the aircraft off the edge of the beach to the edge of the coral and then the drop off was like that, and we pushed the aircraft over the drop off and made sure that it sunk to the bottom. There's dozen and dozens and dozens

37:00 of aircraft in there, outside of Morotai, I know where they are. There was Mitchell bombers, there was Boston bombers there was Beauforts, there was at least one Liberator, there was some Kittyhawks, their all up there, down there somewhere.

**Couldn't they have been repaired?**

Well you see a lot of that equipment was lend leased from America, a lot of it, not all of it and part of the agreement was

37:30 that at the end of the war the equipment be destroyed. Mind you the war wasn't over a great length of time before they decided that they'd probably destroyed far too much, enthusiastic people like us had done our job very well. We should have hid a few aircraft and probably gone back after the war and made a fortune. That was one of the things that we done when the war ended.

38:00 They came to me after the war finished, after our small unit was swallowed up into a bigger unit at a later stage, somewhere around about six weeks after the war finished, and we were swallowed into another unit. There was about fifteen of us left, the rest had gone back because they were married people with a number of points up,

38:30 so we become part of another unit. And they came to me and said, "You're the radio expert we're sending" remember Morotai became the jumping off spot, it was to be the jumping off spot for the invasion of Japan but was the jumping off spot for the occupation of Japan. And they come to me and said we want you to go to Kure, which was going to be the air force base in Japan, and set up and

39:00 form the communications centre, and I said, "I want to go home." Remember this would have been October, sometimes in October and I said, "No I want to go home, I've got a girlfriend back in Australia and I want to go and see." I should have said, "Yes, I'll go to Japan," because I never got home till March the following year. Because I'm sure they forgot me,

39:30 what had happened anyhow is on that unit they had no record of where their troops came from and when we had a bit of a confrontation with the administration people, they said, “Anybody that’s been here over the twelve months put their hand up,” they fully expected none and about six of us did. ‘Cause we’d been somewhere else, most of them had come in from Australia but

40:00 we’d been somewhere else. So oh well, how could that be, and when it was explained to them there it was. And they said, “Some of you must have been too young,” but didn’t matter, I was twenty-one then, I was old.

**Well just pause there ‘cause we’ve got the end of the tape.**

# Tape 6

00:35 There was a couple of other incidents at the war’s end. The unit we went to, the big unit was on the basis of being reorganised to make sure that the troops that came through, including air force and army that were going to the occupation forces in Japan,

01:00 kept mobile and kept moving. However they had a problem and the problem was that people who had been in the air force for a long while and had a lot of point up, in other words they might have had married men with children they were posted out, back to Australia for discharge because of the points they’d accumulated. This happened in lots of units especially army units and certainly happened in this particular unit.

01:30 Us young fellows we had very few points up so we wouldn’t have got a discharge so we had very little chance of getting out of the place. So at that particular stage, remember I said my speciality was radio, I got called in to take charge of the store, the aircraft store, the tool store. And quite frankly

02:00 I never had a clue. So the fellow would come in and say, “I want such and such a tool,” and I said, “Do you know where it’s kept?” “Oh yes,” “Well get it out.” And he’d get it out and he’d say, “Do you want me to sign for it?” I said, “No you can bring it back.” Now this went on for about three or four days until the tool store was starting to dry up because the word got around see. So again here I was

02:30 in trouble again so I had to report in, “And what happened about the tool store?” and I said, “Well, I didn’t know the tools, I don’t know anything about tools or stores or how to book things in or out or anything like that.” So very quickly I went back to being a radio specialist. Again there was two ways of skinning a cat and instead of getting into trouble I just got out of that particular job.

03:00 That wasn’t a bad unit, at the end of the war when they were assembling a Zero fighter, the specialists, the engine fitters and things like that, and they got it flying after the war. It flew up and down the strip and around a bit, goodness knows where it is now, but they had a Zero aircraft flying.

**During the time when you had to go out to collect bits**

03:30 **and pieces from planes that had crashed, were there any particular places around the area where there were a lot of crash sites?**

Well you see it was an island, Morotai; when they came back they usually landed on the strip, whether it was damaged or not that didn’t worry us one little bit. The idea was that any aircraft that were assisting the army in the strafing or bombing situation in

04:00 the Dutch East Indies in Balikpapan and Labuan and those places, any aircraft that crashed in that area that was our responsibility to. We had to go in, in a landing craft with the assistance of the army and we had to do what we were supposed to do. Remember earlier that I said the war finished, we didn’t have to do it, which was, we done it a lot of course on Morotai itself

04:30 because that was our job in the finish. But at that time we were lucky enough to get out of it, to put it that way.

**So there were no particular spots on or around Morotai that had been dangerous for aircraft?**

Ah yeah Balikpapan itself was; an odd aircraft would have been shot down. And in

05:00 any of the Dutch East areas there could have been aircraft on the ground somewhere, and once they were plotted of course we would have had to do our job, which we would have. That was one of the things, this particular funny unit done, it was a good unit, nice fellows in it. It was fairly

05:30 hairy sort of a job, anyhow it didn’t happen so that’s alright, it’s one of the things that went through. And after far too long a period for the first time ever they said, “You’re going home to Australia by ship.” I’d never been in a ship before, I’d been always shifted around in aircraft, course the war was over and the arrangement was

06:00 that when I knew roughly what time I got back to Australia was that Dorothy was going to arrange that we got married, so we got married.

**When had you proposed to Dorothy?**

I can't remember specifically doing that, it just happened I think. I acquired during the war, for my first leave, remember I was only eighteen and

06:30 Dorothy was only seventeen to get an engagement ring. And we got engaged then, much to my father's disapproval, a mere little boy and Dorothy's father was a blacksmith, which is a dead trade now, but he was a blacksmith and he said, "Sid," my father went to see him and he said, "your daughter's only a little child."

07:00 He said, "Sid, you forget something, when this leave period's over, that son of yours is going back to the air force, I've got to live with that daughter of mine and as far as I'm concerned I'm not going to interfere." So that was our, and by the way that was when I met my brothers again after the war had finished, when I arrived back in Australia.

**Well just before we talk about coming back to Australia, just got a few questions about the planes that you put onto the reef, or into**

07:30 **the reef?**

Well there were a number of fighter aircraft, mainly the Kittyhawk, which was being used then. The light bomber sort of thing, which were being used extensively, the Mariner and the Boston. The aircraft of which was suppose to been our front line

08:00 aircraft in Australia the Beaufort, some American aircraft which were, one in particular, Liberator which crash landed on the strip. We had about five Kittyhawks – not Kittyhawks – Spitfire, here I go – we never destroyed any Spitfires, Mosquitos that had sat on this strip and hadn't been

08:30 used for a little while. So they decided that they were going to take them back to Australia, they'd sat in the base for a while. So the test pilot took them up to test fly them and every time he landed one the undercarriage collapsed, so invariably the back tail section. It was a wooden aircraft, used to fly off, so we had the job in the finish of getting rid of those

09:00 aircraft. But there was probably in all, we might have allegedly salvaged one hundred aircraft, allegedly, 'cause when we left I'm sure those motors were still sitting under tarpaulins where we put them, I'm sure, just one of those things.

**Well how would you get rid of the aircraft?**

The aircraft you pushed them off the strip, you made sure that the petrol

09:30 tanks if there was any left in them were punctured and you sunk them in the sea.

**How far into the sea?**

Oh it was only about fifty to a hundred metres of the reef which was exposed at low tide and then used to drop straight down, go down probably anything up to a hundred metres or more, those

10:00 aircraft will be down there still.

**How many people did it take to push them off the strip?**

Whatever we had, probably about twenty, we used to take the crane and the big truck and pull them to where we manhandled them. And when the tide come in of course the fellows there all they had was shorts, was man handle them over the edge and make sure that the thing sunk.

**Well how hard is it to push the plane through water?**

Oh

10:30 well, if it's got a little bit of buoyancy, it's not too bad at all. Remember generally speaking most of them we pushed off the edge had wheels so they could, it was wheeled off. We had troubles, one particular aircraft floated when we got it to the edge of the reef anyhow. One of our fellows had to chase it in a little bit of a canoe we had and make sure it sunk.

11:00 That was a little bit off shore, just one of those things.

**Was it strangely fun in a way to push aircraft into the sea?**

I suppose so yeah, we used to spend our days working on those aircraft, we tried burning them, there's probably a pile of aircraft that's just a mass of metal because we burnt them with jellied fuel. I won't tell you a story on that one.

**Tell**

11:30 **me a story?**

No.

**What kind of a story?**

Well you see, I'll tell you the story, he's probably dead now. The flight lieutenant who was our OC [officer commanding] of the unit, we didn't like him very much because he thought of himself and not necessarily the unit. And we had these aircraft piled up and we were going to burn them in a big drainage area

12:00 beside the airstrip. And we had the drainage area full of probably thirty aircraft, and we poured jelly fuel over them, in other words you put soap in the petrol and that jellies the petrol up, so we had jelly fuel all over it. He was going to set off this pile of aircraft and the fuel with a pistol and we shook our head and

12:30 we sat along the edge of this big pit, further away from the aircraft and watched him. He had two or three goes with the pistol and they used to hit these aircraft and fly off. So he got a can, oh about twice that big of fuel and he went up to the aircraft and he drained it along the bottom of the gully, which was a deep gully as I mentioned. And one of the fellows was going to say something

13:00 and we turned round and looked at him and said, "Shh," because we knew what was going to happen, because he struck a match and put it on that fuel and it run along the bottom of the strip and it hit this aircraft pile and there was a huge bellow of flame. And that bellow of flame rolled down the gully and he turned around and

13:30 run. He lost all his hair and none of us were very sympathetic whatsoever. Now I've told you and I shouldn't have.

**How well did those aircraft burn?**

Well they were made of aluminium so there was a bit of melting and quite a bit of burning of the material that was inside them. It wasn't as successful as getting rid of them over the –

14:00 into the sea. We put not only the aircraft we put motor vehicles and trucks and everything in there, so there was a big drop off there. And did I mention there was about twenty in the unit? By the time we finished every one of us had a car, of some sort. 'Cause one of the cars was a petrol tanker

14:30 which was full of fuel so if we wanted fuel we just used to pull up. And then they sent a few blokes home and they sent us up to the other unit, but we kept about six cars in our little section, vehicles of some sort.

**Did you enjoy this time?**

Yes except I wanted to come home, yeah. It had been, the war was over and I'd been in a number of places

15:00 throughout the islands, technically I should have been sent home because I'd done me time. I arrived in the islands in 1944 and I got home in 1946.

**Well tell me about getting the news that you were going to be come home?**

Well a group of people from that particular unit

15:30 were told they were flying home and another group, which included myself were told we were going home by ship. It's a story in itself so I'll tell it to you. One of the fellows from our section who was to fly home and the ship was to go to Brisbane. So those who lived in somewhere else might have been flying home. And he

16:00 slipped on the top of the stairs and put his hand out and he had a ring on his left hand and it ripped all the skin off the bones and things, because it got caught in the aircraft door. So he got offloaded and went into hospital so those that were left were quite happy to go on the boat anyhow. And so about two days later we boarded this boat,

16:30 it was the Kings Point Victory, these are some of the names that stick in your mind. And I went up on board knowing full well I didn't like confined spaces and I was escorted with my gear down, right down below the water line. And I looked around and I said, "This won't do any good for me whatsoever." So I took a blanket out of my kit

17:00 some changes of clothes etc and went up on the deck and that's where I stopped until I got into Brisbane, and it took seven days. And by the way when we lined up for a meal, it was American manned, it was an American ship, it was a victory ship. The first meal was, and we had trouble getting things like eggs, the first meal was boiled eggs and boiled potatoes and one slice of

17:30 bread. And we only got two meals a day and the second meal was boiled eggs and boiled potatoes and bread. And the third meal the next day was, guess what, that's all we had. So within three days nobody wanted to see an egg ever again. It lasted with me for over twenty years; I wouldn't have a boiled egg. Anyhow –

18:00 **Who met you when you arrived in Brisbane?**

We, nobody, friends or anything, we arrived in Brisbane and any of the equipment that the boys had bought on board to make it more comfortable to get home with was thrown overboard at the mouth of the river, things like deck chairs that they'd made and all that sort of stuff. Goodness knows, I bet after a while the word got round and when there was a

18:30 troop ship coming in there would have been some launches behind it to make sure they collected anything that was of any value. We went into the personnel depot and immediately I got a leave pass to go home. So I went home by train, naturally it was the mode of transport

19:00 and Dorothy had arranged the wedding, might have been a week after, or there about. My two brothers who had been home for sometime had organised a drinks, remember it was a war and drinks were hard to get but they got it. Everybody who went to our wedding got as full as you would possibly believe they could, there was wine and there was beer.

19:30 **And how was the wedding?**

The wedding went off very well and we were to go for our honeymoon onto one of the islands, the resorts that had opened again and a cyclone came down so we finished up going to Gympie to Dorothy's sisters and I went back to the, after a little while to the air force for a discharge and there was

20:00 only one thing I can tell you and that's about my discharge. Dorothy said, "What are you going to do?" and I said, "Well if they ask me, I'll stop in the air force, I don't know anything else." However my discharge, my interview was on a Sunday and there was nobody there so I didn't get an interview. But I do remember going to the Q store and the girl behind the counter was very sour faced, and probably 'cause she didn't want to work anyhow, and she said, "How did you get home?" and I said,

20:30 "On the Kings Point Victory ship," she said, "No, what clothing did you wear?" I said, "What I've got on now," which was my army greens. She said, "According to your records, the only thing you've been issued with that you still own is one pair of socks," I said, "How did I miss that?" And she looked at me and she couldn't help but crack a little smile. So I got a complete issue of clothes because I never brought anything much home at all.

21:00 So I got a new issue of clothes, that was the only funny thing, how did you get home, no clothes. So that was my Second World War experience.

**How did you feel after getting your discharge?**

Well I didn't know what to do but what I'd arranged to do was, because I knew radio, was to join a firm in Mackay,

21:30 my sister Nell, remember I mentioned earlier that she was a waitress at the Sunshine Café in Mackay. She had married one of the owners' sons and I'd known them before, the oldies, when I was a little boy, and I got put on as a radio mechanic, but one shouldn't work for,

22:00 with relations or for relations. I lasted a bit over twelve months and went into what was called the PMG, so that was my, I went as a technical, I was from the PMG. And later on I foolishly, or Dorothy and I foolishly, mainly me I bought a store, a school store and took my

22:30 farewells from the PMG and run a school store for a while, but it was too big, the business, we built it up to something that was a big business. And one day I sat down and I said, "Look I'm going to work out how much we make," we were making good money. But I worked out between us that I was working something like seventy odd hours a week and Dorothy was

23:00 working probably thirty five to forty and we were employing staff. I said, "All we're earning the two of us for each hour is three shillings and tuppence," I said, "I get paid with the PMG probably three or four times that much." So I put the business on the market and sold it and then I went to see them at the PMG and they said, "No,

23:30 we don't want you back." And I said to the boss, "I thought you said I could have a job when I wanted one." He said, "I'll give you a job anytime," he said, "it's admin people, we'll fix it." So I started back with them, but they made me do all the exams all over again.

**What made you decide to join the militia again, or for the first time?**

Remember that we were a reasonably close-knit group

24:00 my brother Jim and Alf and I. And when they formed the militia Charlie Barton who was an engineer in Mackay who was taken a prisoner, he was 2/5th Battalion with Jim and Alf, but he was taken prisoner and he spent the whole of the war years, up til the time he got taken prisoner in the Middle East in prisoner of war camp.

24:30 The, he was asked to form the unit and he asked Jim if he would come in as company commander and Alf to come in as a company sergeant so I said, "Well, I'll join too," I joined as a private in 1948 on the formation of the unit. And as I mentioned earlier, 1949 was the first camp, we had it in Townsville,

25:00 I went as a corporal and came home as a sergeant. 1950 we had the camp in Sellheim, I went as a

sergeant and then I went away with the PMG doing a course and I qualified as a, while I was doing that course I not only qualified as a technical officer with the PMG I qualified for a first appointment, so I was lieutenant for the

25:30 third CMF exam. Probably the first enlistee as a private who made an officer after the war, in what was then called the CMF. Then I stuck with it, so I was with the CMF for a long while.

**Tell me about this exchange that you went on to Malaya with the CMF?**

I was a major by then, I was a company commander, I'd gone through the different

26:00 exams etc. and I was asked if I'd like to go to Malaysia as a look, see, learning experience, they called it a senior's officer's course. There was five of us went, one was a doctor, they were all majors and we went in '62/'63, that's over the Christmas period, New Year period.

26:30 And it was, as it was advertised; it was a look, see experience, we went to Malacca where the Australians were posted, we went out on exercise with the units that were in Malaysia. We were looked after, 'cause I don't suppose they wanted any of us to be casualties but everyone, the five majors who went they were all returned serviceman.

27:00 I was the only one from the air force by the way, but I was an army major then. And when I came back I went back to the original job I had, because it was only a short posting. In this CMF I kept the job as detachment commander. In later that year they asked me if I'd go into the regular army as, on a short service commission, probably suspecting that

27:30 they would want somebody to go to the United Nations at that stage. And I was taken to the, with the short service commission, I remember my number had to change and I was given number 1905010 in the regular army.

**Well just before we talk about the regular army take me through in a bit more detail what your experience in Malaya was like?**

28:00 Really, part of the time was boring. Let's say we arrived, we went to – we were looked after very well, we went to a British unit in Singapore. From there, we might have had two days there, we went to Malacca which was the Australian base and we had some time there. And we toured around and looked

28:30 at artillery units and things like that. Then we were allocated to a company that was out in the field, either doing exercises, operations or whatever. I remember getting on top of a hill and meeting a regular army major called Major Peter Phillips, who I met some time later, and some time later than that I asked him if

29:00 he'd become the national president of the RSL, because he lived in Canberra, and that's our association went back all that time, we met the first time in Malaya.

**What was the general situation in Malaya while you were there?**

While we were there fairly quiet, nothing happened, not a thing. Before we went there the confrontation period was on, that's why our troops were still there. After we come home the

29:30 Borneo incident happened, it was just one of those things, we were in a quite period. That's all there is to tell about Malaya. We saw lots of things; that photograph shows me being briefed by somebody who knew all about edible plants and all that sort of stuff, I don't know a thing about them now of course. But that was, they give us a good run through.

**And in what kind of I guess capacity were you there, what was the – ?**

30:00 We were there as visitors to look and learn. We learnt how they operated over there and we certainly looked at everything they were doing and that's about it.

**Well what did you learn about the way they were operating?**

Basically the way we were teaching and that was probably why we went, so that we could pass on the style of teaching, the style of instruction, the

30:30 methods that had been learnt in the Confrontation period with the communists in Malaysia and that was basically it.

**Did you notice any differences in the way the army was working or teaching from when you'd spent time with them during World War II?**

Oh yes it had changed, it was a different type situation, it was a bit like the First World War,

31:00 it was dictated how you operated, which was trench type system. The Second World War was vastly different except for odd places, such as some trench warfare that happened in the Middle East, not much of it. And then of

31:30 course it shifted to a jungle type operation in places like New Guinea and other places. And then when the Korean War started it became trench warfare again, the country dictates what happens in the

particular time. And a different type situations, different ways of fighting things.

**Well what kind of fighting**

32:00 **was the country in Malaysia dictating?**

It was mainly a jungle type warfare, in other words it was more a patrolling exercise and you held a piece of ground and you patrolled and worked from that area. It's – again there was some subtle changes in different places in Malaya.

**Did you get to go on any patrols with the army when you were there?**

32:30 Ah yeah we went on patrols but let me assure you that when we were there we never got in any dangerous situations whatsoever, whatsoever. Remember I'd been through a few funny things, but Malaysia wasn't a huge, when we were there, wasn't a huge operation. It was certainly dangers and certainly confrontation periods

33:00 in Malaya but not while we were there.

**Did you learn any skills I guess of general observational skills while you were there?**

No, might have honed up a few skills I had I suppose that's about it. No, Malaya was alright it was a good visit and they were well trained troops. The reason they were well trained troops is because somebody occasionally fired at them I think, but they were well trained, they were good

33:30 troops.

**And what was it like being back, although there wasn't any danger to you in Malaysia but being back in a sense in almost an active situation?**

It had been some time, remember that the war had finished some time. I'd risen through the ranks from a private to a company commander, actually a little higher, detachment commander or 2IC [second in command] of a battalion. And the

34:00 things had changed, your line of thinking changes because you become more of a tactician than a doer, do as you were told, you had to do the telling sometimes, that's all. And that's basically what you were looking for and seeing how the officers operated and how they worked in places like Malaysia which was

34:30 more of a jungle type operation than most places, either jungle or rubber plantations, which were very thick anyhow.

**Well how does the fact that you have to be the one who sometimes saying 'do this' rather than doing it; how does that affect the way you look at a situation?**

You see, can I give you an example of giving orders of how

35:00 things can, it can affect people. My brother Jim I told you was commissioned in the field and had three overseas postings, well after the war he went back to carpentry. Now I knew a number of people in Mackay and a fellow by the name of Pratt came to see me and said, "Would your brother Jim come into business with me?" He said, "I want to

35:30 build houses in quantity," and he said, "His name has been mentioned." I said, "Well why don't you ask him yourself?" He said, "I'd like you to ask him." And I went to see Jim and I said, "This is an opportunity for you, you can take this," he said, his words to me, and to give you an idea of command in wartime, his words to me, he said, "I don't want any experiences where I have to make any

36:00 decision whatsoever," he said, "I sent a lot of young men out to be killed in my time as an officer in the army," and he said, "I don't want any responsibilities at all." And that was a very intelligent, a very good soldier who didn't want the responsibility of going into business, he would

36:30 have done alright but he didn't do it. Now that's how people are affected, some people shoot themselves; they get to the stage where they can't do it anymore. Don't ever believe that there are no suicides in the army, yes, yeah there is. Some people can take to army life, others can't

37:00 and that's just the way it is. My brother was a brilliant soldier and the war ruined him. But he lived a long while, he lived happily, his wife and family and he was a good soldier.

**How did the war ruin him?**

Well he could have been in a business except he didn't want to have responsibility of carrying that business through.

37:30 That's because his exact words were, he'd sent too many young fellows out to be killed, yeah. That was it that happened. Yes, come on, what else do you want to know?

**I**

38:00 **guess being in Malaysia did you, I guess extra lessons did you learn from I guess the officers there about giving orders or looking at situations in an active sense?**

Well I don't suppose I learnt anything new; I certainly became aware of, my

38:30 thoughts were sharper because I was in this particular situation. And my learning experience was basically the fact that these people have done certain things and they are in the process of doing certain things, we learn those skills because it seeps back down through the army, it comes through the army. This is the time to sit up and take notice of what they'd been doing.

39:00 And that's what we done in Malaya, that's what all the officers that went over at my time were looking at doing, so that's what we done, went off very well.

**We're just at the end of this tape, well almost so –**

# Tape 7

00:35 **Okay so tell us about after that?**

Well after I came back naturally I went into the same job in what was called the CMF in those days, as detachment commander. And I was asked if I'd like to take on a job as

01:00 a short service commission in the regular army. Now there was two ways, at that stage remember Vietnam had started and they were short of officers and they were taking officers into the regular army, especially those with experience and especially those they wanted anyhow. You could have a short service commission which they offered me or you could go in full time CMF. So I

01:30 took the short service commission and I think they offered that to me because in the back of their minds was that sometime in the near future there would be a posting to United Nations. We had six observers in Pakistan, Kashmir and there was at that time I think six in the Middle East.

02:00 The first job I was given when I went to Townsville was G2 [Intelligence] of the CMF Task Force in Townsville. G2 is a staff officer posting, it was an interesting one too, it was basically to see that the units kept functioning and everything was running smoothly. This was late in

02:30 1963 because into '64 in January they told me I would be seconded to the United Nations I was going to Kashmir. The headquarters of the United Nations then was in Rawalpindi and I was to be there on the 2nd February, which duly I arrived in the sub continent

03:00 and reported in for duty on the 2nd February, everything was organised. The briefing in the headquarters was for a week and that left Dorothy and the boys back in Australia which meant that she would have to make arrangements to join me as soon as I could get things organised.

03:30 Anyhow I had a weeks briefing in the headquarters of the United Nations and I was posted to place called Sialkot, which was normally pretty quite. There was one major in charge, there was one major there who happen to be a Canadian by the name of Bromwell. We called him Skinner Bromwell, the reason we called him Skinner Bromwell he used to get the local barber

04:00 in everyday to shave his head. So we called him Skinner. The reason I got a posting there was the fact that they'd had some trouble on the ceasefire line which was near Sialkot, which was on the plains by the way, which was flat country. Before we went into the mountains in Kashmir

04:30 they used to patrol around the perimeter and one day the Indian patrol instead of taking the long way round this particular plot of land, which was alleged cemetery, a plot of land which measured about fifty metres at the most by about twenty metres wide. They took the short way round, so the Pakistanis fired on them, so both sides dug in on either side of that

05:00 plot of land and they used to throw grenades at one another. So we had to go and do investigations and try and settle the problem. The problem was simply solved in the finish after about a number of weeks in the fact that the UN observer from the opposite side, which was a New Zealander, a captain and Skinner Bromwell along with a Pakistan officer

05:30 drove from Sialkot to check the, what was happening on this particular plot of land. And as one of the military observers got out of the jeep he kicked a grenade that was lying there, they used to lob grenades at one another, and it went off and they were both wounded, along with the Pakistan officer. So that meant that that particular, they decided they'd better solve that particular problem. So both of them withdrew and it didn't matter whether the block of land was there or not.

06:00 But both them lived, they were alright, Skinner was due to go home and so was the New Zealand captain, and he was going home via, he was going to England for a holiday with his wife, and on the ship on the way over, after he'd come out of hospital in India, some of his wounds broke out so he had some problems. But I assume that the Indian hospital, which was probably second or third rate

06:30 the military hospital might have left some metal in them.

**Where had he got injured, or where had both of them got injured?**

Yes.

**No but what wound did they have, in the legs or what?**

Round mainly the bottom part of their legs yes, and possibly a couple of little cuts, I saw them both in hospital after the event. And I took Dorothy to visit them in hospital because she arrived from

07:00 Australia with the three boys at that particular time, that was a learning experience anyhow.

**I'll get onto that, but I was interested why you had been chosen for this role in the first place?**

Oh six officers and they liked to have experienced officers in this particular job. Up until the Vietnam conflict it used to be regular army officers

07:30 and because of circumstances it was now all CMF officers who had joined the regular army at full time commission etc, both in Kashmir and the Middle East. Now we have about twelve missions going but there was only two at that stage. The Kashmir thing was a partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the ceasefire line,

08:00 which I'll mention the stupidity of some of the places later on. But a ceasefire line was plotted in 1947 by a group of officers, a fairly large group of which there was quite a few Canadians, and they still had six Canadians on the mission. They weren't the same ones of course because this is 1960 on. And there was

08:30 a number of posts, to try and give you the picture, see I got the smallest which was one officer and sometimes two was there, but opposite them at Jammu there was about nine because they had a bigger area to cover. The next up on the Pakistan side was Bhimbar, which had three officers and then opposite them there was another Rawala Kot, I think it was, anyway doesn't matter, I might have that wrong.

09:00 Generally speaking most of the posts on either side of the ceasefire line were three UN officers, an officer in charge and two others. That was all the way along the ceasefire line right up to, into the Srinagar Valley, so there was quite, probably there was six or seven

09:30 posts. And what you did was work four or five weeks on then you had a weeks time off and that was leave actually, but you had a weeks time off to get back to the headquarters area, if you had your family with you, you could spend that time with your family, or you were on duty all the time. Some of the postings were hairy and some got extremely

10:00 difficult during my time over there, or our time the group of people that were there. But this was just the first break in, this was just the first indication of what might happen and how stupid the ceasefire line, the patrolling and all that sort of stuff was. The mind thought of the Indians and the Pakistanis about

10:30 what either side, the opposite side down. Remembering the army from the Pakistan side was part of the British Indian Army before partition. The next posting I had which was to Mel the brigadier there had a military cross, he'd earned it in the Second World War with the British Army. But these were comrade in arms from about,

11:00 certainly lieutenant colonel up, who'd served in the same army. Listen the only religion that's more bigoted than the Muslims is the Christians and that's basically what the problem was in India and Pakistan, in Kashmir that it was a Muslim religion basically in Pakistan and

11:30 a Hindustan religion basically in India. Remember that there was still at the end of partition, when partition was carried out there's still more Muslims living in India than there was in Pakistan, there was about seventy to a hundred million in the two Pakistanis and there was about seventy to a hundred million in India, Muslims. They were mixed in with about eight hundred million Hindus

12:00 the uncleaned people of our time, certainly in Pakistan, were those who – Pakistanis who choose to be Christians, they were the people who were ostracized more. Anyhow –

**I was interested in why you were particularly chosen, any skills you had or?**

No except I was possibly a good officer, possibly, you wouldn't want

12:30 to skite myself up. I used to get into trouble by the way, 'cause I used to speak my mind. I was offered the job I took it.

**Just pause there 'cause we've got a tap. Okay we were just saying?**

To answer your question I don't know, generally speaking they probably should have been picking good officers, remembering that

13:00 it was mainly to release regular soldiers for the operations in Vietnam and that's why the mission was,

certainly in my time, the years I was there and before I arrived and after, later it reverted back to a mixture of regular army and CMF, and later on apparently to keep regular army officers in postings they

13:30 reverted back to all regular army officers, that was when the Vietnam war was over. But that was it at the time I was there was CMF officers and most of them were good, some of them weren't.

**Had you been briefed on things such as conflict resolution?**

Yes, you were briefed

14:00 on that in your first weeks briefing, you read up the paperwork on investigations and things and there was a set piece, how to do investigations and how to solve problems. At the particular time when I arrived and afterwards, the situations got worse and worse and worse and we'll come to that a little later. But they weren't talking to one another

14:30 the Indians and Pakistanis they were just needling and fighting and it was very difficult. But every observer that was there was trying to do his job and done a good job. But that was the way the mission was at that particular time. They should have briefed you earlier that not only were the military observers there, when I arrived in a

15:00 New Zealand Caribou with a New Zealand crew, later on they changed to Canadian Caribou and a Canadian crew. That was part of the mission, but there was more civilians on the mission than there were army officers, our job was to man the ceasefire line, their job was to be in the headquarters and do all the headquarters work and the admin work and all that sort of stuff. So it was a mixture of United Nations employed people and

15:30 a number of countries with military observers there. For instance Uruguay had one officer, Chile had two, Australia six, Canada six, observers, military wise there was six from New Zealand, not counting the air crew.

16:00 And so they came from all over, there was Italians, there was Belgians, there was Danes, there was quite a few. I'll give you a story later on as I worked through about some of the different nations and how nice people they were or weren't. But most of them were alright.

**Well tell us about this first week of briefing what kinds of messages**

16:30 **were you receiving?**

Well the first week of briefing was to be told how to conduct investigations, to be told what to expect, to be told, explained the ceasefire line, where it was, how it was plotted, all that sort of stuff. The lecture from the administrative officer which meant that he told you that you weren't allowed to cash in your American dollars for rupees

17:00 because you were United Nations people. But we all ignored that fortunately because the black market was pretty good for rupes, forget I said, that, it's on tape, that was the general anyhow, that was the way it worked. And it was to get to know the civilian staff and how the transportation worked, how the aircraft worked, how you went on leave, how

17:30 much leave you got, which was called 'time off', as I mentioned. About a week a month, sometimes you worked for four weeks and got a week off, sometimes you worked for five weeks and got one week off, but around about that time. And that was the first week of briefing; you learnt most of your stuff out in the field.

**I was going to ask you how clear after a week were all the tasks and roles?**

18:00 I think you learnt most of it in the field, you learnt from other observers who'd been there some time. And they mixed the observers in; the new ones invariably went to a station, unless you happen to arrive at the wrong time, where there was observers who'd been there for some time. My second station was in the opposite direction in the hills called Domel, it was what we called a hill station.

18:30 The station itself was the brigade headquarters, it was about, lets say three and a half thousand feet above sea level and it was in the brigade headquarters area as I said. It was a nice little cottage, UN cottage, there was three observers, there was a Dane and a New Zealander there when I arrived and I became the fourth officer with

19:00 a chap from, by the name of Paul Vennits who was a major from Denmark in charge of the place. He was there for about two or three weeks and he handed over the officer in charge to me because the Dane, they were very good was a captain and the New Zealander was a captain, so I happen to be the senior officer, I became officer in charge at that

19:30 early stage. And it was a high mission as I said. The first investigation I did I decided I wasn't fit enough to do any heavy stuff so I looked through the files and found a post to visit on the Pakistan side, 'cause we were on the Pakistan side, Domel. And it was only at the height of nine thousand two hundred feet, remembering our highest

20:00 mountain in Australia is Mount Kosciusko. And some European officer had said, “An easy five hour job” I said, “I’ll take that and I’ll do that first and that will help me get fit.” So I used to go walking of an afternoon and I used to walk with the Pakistan brigadier who I met the first day, I happened to meet him when I was out walking and we used to walk together everyday. Anyhow the

20:30 first investigation I done I got in the jeep and we drove as far as this particular spot and my escort started to lead me towards, and about five hours later we reached the top. Not five hours overall, it was rather an exhausting experience because I wasn’t used to the oxygen level and my legs weren’t used to climbing.

21:00 It was an easy climb, it wasn’t real hard, mind you it was fairly steep all the time, to go from four thousand odd feet, where we started to climb to, or left the jeep. Most of the investigations by the way were by foot to get to the top. And the post had their own chickens and everything there, which was a surprise, was the Pakistan company

21:30 position and I done the investigation and our investigations meant that we had to look around and make sure there was no weapons there that hadn’t been in the area in 1947, which was the partition time. That was machine guns or rifles and all that sort of stuff, so that was one of the things we had to check every now and then. So I went down from that one and about three days later I got a signal

22:00 to say there was another one on the opposite side of the river, and investigation to be done, because a Pakistan soldier had been killed by sniper fire from the opposite side, so away I went again. So I went to the same spot jeep wise, I crossed the rope bridge which was wire rope across the river, that’s an experience on it’s own, a big river. And

22:30 I went, started to climb with my escort and I got about five hundred foot up and I looked behind and here’s a small party behind us with one bloke carrying a fairly bulky object on his head and another bloke’s got a parcel on his shoulder and this escort. And they were down there, while we were climbing, about every five or six hundred feet I used to stop and I’d go about

23:00 a hundred foot higher and I’d take my woolly jacket off, which I’d bought from one of the areas. Then I’d take my battle dress jacket off, then we’d stop at about a five hundred foot stop and I’d look behind and here was this party. And I’d put my battle dress back on and I’d put my woolly jacket back on because it was cold. When we got out of the jeep it was raining, when we got to about, another thousand foot higher it was sleet, when we got about a thousand

23:30 foot or more higher than that it was snow, and that’s the way it stopped for the whole trip. Anyhow when we got to the top, which was ten thousand odd feet, I met the company commander, a Pakistani who had been educated in England and who’d attended the military college in England and he spoke better English than I did, let me assure you. And he said, “I’m so pleased to be able to talk to somebody, really I am you know.”

24:00 And I’m sitting talking to him because he was obviously getting enjoyment out of it. And this party that had been following us up the mountain came past and one was carrying a commode on his head, you know what a commode is? It’s a portable toot, and the other was carrying a carton of beer on his shoulder. This officer somehow, because there was a European officer coming decided that in

24:30 his quarters in the little area next door there would be a commode, a toilet and that he and I were going to have a beer together, where he got the beer from I don’t know. So that night, snow all around, he and I drank quite a few beers, he was a Muslim, not supposed to drink beer anyhow. So we drank a few beers and he said,

25:00 “Tomorrow’s investigations only up about three or four hundred feet where the soldier was killed.” And it was still snowing the next day but we went through this snow and we done the investigation and we come back and he said, “Will you stop another night?” he said, I said, “No I’m going down, it’s too damn cold up here.” So my escort and I went down and I got down about five hundred to a thousand feet and I turned around and I looked up

25:30 and guess what was coming down behind me, the little party that had bought the commode up was bringing it back down again. You see the hygiene was such on those posts, the company positions where there’s about a hundred odd men, they all took a bottle of water, all used to go down the side of the hill and that’s where their toiletry was. So you had to be very, very careful when you were climbing around the area where you put your feet.

26:00 So that was my second investigation and I wasn’t back long, and I should tell you this one. And I got a signal about a remote area, and it was a remote area, where twenty eight Pakistanis had been killed by the Indians who had crossed the ceasefire and killed these twenty eight Pakistanis and the investigation had to be done.

26:30 So here I was exhausted from my previous runs, off I went. This time we took the jeep as far as we could, which was a different route all together and it took three days of walking to get in. So you can imagine the country we were going over. So three days after the incident of twenty eight being killed I arrived in the

27:00 area having had a fall crossing the pass, which is eleven and a half thousand feet, I slipped on some ice and I'd injured or hurt my hip. So from then on I hobbled along and we got into the area and nobody had been in that area since the ceasefire line had been plotted. So I had a look on the ceasefire line and the Indians hadn't crossed the ceasefire line at all, the Pakistani had come in and

27:30 cut the timber. Now that valley that we were in the ceasefire line went through the middle of the valley, plonk. Now the village was on one side of the ceasefire line but all their crop area, all their fields were on the other side of the ceasefire line, on the Indian side of the ceasefire line. So naturally those villages they crossed the ceasefire line and it didn't matter to the Indians, if the villagers crossed the ceasefire line to do their crops.

28:00 But there were pine trees there that were huge, I stood beside one and it was more than hundred, well in the old measurements higher than I was, that's the butt, I'm standing beside, they were huge trees. But they'd cut down when I arrived, and when the Indians had found out of course that they'd cut down a couple of hundred trees in that

28:30 valley, they were going to take it out before the winter set in, this was summer time. And of course we run into the snows in the summer time, on that second trip and again on crossing the pass to get into this place. When I arrived at the place the Indians were up about one hundred and fifty feet and the Pakistan said, "This is as far as you can go," damn –

29:00 **And we were talking about how the logs were cut down, the trees were cut down?**

Now the Indians obviously found out about the pine trees being cut down and I wouldn't be surprised if the logs were still there. The – I'd met – just to deviate a little, on one of my previous runs I was talking about I met the Indian brigadier who was

29:30 very nice spoken gentleman who had been British Army, well British Army officer, who'd risen to the rank of brigadier in the Indian Army. And he was well spoken and a great guy. Anyhow I mentioned this because when we pulled up the Pakistani officer said, "I'll go and check things." And he went down to check and he said, "Sir," he said, "The

30:00 people here won't let you pass this point." I said, "I'm a United Nations' observer and I'm going to pass this point, I'm going up there to talk to the Indians," I said, "I've explained to you where the ceasefire line was," I said, "I don't agree with it but that's where it is and that's the deal, that the Indians had a right to come in here. There shouldn't have been any killings, these Pakistani people shouldn't

30:30 be here." He said, "There not army people." I said, "Well they look like majides to me," which were bandits I said, "but irregardless, this is Indian territory," and I said, "I'm going up there." And he went away and come back all agitated, he was my escort in, I'd have got lost anyhow because it was real rough country. He come back and he said, "The people here have said that the

31:00 moment you step out from here to go to climb up the Indian position they will kill you," I said, "You can go back and tell them I'll be stepping out of here in ten minutes time, I'll give them that much time to get organised." I said, "It's my job to go up there," and I said, "I'll leave it in your hands," I said, "because if a UN officer gets killed there will be hell to pay, there really will be hell to pay." So ten minutes later I stepped

31:30 out from position where it was to go up and talk to the Indian group, who – I didn't know it's strength then, fully expecting somebody might shoot me in the middle of the back, but the message had got through. I got up and I spoke to the Indian group, which was a company of infantry with a support section of mortars and lo and behold, and because of the inexperience

32:00 of the lower ranks the brigadier was there, more fool him of course – and he said, "We're in an awkward position," and I said, "Well I can handle it this side; what's your awkward position?" And he said, "They've got an ambush set on the track that we'd have to withdraw down," and he said, "We're stuck here, we can't get out and our people in Indian have to operate,

32:30 mount a full scale operation to get us out because they've got us ambushed." I said, "I'll fix that." So we, seeing as I won the first stage of the battle of the Pakistanis, the next stage was easy to win, to make sure they withdrew, because they were in the wrong. Ceasefire line should never have been where it was of course but they were in the wrong, that's the way it was, that's one of the problems that had to be solved.

33:00 So I managed to make sure, see that the Indian contingent managed to withdraw down the track, down the mountain and made my way back to headquarters. Because I'd been, at that stage six days out of contact with the United Nations they asked that headquarters were to shift to Srinagar,

33:30 used to have six months in Rawalpindi and six months in the Indian side and Srinagar, and I was asked to come into the headquarters in Srinagar to report, so I did. And I had a week there reporting, they give me a rest. That was the first incident, that's to give you an idea of how volatile the problems were in India and the problems were in Pakistan.

34:00 If they had of killed the Indian company when they tried to withdraw there would have been a full scale war start there and then. From then on, for the next six to eight months really the military observers were trying to stop the Pakistan Indians getting into a proper fight. So that was my posting to the

Domel,

34:30 that's the way it went.

**What kind of powers did you have to – ?**

None, the ceasefire line it was agreed to by both countries. The observer, all he could do was observe, all he could do was try and lead either side, especially in some of these funny situations, all you could do was try and bluff it out.

35:00 You had absolutely no power, the chief military observer might have been able to rouse on somebody, write letters to the government of either Pakistan or India, but they'd just about reached a stage of ignoring all UN dictates if you like anyhow. I went back to Domel and that was my last

35:30 funny experience in Domel anyhow. My next posting fortunately for me probably, because I'd ruled against the Pakistanis was to an Indian post, a brigade headquarters, a place called Galuthi. And it was the stupidest place to ever put a brigade headquarters, it was in a dish in the mountains,

36:00 fairly nice pleasant area but it was in a dish and the brigade was in this valley, in large sort of a dish. But if you got in on top of them you fired down on them, silly, but was there and that was it, brigade headquarters. During the, just to tell you why it was silly, during the Indian Pakistan

36:30 war the, which followed, and we'll come to that later if we've got time, the Pakistani air force dropped some napalm in there and killed everybody in there, in the dish. Fortunately the UN position, there was three people had been withdrawn and they went back to the divisional headquarters while the war was on, but everything was destroyed in that dish. I made some good friends

37:00 in there to, of the Indian Army. So Galuthi was fairly quite, I had three months there as the officer in charge, they had a silly habit of whenever you walked the ceasefire line of firing at you. But the distance from where their post were

37:30 to along the ceasefire line was well over a thousand metres, so by the time the bullet reached you it wouldn't penetrate anyhow. So that was Galuthi. The photograph of the brigade major and the admin officer in there, it was a pretty reasonable sort of posting. The only trouble I had in Galuthi was the corporal driver I had, the Indian was

38:00 crazy. We went to an Indian desara, an Indian desara is the celebration where they drink lots of drink anyhow, they didn't have any beer of course, we had the beer. Just to give you an indication this New Zealand officer, Terry Samuel and I went with this corporal to this Indian

38:30 battalion desara and another New Zealander and a Swede I think it was went in another jeep. We went to the desara and as I come in with all my troops to tend their ceremony I could see two little Ghurkhas sitting about forty metres away, might have been a bit closer and they were pouring rum

39:00 into a wash pan about that big, out of bottles into this. And the sergeant major, who was the sergeant major of the battalion, the Ghurkha, said, "Drink major serg," and I said, "Yes," I nodded. So he marched over, they never walked, marched over with a pannikin and dipped it in the wash bowl, which, the

39:30 galvanised wash bowl, marched back and handed to me and I looked at him and I said, "Tunda parni," which is water, and he just shook his head. In other words you drank your rum, a pannikin. Anyhow two days later we went home instead of that day. And the embarrassing part was, there was a radio skit every morning to the headquarters, and the embarrassing part was that I said, "I wouldn't be at the next radio skit the next day because I was attending

40:00 this desara." And when I finally arrived back at the headquarters the New Zealand captain and I, we had a sleep and we come up as bright as possible could on the radio skit and I said, "Galuthi reporting in," and they said, "Where were you yesterday?" and I said, "I asked for permission to be off the air yesterday," they said, "That was the day before." So that was it.

40:30 By the way, the other two officers, they never turned up for another two days and the New Zealander saluted and said, "Sir," he said, "We were prisoners down in that Ghurkha battalion," he said, "They wouldn't let us out," he said, "We were locked in a bunker." I don't know whether they were locked in a bunker or, anyhow that was the embarrassing position.

**We'd better pause there 'cause we're right at the end of the tape.**

# Tape 8

00:36 **We're on?**

Where did we finish, we finished at?

**I was going to ask a question, couple of questions. Having spent time with the Pakistani and the Indian sides can you make some comparisons between them?**

Look, generally speaking they were very nice people. Now

01:00 both groups of people because of the conditions and the position they were in are antagonistic towards one another. Both groups of people are bigoted and that's standard, I mentioned earlier that a lot of other people in this world are bigoted but because of the situation in India and Pakistan they were anti one another,

01:30 and let's hope they finally someday get over it, I don't know how. Because they are two big nations, especially India that's a big nation. So I couldn't give you a comparison, there are very, very good people on either side, in the services, and there's some very difficult people to get along with because they believe they are, either side, completely and utterly in the right. Now I don't think there can be any right

02:00 about Kashmir, I believe that sooner or later both sides have got to get their heads together and settle it, the Kashmir situation. Really it's predominantly Muslim so maybe it should have gone to Pakistan. But in the partition it was more or less allocated to India, so that's the way it is and India's going to hold it by hook or by crook.

02:30 I don't know how the thing can be solved, I really don't and I hope it is but I don't know how it's going to be solved.

**Can you make any comparisons, I guess not so much about the people but about the way the two army's were run, any – ?**

In my time the – not being derogative in anyway the Pakistani Army was the better

03:00 trained and the better serviced. Now there was a reason for that the Indian Army had just recently had problems with the Chinese in the north and the expansion of their army was huge, huge. Some of the posts, the company posts which were major postings had a lieutenant in command of them,

03:30 because the lieutenants when the come out of the academy, the training system they got a posting and they had to take command because they didn't have enough officers. You can always, to a certain extent expand troops to a large number but you've got to have officers and NCOs who were well trained. Now the efficiency of the army

04:00 was to an extent in India, at that time remember, had deteriorated because of the expansion, the huge expansion in the Indian Army. It was just one of those things that probably has been solved now, probably, remembering the senior officers probably from, certainly from brigadier up they were all,

04:30 from both sides, British trained officers. Some of the battalion commanders had been junior officers at partition time in the British Indian Army, so, but all the others they had nothing to do with one another, probably all the company commanders, and certainly all the junior officers, had no contact with one another except through the sights of a rifle,

05:00 or something for years and years and years. And I wouldn't want to be derogative to either side, good people on either side but pray the good lord that sooner or later their problems are solved in that particular area of Kashmir.

**And you spoke a bit about conflict resolution and that you learnt a lot of those skills on the job;**

05:30 **can you tell me about some of I guess the development of your skills in conflict resolution?**

I suppose I became more tolerant, I learnt to be friends with

06:00 people, certainly the officer groups from either side, unless I was playing bridge with the Pakistanis and they were brilliant and they always beat me anyhow. But you listened and you accepted the fact, like some of the military observers didn't, you accepted the fact that they had a point of view and that point of view was to do with the ceasefire line and that was their

06:30 way of thinking and had been for some time. Remember the partition was 1947 and this is 1964, so that was the way things had grown up. All the, most of the military observers learned tolerance and most of them could talk to both Pakistanis and Indians, not together because you never got them together,

07:00 except on an extremely rare occasions. And most of them had learnt that there are certain things you mustn't do and certain things you should do in the way you approached and talked to them, that's all.

**What mustn't you do?**

You mustn't be dogmatic for starters you certainly mustn't be religiously dogmatic because they both had a point of view and they both might have been right

07:30 do you know which is the right way, do I know which is the right way, no. They both had their point of view and as our way to accept it, we were a group of officers that had to come to their country because

we were asked to, to try and help them sort out a problem. The only people going to sort out the problem are the Indian and the Pakistanis. We can keep them from one another's throats for a certain length of time, but

08:00 that's about all, it's a pretty difficult situation. But that's the skill you learn and that's probably one of the most difficult skills, when religion comes into it you've got to be very careful.

**Well how would you go about suggesting a resolution once you'd listened?**

Well you point out to both sides, normally

08:30 the rights and wrongs and what should be done. Sometimes they wouldn't listen, sometimes you couldn't solve anything, occasionally there was a drastic way of things being solved, maybe it was a couple of UN officers being wounded. Maybe it's because it was pointed out to one side or the other irregardless of whether it's right or wrong,

09:00 that's the ceasefire line and that's the rules, and that's what you've got to abide by. The ceasefire line by the way was never a clear, in all areas, in some areas it's quite clear but in other's it's not. So that's where your tolerance has to come in and I believe that that's the ceasefire line. And then they'd argue about it and say, "Well you can't agree so I'm going to rule that that's where the ceasefire line should be."

09:30 And they'd have to accept your ruling or go away and dispute it, which they may have done, through the governments of either country. That's just one of the things and that's about the way we handled it.

**Would you ever present say that, you said you would have listened to both points of view, would you ever present I guess the other point of view, or act as a mediator in**

10:00 **that sense?**

When the opportunity was right and when it was the right way to do things yes, and sometimes it worked, which was great, sometimes it didn't.

**How would you for example present the Indian point of view to the Pakistanis without sounding as if you supported the Indian point of view over theirs?**

Well you'd present the point of view from the basis of the ceasefire line, because everything was based on the ceasefire line. Now

10:30 if it was very obvious that the Indians had fired on the Pakistanis first or the Pakistan had fired on the Indian first, then you made a ruling. You've done the wrong thing, you shouldn't have been firing at, why did you etc. etc. Sometimes it wasn't clear, I'll give you a case shortly that it may never be clear, but sometimes it wasn't clear, sometimes it is and you can make the ruling and say,

11:00 "This shouldn't have happened because of – " Naturally as in any situation, as in situations in Australia, it's not always clear and you're not always right.

**Why did you sort of as one person, or two or three people that might have been with you as UN representatives hold so much sway, why would either army accept**

11:30 **your decision about the ceasefire line?**

Well see most times the particular group, whether it be Pakistanis or Indians wanted the United Nations observers, or the United Nations as a whole to be on side. They had to prove to us that they were in the right and sometimes they weren't of course. So that was the way you handled that

12:00 particular situation, trying to let them prove that they were right, and sometimes prove that they were wrong for themselves. And it was, I suppose a bit like United Nations being a bit like a judge in a custody battle in Australia, you never get it right all the time, you were just lucky if you got it right fifty percent of the time.

12:30 And that's what we were there for, to observe and report and we did that and sometimes we stuck our necks out and solved a problem which we should have left alone. We should have reported on it, 'cause that was our job, it was an observer mission. And you weren't allowed to carry weapons by the way. A couple of Canadians used to have a pistol stuck away somewhere, but we

13:00 never carried weapons because if either side found that we had a weapon on we would have got sent home. At no time did we have any chance of retaliating on anything that might happen, which is probably a good way in that particular situation.

**You were going to give me an example of a situation where?**

Well my next posting, probably give you a good example of

13:30 what I was explaining earlier, my next posting again was on the Indian side and the brigadier there was of all people, had been a pilot with the Indian Air Force. And one day he said to me, "Eric," he said, "we've got a huge problem," about a fortnight after I got there I suppose. "Down at such and such an area," he said, "every night there's fire comes from the Pakistan side

14:00 and there's artillery and mortar and machine guns, would you look into it for me?" I said, "Why not?" I said, "Which post?" I said, "I'll tell you what without letting the opposite know, except that I asked the military observer from the Pakistan side to be in the opposite post where you say the trouble's coming from to

14:30 be there and I'll go and stop on the post overnight to see if there's any problems." So I went up to this post, it was a company post and there was little lieutenant as I just mentioned earlier in charge of this one hundred and twenty odd man post. And he said, "I'll show you your quarters, Sir, for the night." And as I went down it was on the ridge line, wouldn't have been

15:00 any more than twenty metres across at the most and I had a bunker which was allocated to me. From the bunker generally speaking going in both directions a wall of rocks and mud about that wide and that high, I thought, "Now I'll know where I go if they start firing tonight." So sure enough about ten or eleven o'clock at night, or thereabouts some firing

15:30 started and it started from the other side. And I'm sitting there with my back against this brick wall and this poor little lieutenant crawled up and he said, "Sir, sir," he said, "the Pakistanis are firing." I said, "I noticed that." He said, "Sir, what will I do?" I said, "What would you do if I wasn't here?" He said, "I would fire back." I said, "Well go and fire back." Knowing full well from my point of view that the UN

16:00 observer from the Pakistan side was in the post opposite, I was in the post here. And next morning after it had died down where we were, there was artillery that would have to have been very lucky to have landed on the post because there's a big drop off on that side and a big drop off on that side, it either went over or short. Somebody'd got killed if it landed on the particular bridge line, and it didn't

16:30 anyhow. And there was mortars and everything was fired at so next morning I wave my UN flag and another UN flag was waved from the other side, which is about probably four to five hundred metres on the other ridge line. And we went down into the valley at the bottom, between the two posts and as we got close to the bottom there's one hell of a stink, my gosh you wouldn't

17:00 believe. Now what had happened there was a troop of monkeys were working the bottom and on the wire in the bottom there was sounding things that anybody touched the wire they'd be a noise made. And if Pakistan heard it they'd fire and if India heard it they'd fire. And all these poor old monkeys were getting killed, there was dozens and

17:30 dozens of them in numerous stages of decay. Now see the dangers of us going down there we didn't know the area and there could have been mines, there had been mines all through the ceasefire lines for many years, there was probably more casualties from mines because they never plotted where they were. Anyhow there was no problem, we sorted that one out 'cause we went back and explained to the Pakistanis

18:00 commander on my side and the Indian commander on the other side so they were very quite for some time, rather embarrassed actually, that all they were doing was killing monkeys. So that was one of the things that happened in that particular position there. And that was basically one of the things that happened. I was asked

18:30 by the brigadier who was again fairly nice guy – there was somebody snipping into the area and I think I was set up this time, from another post, and this time was a police post which was fairly unusual, most of them were army posts, this was an Indian police post. So I went to this area and the lieutenant colonel there, down in the bottom said, "We've got a mule for you to go up."

19:00 And that mule took me up about two thirds of the way up the mountain and stopped and the guide said, "He won't go any further sir, he's decided he's carried enough weight for the day and he's gone high enough." So I walked up the rest of the way, by that time I was extremely fit by the way, I had to be. So I'm at this police post and I'm sitting at the, in one of their bunkers

19:30 and it was a mud bunker, big logs with mud all round them. And I'm sitting with my elbows on the slit that you looked out of this bunker. I'm looking out and the next minute there's a shot went past, like a sledge hammer hit me in the ear, just nicked my ear and buried itself in the wall at the back. And I said to myself, "That would be on fixed lines and

20:00 that would be from the Indians," because I'm quite sure I was set up on that one. Next morning I naturally got out of that area and stopped the bleeding, just touched my ear, I could have – that much further over and I wouldn't be here but that was I think a set up. Anyhow next morning I got up and I went outside of the bunker and I stood on the wall and there was a couple of shots and I got down

20:30 from that wall pretty quickly let me tell you. I think it was one of the times it was set up by their own side, because there was no way of contacting the Pakistanis on the other side to make sure that it was checked on, so just one of those things.

**Why would it have been set up by their own side?**

Because it would have meant that the report I put in would have blamed the Pakistanis

21:00 which I didn't put in, I didn't blame anybody, it was just my thoughts that that was a set up. I'd better

tell you about my next posting while there's still time on the tape, yeah. I got posted to Punjab and we, the brigade headquarters and the UN headquarters were in the Palace of Punjab. In the Palace of Punjab

21:30 was a rather large building, it was a chalet, French type chalet, it was no palace by any means but it had a swimming pool because the Maharaja of Punjab liked to swim. And he used to swim in this swimming pool, which is quite a big one, but it was fed by snows melting on the mountain which used to come down in a little stream

22:00 into the swimming pool and out the other end. And my gosh it was cold, I only ever got in that pool once. Anyhow for the first time I got on station to Scandinavian countries as observers and how they organised it I don't know. But every morning I used to get

22:30 woken up and they could never understand the locals why they'd come in and they'd wake me up and they'd put the bed tea on the, beside my bunk and it never got drunk, 'cause I never drank tea, I don't drink tea now. But you couldn't tell them that I wanted coffee with this much sugar and that much milk. So the tea used to arrive, which was dreadful anyhow but I never drank it, but I used to get woken up. But this morning

23:00 after the Scandinavians arrived I look across the room and here at the other bunk way over there in this big room was a bearer carrying a tray with a tin of beer on it, cold beer, I thought, "This is six o'clock in the morning." They both had a stubby of beer at six o'clock and at breakfast they had another stubby of beer and after breakfast they

23:30 pulled out a bottle of scotch and I said, "No," I said, "and I'll make the decision right now and I'll tell you right now." I said, "There will be no drinking until one o'clock in the afternoon, none whatsoever." "Oh you mean hard liquor like scotch, having a beer before breakfast and with breakfast is not drinking?" I said, "Nothing at all and I'll tell you why," and I said, "all the reports are in before lunch,"

24:00 and I said, "you might have to go out and do a very delicate job in the afternoon, or stop overnight or have a couple of days." I said, "No drinking." And they thought I was dreadful, I stopped this Scandinavian couple having, boy they could drink. One o'clock they used to start. You see through the United Nations canteen, remember this is both Indian and Pakistan was more or less a dry country, but

24:30 you got a carton of stubbies, carton of tins they were, 'cause it's easy to carry for three dollars American and you got a bottle of scotch for three dollars American, you got a bottle of rum, proper rum not like the Indian wood alcohol, for three dollars each. Drinks were easy to buy, so they

25:00 could beat any Australian that I ever contested.

**Were they good at their job?**

They were good, but you had to make sure they were given their job properly and I used to send them off to do a job and not allow them to take any drinks with them. And they used to come back and they'd be toughing it, but they done the job, they were alright once they'd accepted the fact that that was my ruling.

25:30 If there was no reports to be investigated by lunch time, one o'clock they'd get a drink, they could go and get themselves a case if they wanted to, a case. I had a little Chilean at one stage with me and, Albie Leabarcha his name was, and every time he went out he used to open, he had a thermos flask and he used to open two tins of beer

26:00 and pour them into this thermos flask. By the time you'd get to drink that it would be flat and dreadful, but that was Albie Leabarcha he used to take his beer with him and he was the slowest walker you'd ever believe possible. And all the investigations are done walking and you'd say, "There's a two day investigation Albie I want you to go and do this investigation I expect you back in three and a half days,"

26:30 it used to take him that long 'cause he'd put a foot there then a foot over there.

**What was the method used, how did the reports of where investigations should take place come to you?**

Every morning there was a radio skit and the reports used to come to you on outstations on the radio skit, they used to go into headquarters in teleprinter, the

27:00 UN Headquarters, who then sorted it into who had to do the investigation. Sometimes there mightn't have been one, some days, and if you're in a good station there mightn't be one for weeks on end. You were on a bad station and in a bit of a stoush well then course you had investigations to do fairly regularly. They used to go by teleprinter from the

27:30 Pakistani or Indian Army to the United Nations Headquarters and they used to sort it out in the headquarters and send it out to the different stations the investigations they had to do and whereabouts. And that would come on the radio skit. It was a code system that you could use to keep it secret, we didn't use any codes but it didn't matter in

28:00 the investigation, didn't matter if the Pakistanis or the Indians knew, 'cause they both listened to the UN broadcast, the UN radio net, but it didn't matter and ordinary investigation didn't matter. Very rarely we encoded anything. Later on I might be able to tell you about the coding system, that's if we go long enough. At the end of the Punjab operation which was fairly quite anyhow

28:30 I was posted to United Nations Rawalpindi and I was made liaison officer with the Pakistan Army. So that was my job, at that stage the headquarters which was in Srinagar, Dorothy and the boys came back to Rawalpindi and that was the hot time, that was the

29:00 heat of the valley, of the plains, but we were together anyhow. But I done that job for a few months and at that stage, into 1995 and things were getting more difficult and being liaison officer with the Pakistan Army they told me nothing.

29:30 Because they were planning something very big.

**How aware were you that they were telling you nothing?**

Well you didn't get any information at all so you knew they weren't going to tell you anything. You'd ask a question and they'd head you round it, they didn't want the United Nations to know that they were planning an operation to attack the Indians on the border and the ceasefire line

30:00 in strength. If they'd have let the United Nations know the United Nations would have been morally obliged to tell the Indians that there was an operation going to be mounted.

**How much power did the United Nations have?**

Again unless the nations cooperated very little, if either side think that they need

30:30 the assistance of the United Nations they will bend over to get that assistance, and either side. And they want the moral support, the thinking of the world of the United Nations so everything has to be au fait with the United Nations if you like. I suspected something was going on, I used to watch the

31:00 roads, Dorothy and I used to go, drive around the different areas, Peshawar for instance which is about a hundred kilometres, which was an American base, we were allowed to shop in. And we used to make sure we watched the roads and watched the units and find out where the units were until one morning somebody come to me and said,

31:30 "We came back from Lahore last night, it took us a long long while to get through from Lahore to Rawalpindi because there was a lot of armoured vehicles and a lot of army vehicles on the road between Lahore and somewhere. Because when we got roughly near the Sialkot area all those army vehicles and that had disappeared and then we got through." I said, "This sounds very suspicious," so

32:00 I got on the radio and I said to John Daniels, who was an Australian in Bhimbar, which is on the Pakistan side, "I want you to take the back tracks by jeep through to Sialkot and see if you can see anything when you going through," on open radio. And I said, "And either side," and fortunately he was Australian, "Either side have a look for a bit of rust in the wheat." Now the bit of rust business went over

32:30 the air, went over everybody, went over all the UN people's head except John Daniels who realised that he had to look for there's something military wise that was made of metal. So he came through from Bhimbar and he had a Canadian and he came through from Sialkot and he said, "You'd better come down to

33:00 Sialkot and come for a drive when were going back to Bhimbar," I said, "Okay I'll be there in about an hour and a half, I'll be leaving headquarters here straight away." And I left that straight away, this is the same day as the fellow had rung me and said, "There's an armoured group and infantry, lots of infantry moving towards the area." I got to Sialkot and he said,

33:30 "Eric," he said, "there's a tank broken down in the middle of one of the wheat fields otherwise I'm sure it wouldn't be there." And he said, "There's signs of lots and lots of movement all through the roads and behind the ceasefire line." I said, "We'll go back in a different route." So we left the other military observer there who was a Canadian and I went back in Bhimbar and we drove through and we

34:00 run into a very heavy concentration of Pakistan troops and I said to John, "They won't let us out of here." I said, "We've gone into what is obviously a very big area," I said, "you might have to say in your dreams goodbye to your wife," I said, "I don't think they'll let us out of here." And we drove straight through, no trouble whatsoever. Anyhow

34:30 I got to Bhimbar and I come on the air and they said, "You've got something to report?" and I said, "I'll have to encode it first." I said, "This one needs reporting in code." And they said, "Wait a second," and this is the headquarters, they said, "General Nimmo wants you to send this in clear," and I said, "You're sure?" "Yes, General Nimmo

35:00 wants you to send it in clear." He knew, he had an idea there was something big going on, and every station stopped on the air, see you come on the schedule and then you went off the air until next day, every station stopped, something going on. So I reported in and I said, "There's at least a division of

Indian," not Indian – Pakistan – "troops in such and such an area," and I said, "There's probably an armoured

35:30 division in there as well," and the voice from the other end, which was the operations officer, said, "The chief military observer want's your estimate of when the problem might be launched." And I said, "I would think that they would attack across the border, across the ceasefire line in forty eights hour minimum." Now Pakistan obviously listening to this, so were

36:00 the Indians, that give the Indians a chance to be at least one day ready, of all their troops that they could possibly could muster ready. And the, I was right, except for one thing they put the attack on the next, in twenty four hours, the next day, because they had no choice because that would have given the Indians another day to get ready. So they attacked

36:30 the next day and went from there, that was the war, they called it the Indian-Pakistan war in 1965. At that time I was liaison officer, we set up the meeting, by the way once the war started as liaison with the Pakistan Army they told me everything, everything. They used to show me the maps and show me this and

37:00 explain what they were doing. And after about, it only lasted a few weeks, you know why? 'Cause Pakistan didn't have enough sophisticated munitions to keep grinding out the ammunitions to their front line, sophisticated weaponry. And they didn't have sufficient know how to keep their tanks operating. The Indians were in a similar

37:30 situation except the Indians were very smart; the Indians realised fairly early that they had the numbers so they simply said, "Righto, we'll have some troops here and we'll try and stop the Pakistanis and we'll move down the border twenty kilometres and we'll open up a front with a division

38:00 of troops." And when that division of troops got stopped by the Pakistan they moved down the border another twenty kilometres and put a division of troops in. And they done that about five times, by the time the Pakistanis were saying, "Ceasefire, or truce or something," they had a division supported by a division. When I say they, the Indians had a division supported by a division with

38:30 no more than a brigade officer in the Pakistan side to try and stop them. So the United Nations were again asked to form a group in India Pakistan, that's the border area, the old mission stopped in place on the ceasefire line, but the border area we were asked if we'd form a group to

39:00 supervise the cease firing on the Indian Pakistan border. I lost my good job as the Pakistan liaison officer; I was made chief administration officer of the new mission. So the new mission was formed with it's headquarters in Lahore and as the chief administration officer I had to take over, take a group with a colonel who was in charge of operations, I had to do all the admin

39:30 to try and get things off the ground. We took about twenty-odd observers from the old mission to the border mission, including the colonel who was in charge at that time including myself and a few well established officers who knew what they were doing. And we flew into Lahore, and from the other side

40:00 Amritza and those places to supervise the new mission. And I got the mission going, not the operational side the admin side until such time as a civilian arrived, and the civilian happen to be a Russian who I handed over to and the general who was a Canadian general who was in charge of the mission had arrived that day and he said, "Would you stop

40:30 on the operation team?" And he bought in lots of Canadians and I went from operational officer, ops officer to assistant ops officer when the whole mission got going to special liaison officer for the general on the ceasefire line. So each time General Nimmo asked me to come back to the old mission, when most of the fellows went back,

41:00 I got held back in Lahore. The second –

**We might have to stop there –**

# Tape 9

00:35 **Okay?**

Well I promised to tell you about this particular incident while the actual war was on. And it happened, well the lead up to it was that in my home in Rawalpindi the team from Sialkot turned up. They had

01:00 automatically withdrawn themselves from the area because these Sialkot headquarters had been shelled, it wasn't the only place that got shelled. And I duly sent them back and I said, fortunately they'd bought their radio with them, which was a big thing, I said, "Now you got to the Pakistan division and get them to find you a safer place to be but you must be in the area because you're a United Nations

01:30 team.” So the people from Sialkot who left the United Nations building were positioned in the divisional headquarters area, which was much safer because it was further away from the border and it was out of range of even heavy artillery. However Pierre Poggi, who was an Italian colonel, had left his brand new Mercedes Benz in

02:00 Sialkot. And he was very worried about his Mercedes Benz, it was brand new ‘cause it was his retirement because he’d bought it free of all duties so that when he went back to Italy having very little kilometres on it, he could have sold it at a vastly good price.

02:30 So he got in contact with me, he said, “Can you go and get the Mercedes?” and I said, “I haven’t got a key for starters.” He said, “I’ll have the key with you today.” And he was on the phone - in other words, he was somewhere in Pakistan, probably up the other end. So duly the key arrived and I said, “I’ve got the key and I’ve spoken to the transport officer,

03:00 the UN transport officer, and he’ll come with me and drive the Mercedes back to Rawalpindi.” I said, “You realise that the report is that the UN headquarters in Sialkot has been shelled,” and he said, “Yes, yes I’ve heard that,” he said, “That’s why I’m worried about the Mercedes.” So we got in the jeep and we went to Sialkot and the building was falling apart, it wasn’t falling apart

03:30 because of incoming shelling the Pakistanis thought because the UN building was there if they put a battery of artillery here, beside it, and a battery of heavy artillery behind it those two batteries would be safe, they could fire into the Indian positions. And because it was an old building made of brick the ground was shaking it to pieces, the bricks were

04:00 falling out of the ceiling, there was bricks in the ceiling. Anyhow Pierre Poggi’s Mercedes Benz was okay. I thought that when this artillery opened up, which happen to be the Pakistanis who couldn’t hurt anybody, couldn’t hurt us anyhow, I full expected there’d be some incoming fire. The poor old UN transport officer nearly had a heart attack. I said, “You take the

04:30 keys and you can get out of here and go straight back to Rawalpindi,” I said, “I want to see that nothing, UN-wise, is left in the building.” So I had a look around the building, actually there had been some incoming fire one of the guys on the aerial had been hit and broken and that’s about all the damage incoming fire had caused. But those UN soldiers must have been, ‘cause they walked out of that UN building

05:00 and they’d left their jackets and their coats, their uniforms hanging in the wardrobes, they fortunately had enough common sense to take the radio with them. So I loaded up the jeep with all these jackets and coats and I pulled out. That was just one of the things. The Chileans for instance used to come from Chile, one way

05:30 round the world to the mission and on the way through they’d stop in Europe and buy a Mercedes Benz each and they’d store it somewhere then they’d go back to Chile, the opposite side of the wheel, so they’d done a full turn, every twelve months, these two Chile Officers, and they used to take the Mercedes back to Chile and make a fortune. I wouldn’t have minded a Mercedes Benz I couldn’t afford to buy darn anything.

06:00 If we can go on, the day we arrived in the Caribou to start the mission off, Colonel Gartier who was a French Canadian said to me, he said, “Eric there is some problems out at such and such would you go and have a look at it?” he said, “I suggest that maybe the information may not have got down to all units yet.” So we went out,

06:30 John Daniels and I went out to this unit and was a Pakistan colonel he said, “The Indians are digging in over there see, look you can see the new dirt.” I said, “Look I’ll walk over and have a talk to them,” I said, “on agreement, all earthworks, everything should have stopped as they would have on this side,” I said, “I’ll go over and talk to them.”

07:00 Anyhow I walked over and it was getting in the afternoon and I spoke to the Sheik lieutenant on the other side and told him that he wasn’t to do anymore earth works and he assured me he wouldn’t so I duly strolled back across the line between the two battalions and when I’m on my way back there’s – here’s the Pakistani waving his arms,

07:30 the Pakistan major and he couldn’t speak any English. But he soon let me know what was going on. When I got there he pointed and on the bench is a shoe box mine about so big, an anti personnel mine, and I walked that way through it and back through it, fortunately stood on none. And that’s the first time in my life, or first time with United Nations I abused a colonel

08:00 anyhow and I did, I told him what I thought of him, I told him he was deliberately trying to start an incident by getting somebody killed by whatever, whosever weaponry it was, and had a few words to say. Anyhow on the way back John was driving with these little slit headlights and he’d run into the damn railway gates,

08:30 and I smashed the windscreen with my head, that’s about, that was the first day of the new mission, all I had was a headache by the way. So before earlier I was saying I was made chief liaison officer for the general. But there’s one incident I should tell you remember the border was a very long border and we

didn’t have troops

09:00 in position. And the Pakistan Army said there was a problem of fighting still down in the desert, the Rajasthan Desert and they said, “Could we send somebody down.” And again Gartier said, “Eric you’re the experienced man will you go down, they’ll fly you down and fly you back?” When they said fly me down they put me in a Bristol two seater with a Pakistan pilot and away we went down to the Rajasthan Desert,

09:30 where there had been fighting, they’d been killing one another. Anyhow they put a, the Pakistan Army put a helicopter at my disposal, huge great Russian thing. So we flew over and landed at this particular spot and I spoke to the Indian group and told them the ceasefire was in force and no more shootings and no more killings.

10:00 And we arrived back at the Pakistan side in this helicopter, just at the right time, just on dark and I wonder what all the excitement was, there was a number of holes in the helicopter which the Indians had fired through. So that was just an incident, and Dorothy said I had to tell you about this incident because it always struck her fancy. The general asked me to go down

10:30 to again the Rajasthan Desert which is a different area and it was Reheim Lakhan and there was a Abasi Textile Mill in Reheim Lakhan and that was where the headquarters were, the UN headquarters. And there was about eight people on that position, that post, UN post. So I went down to show them how to make out the reports and to look at the area and explain things how they went. There was a

11:00 Brazilian colonel who was new at the job and his whole team was new actually, all eight of them. And the first night I’m there somebody, one of them said, “You know there’s a canteen in this town?” and I said, “Oh yeah.” I wasn’t particularly interested, they said, “You can, it’s in the Abasi Textile Mill and you can get a drink at the canteen

11:30 and you’re more than welcome.” I said, “Well, we might drop round tonight.” So we went down to this Abasi Textile Mill to the canteen and they said, “There’s an Australian here by the way, you’re an Australian aren’t you?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “He looks after the bar.” The Australian happen to be a Pakistani whose father had been ambassador to Australia who’d renounced his rights, if you like, and became

12:00 an Australian citizen. So the son came back to Pakistan to work in this Abasi Textile Mill. And he said, “I’ve got some Australian beer.” I said, “I’ll believe that when I see it,” and he pulled out a large bottle of Swan Lager and dusted the dust off, he said, “Do you want a drink?” I said, “Not now,” I said, “If I get back tomorrow or the next day make sure there’s some in the fridge.” And I had with me an Irish

12:30 major and Irish captain, a Canadian captain - there was a few people anyhow - the two Brazilians that were on the mission didn’t come. I said, “I’ll, might come back tomorrow night if I can, I’ve got a bit more work to do.” Before I left, the secretary of the establishment, the Abasi establishment, this will give you an idea of price,

13:00 I’m putting it on, after all these years I’m putting it on tape. He said, “You couldn’t get me any scotch could you?” I said, “No,” just like that, because we never got any scotch for anybody. But every unit I went to Indian or Pakistan whenever I left that unit, which was the brigade headquarters, I always left a carton of beer and a bottle of scotch, only cost me six dollars. And that was just to help the mess along

13:30 for the visitors and things. He said, “We’ve got some Englishman here and we can’t get any scotch,” he said, “I don’t mind what I pay for it.” I said, “Oh yeah,” I said, “but I can’t sell you any scotch.” He said, “It’s worth ninety six dollars a bottle American,” and he said, “we’ll pay the American equivalent.” Goodness gracious, ninety six dollars a bottle. I said, “No thanks.” Remember I told you earlier

14:00 our canteen prices were three dollars a bottle American. So I went to the canteen two or three times, and no more than that and had a few, not very many, a few lagers, and the others learnt to drink a bit of Australian beer and drank some scotch and things like that. Anyhow I went out, because there was something touchy happening on the border, the ceasefire line, I went out to this

14:30 post we had on the ceasefire line. I drove up in the jeep with a driver and a mechanic because it was the desert and it was hot and dusty and dirty. And there was a bearer there in this area and said, “Your quarters are ready sir.” I said, “Oh thanks very much.” And it was a thorn bush hut and I walked into this thorn bush hut and looked through and all I could see was the sky looking through.

15:00 And I said, “What happens if it rains?” He said, “Rains? Never rains.” So that was my quarters in the desert, when Dorothy was at that stage in Lahore because I was the admin officer, I’d taken over this hotel quarters for the United Nations, living in the hotel. And it always amused here that here I was stopping in the thorn bush hut

15:30 in the desert. Anyhow to get the end of the story I had to go back to the headquarters because I was only there to liaise and get them on the right track and I said, “Can I have my bill please?” and I got my bill for a few bottles of beer, one hundred and something odd dollars and I thought, “Goodness.” I said, “Would you mind telling me what the

16:00 bill of captain so and so is?” which was the Irish chap, he said, “Oh his is two hundred and something

odd dollars." I said, "What about the Canadian captain?" "Oh he's a hundred and ninety odd dollars." "What about so and so?" "Oh his is so many dollars." and I said, "Do they know?" He said, "No, we haven't sent the bills yet," I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do," I said, "You give me all of those bills signed off

16:30 as paid in full, I'll make sure tomorrow morning when I march out that you've got a dozen bottles of scotch." And he did that, marked them off, he got his dozen bottles of scotch which I got from the United Nations, they probably wondered what I was doing with a dozen bottles of scotch. Anyhow I got in the jeep the next day with my kit in it to go and catch the aircraft, the Caribou, back, I said, "Oh by the way, here's

17:00 your bill to the canteen." I said, "I'd be careful if I were you fellows and find out the prices first, but here's your bills anyhow," and I said to the driver I said, "You can drive off now," and I said, "By the way, I paid it all." And they must of thought I was a millionaire, cost me thirty six dollars, dozen bottles of scotch, maybe that shouldn't have gone on there.

**That's a good story?**

17:30 We can all be a larrikin in our time. So anymore questions?

**Well because you wanted to end soon I'd better move it on, so just tell us how did Dorothy and the kids enjoy the time over those two years?**

Well the kids enjoyed it and so did Dorothy I'm quite sure, she used to say that she wasn't used to being in the lowest call in the list. See the, there

18:00 was a chiter sahib in Muslim country, in Pakistan or India, sorry burhar sahib which is me and three chiter sahib, one, two, three, that's the three boys that were there and she came last because she was the female, but she enjoyed it. We had a reasonable length of time together because I was first liaison officer with the Pakistan High Command

18:30 and then I was with the headquarters in the new mission. When the war looked like flaring up again round about December in 1965 I suggested that they come home. So they came home and I came home in February, everything went off alright anyhow. And by the way the Canadian squadron and the headquarter staff at,

19:00 in Lahore had a huge party on because in the lead up to the, and during the war and after the war I'd supplied the beer to the Australian Embassy because they never had any. And they delivered it to me in bulk, at Lahore Hotel which was the headquarters for the United Nations, where the headquarters

19:30 and the accommodation was anyhow, which was a Canadian Air Force Squadron and all the headquarter people. And there was about forty cartons of beer so all I could do was give it to the mob and say, "Enjoy yourself."

**And overall how did you feel about the role you'd played over those two years?**

I found it extremely gratifying, I feel that I achieved something.

20:00 The genuine military observers probably all felt the same way, they felt that even in the bad times they were stopping a number of people, including poor villages being killed, and that was our line of thinking. If we could stop people being killed we were achieving something. Those poor people in Pakistan and India, 'cause they were

20:30 poor people, they would give you anything, if you were doing a long trek and you stopped at a village they would find some way of giving you a cup of tea. It might have been the sugar and the milk and the tea all boiled up in the one glass and tasted like nothing on earth but you drank it 'cause that was a sacrifice they were making so that they made you welcome.

21:00 Like people all over the world they were good people. The, I felt I'd achieved something that I hadn't achieved before anyhow, it was a good way to be, I was quite happy.

**And how did you feel about the UN's role in general?**

The UN role is one that was proved to me, one I suggested and may have said to you that the only

21:30 way UN can be successful is to get in there and get out as soon as they could. Now that did that on our last mission, the Indian-Pakistan border mission, they got in and they got out. They said, "This is it," you may never get out of Kashmir, there's still a mission going in Kashmir, there's no Australians there anymore but there's still a mission there and it may never be solved.

22:00 But the ones in the, the one on the Indian-Pakistan, between the borders, that was solved because they got in and got out and away it went. And that was the way to do it and that was the way to do any. See the two earlier missions, the observer missions, the one in Jerusalem etc there still going, the one in Kashmir's still going after all these years, 1947, that's

22:30 dreadful. This other one we solved and some of the others have been solved since, like the Congo and those places, they have been solved since.

**And ‘cause you didn’t want to talk too much longer we won’t talk about Vietnam but in general looking over your whole war service how do you feel society changed in relation to**

23:00 **these wars?**

I think society has become more questioning and that’s a good thing. You are certainly reading about it in the papers, as long as we as a society in Australia is not being manipulated by the press, we’ve been manipulated by the politicians long enough. As long as we’re not being manipulated by the press, the questioning of what’s going on,

23:30 in all parts of the world there surely justified. We don’t make wars, the soldier doesn’t make wars and for goodness sake let’s make sure we don’t have them. There happens to be more wars going on at the moment then there has for a long while. Society at least is being more questioned, doing more questioning. I believe personally,

24:00 and my opinion obviously won’t count that that’s a good way to be. I mentioned earlier we should have gone to Iraq under the control of the United Nations, we didn’t, but now we’re in there you don’t walk out and leave people get knocked about or slaughtered for no reason whatsoever. So that’s my opinion.

**And I might**

24:30 **just ask a couple of general questions like how has your service experience, what has that taught you, what important lessons has it taught you?**

Oh I suppose I’ve become a more tolerant person, I’ve experienced the ups and downs, probably had more downs than ups. I’m quite happy I’ve served my country,

25:00 at my age I probably won’t do it again. I sincerely hope my children and their children won’t have to send somebody off to war somewhere, lets hope that our, all the people who follow us live in a better world, I sometimes doubt that but let’s hope they do.

**Well for you what is your worst memory**

25:30 **from all your time?**

If you want my honest opinion and I wake up occasionally now, it’s where I was told I was going to be killed when I walked out from that position to go to the Indian, ‘cause I fully expected that to happen. That was probably the worst experience. There were many, many good experiences, probably because

26:00 I was either stupid or unlucky I got into more scrapes than most people. If somebody from either side asked me if I’d look at something, I looked at it ‘cause it might have been able to save lives.

**And what would be say your best memory perhaps?**

My best memory – marrying Dorothy, naturally.

**And**

26:30 **I guess I might just wrap it up by just saying is there anything that you’d like to add, anymore words?**

No I think I done pretty well, if you want to take a couple of snaps of those snaps by all means do so, but frankly I’ve had enough but I’m pleased I done it, it will probably

27:00 never see the light of day, but I’m pleased I’ve done it.

**Oh glad I wouldn’t count on it not seeing the light of day but – ?**

Good, thank you

**You did a great job and thank you.**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**